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# Whip Up a Statewide Team of Affordable Learning Ambassadors

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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

In 2016, OhioLINK, Ohio's statewide higher education library consortium, reached out to its member library deans and directors asking for suggestions about emerging demands that might be addressed at the statewide level. Library leadership expressed a need to address textbook affordability and to explore how libraries and OhioLINK could lead the charge to make course materials more affordable. OhioLINK developed a multi-faceted strategy, based on a long history of determining different pathways that could work for different institutions depending on funding, staffing, faculty interest, and administrative support. The first course of action was to "whip up" a team of library champions to help support the affordable learning efforts led by OhioLINK.

For this recipe, you will need a statewide library consortium with passionate, committed librarians focused on tackling the problem of exorbitant textbook costs. The recipe also calls for a small group of librarian leaders with specialized talents interested in traveling around the state to educate and advocate regarding affordable learning options for faculty and students.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES/PRODUCT OUTCOMES

- A highly qualified team of Affordable Learning Ambassadors to help promote lower cost and high-quality learning materials, including OER, alternative textbooks, and library resources. They can include librarians, instructional designers, and faculty.
- A resource portal that provides information and resources to maximize the development of statewide affordable learning activities, events, and projects
- Programs to inform, support, and train librarians, IT personnel, faculty, and staff about affordable learning materials
- An Affordable Learning Network to promote statewide adoption and advocacy of affordable learning materials

## NUMBER SERVED

The serving amount ranges, depending on the needs of the state; however, the more people that can sample some of the affordable learning offerings, the better. In fall 2017 and spring 2018, OhioLINK and the Affordable Learning Ambassadors hosted five Open Textbook Network workshops for 131 participants from 57 different Ohio colleges

and universities. Additionally, the Affordable Learning Ambassadors presented more than 15 smaller and more targeted affordable learning workshops (ranging from 5 to 40 people) at 12 different institutions through fall 2019. They continue to travel the state delivering workshops tailored to the needs of individual institutions. Data on adoptions resulting from these workshops is a goal for 2020–2021. With 5–10 Affordable Learning Ambassadors, a consortium could plan to serve 5–20 institutions per year with workshops and other educational offerings. Virtual workshops could allow for more opportunities to present at institutions without having to worry about travel or room availability.

## COOKING TIME

- Provide 3–6 days of training for your Affordable Learning Ambassadors, such as at the Open Textbook Network (OTN) Summer Institute and Summit or other open education advocacy organization.
- Deliver 4–5 OTN "Train the Trainer" presentations for your consortium members (~16–20 hours total). This would allow your consortium to have more people who can provide local or regional workshops and expand your reach.

- Schedule periodic 1- to 2-hour meetings with Affordable Learning Ambassadors to prepare for campus presentations and discuss additional ways to reach people in the state with affordable learning efforts.
- Have each Affordable Learning Ambassador commit to 1 or 2 campus presentations on campus each academic year. Timing of each training varies from 1 to 3 hours, but don't forget travel time.
- Provide continuing education in open and affordable learning through programs like the OTN OER Librarian Certificate, OTN Summer Institute, other Open Ed Conferences like OpenCon Cleveland, and participating in discipline-specific OER initiatives or promoting OER initiatives throughout your own campus.

### DIETARY GUIDELINES

This recipe was originally prepared to facilitate increased retention and student success by reducing the financial strain on students due to the high price of commercial textbooks; however, the recipe developed in different ways. One version emphasized faculty control over content, while another version emphasized opportunities for original collaborative research. All proved tasty.

### INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT

This is like borscht: there is no single recipe. The ingredients can vary with what is available, but the following are desirable.

#### *Ingredients*

The first ingredients are what OhioLINK Af-

fordable Learning calls "Ambassadors." These can, and probably should, represent various interests across the campus.

- Librarians. Include one who daydreams about copyright law and loves to share this passion with others.
- Instructional designers. Not everyone has these on their shelf, but if you are so lucky, they make for a much better result.
- Faculty. These can be any flavor, but the low-hanging fruit works best if the main goal is cost savings. For the biggest impact, a professor from a large-enrollment department has advantages over someone in a more specialized field.
- Administrators. This ingredient may often be overlooked, but they have the funds. Much of this is time-consuming, and without an adequate incentive structure, the soufflé will fall flat. Administrators are the anchovies in the caponata: no one admits to liking them, but they are essential in the mix.

#### *Equipment*

You will need a large enough pot to fit all the ingredients. There are tradeoffs: a one-person crusade may burn (out) if s/he tries to spread the word across the entire campus, whereas a larger consortium may fall victim to bureaucratic sclerosis. You wouldn't boil an egg in a 10-gallon stockpot, and you wouldn't try to make a rack of lamb in a ramekin. Find the size pot that fits best and holds your stew together while binding your ingredients. The OTN supporting materials are also important tools and are designed to be a template;

however, their materials can be adapted and tailored for specific campus presentations.

### PREPARATION

1. Assemble interested ambassadors from a wide variety of roles (faculty, librarians, instructional designers, administrators) and institution types (private, public, large, small, etc.).
2. Give the ambassadors training in presenting open education or open textbook workshops. This can be organized by a state consortium, a statewide professional association, or another state-level group with the time and resources to organize the program. Some training options include:
  - Open Textbook Network Summer Institute
  - Open Textbook Network OER Librarianship Certificate
  - SPARC Open Education Leadership Fellowship Program
3. Build a slide deck that all ambassadors can customize to specific workshops.
4. Create a form or other data collection tool for maintaining information about the number of workshops given, how many were impacted, how many plan on adopting open materials after the workshop, and other details.
5. Create an online space to advertise the availability of the ambassadors for giving workshops and describe what interested institutions can expect.
6. You can also assemble the program weeks ahead and have it ready in a shared drive so others can use it when they are ready

to present. Make certain to add notes if changes are made to the various resources so presenters are aware of changes made.

7. Create virtual, asynchronous options, in case campuses are not able to present in-person workshops on campus.

### COOKING METHOD

1. Solicit campuses across the state to request a workshop given by an ambassador.
2. Choose which ambassador(s) will give the workshop and establish logistical information (when, where, how long, etc.). Depending on what type of workshop the campus is looking for, workshops can last anywhere from 1 hour to 3 hours.
3. For each desired workshop across the state, obtain useful information about the institution, such as:
  - Whether the campus has an OER Committee or task force that is working on affordability and/or open access issues
  - What the general reception is to discussions of OERs on campus
  - Whether any faculty have already begun an OER adoption or creation process on campus
  - What the funding situation is for the campus program: Are grants being offered? Will faculty be paid for conducting open textbook reviews in the style of OTN workshops?
  - What the organizers of the workshops most hope to achieve by the ambassador's visit
4. Customize the slide deck based on the needs and interests of the institution.

5. Give the workshop!
6. Pass around a sign-in sheet to all attendees and ask for an email address.
7. After the workshop is over, gather information about how many faculty attended and their contact information. Consider asking attendees if they would like to be added to a statewide email list about affordability and/or open education.
8. Follow up with participants 3–6 months after the workshop to find out how many participants adopted an OER textbook or other no-cost alternative.
9. If you are looking to feed a really large group, consider offering an all-day statewide gathering or summit to discuss affordable learning options with other like-minded chefs. (See Additional Resources for more information on OhioLINK Affordable Learning Summits in 2018 and 2019.) Statewide summits can provide an opportunity for people who have done an excellent job mastering the recipe to share their masterpiece with others who appreciate good work and to present best practices for replicating the same success on their own campuses.

### ALLERGY WARNINGS

Please be sure to share these warnings with your faculty, librarians, instructional designers, and administrators as you disseminate information about OER and affordable learning resources.

- **“This didn’t turn out the way I thought it would.”** Sometimes, you need to modify the dish to work within

your kitchen framework. Everyone has a different type of stove, so you may need to make adjustments in the cooking time to make certain you don’t burn out the ambassadors. For example, when you have to work with a budget, you may be limited in how many servings you can offer. Be a frugal cook and don’t waste valuable resources. Alternatively, administrators may become disillusioned when they realize the effort and support a successful program requires. Make certain that if substitutions are to be made, you integrate the new ambassadors into the existing dish carefully. Keep notes of mishaps to share with others to find resolutions. Mistakes are great teaching tools.

- **“Let’s use canned tuna instead of fresh sea bass. It’ll taste the same.”** Being penny-wise and pound-foolish by offering incentives to investigate, adapt, or adopt that are too parsimonious to incentivize anyone is a recipe for maintaining the status quo. Even if you are on a tight budget, sometimes it may be useful to serve the dish to a smaller group of people to be more cost-effective. Let those few discuss the great experience they had to build interest and a second meeting. Sometimes less is more, and working with smaller-discipline groups may be more effective with the programming.
- **“Oh, no, not that again!”** “That” being another initiative that faculty and staff have to fold into their apparently 35-hour days. Initiative fatigue can lead to more prepared offerings from one of

the commercial publishers. Be understanding that faculty and staff are being pulled in many directions and being asked to contribute in many ways. If a faculty member, instructional designer, or librarian says “no” at first to attending an affordable learning workshop or learning more about OER, that doesn’t mean that they might not be open six months or a year down the line when some of their other commitments have changed. Don’t take non-participation personally.

- **“Hey, I actually like Brussels sprouts.”** Maybe someone had a bad version once and never tried it again. But had they known, with the right ingredients and preparation, they might find that this stuff they swore off is really good. Having advocates talk up open education may make more people curious and open to the idea. When giving workshops, ambassadors will encounter campuses with a wide range of readiness for OER adoption. Some may encounter hostility or workshop participants with very little knowledge about open education, and this requires flexibility and patience. Substitutions might be needed from time to time as ambassadors may be involved in other campus recipes; be prepared to look for substitutions from time to time.
- **“I got a terrible rash after I ate that.”** Sometimes you try using a text because it looks like a great match for your class. Then your students hate it or it turns

out it’s pitched at a level that doesn’t match your students. Well, sometimes the Bechamel curdles and you try again. Sometimes, it’s not the recipe, it’s that you truly do not like lima beans. Move on. You tried, but it’s time to find another text that works better for your students.

Sometimes the most effective voice to promote open education on a campus is one that the faculty and administrators already know and trust, not an outside speaker like an ambassador. It should be up to the open education team on the campus to decide if bringing in an outside speaker is appropriate.

### CHEF’S NOTES

Be prepared to modify the recipe for different audiences. Different substitutions you could consider include faculty learning communities, student organizations, local area community partnerships, local libraries, and K-12 educators or dual-enrollment educators.

Acknowledge that other cooks might develop different but equally delicious versions of the recipe. Sometimes, individuals may only want to use a few of the ingredients; sometimes, people may want to vary the cooking method. Keep a note of the different modifications of the recipe and share them with others who may be interested in the alternative possibilities of the dish. There is more than one way to create a delicious and tasty version of this dish.

### Final Note

Please take our suggestions and lessons learned from developing a statewide affordable learning strategy so that you can develop something equally tasty on your campus or in your consortium. No two recipes will be the same, but this is the beauty of this particular dish. What might work in your particular context might differ slightly from what worked at OhioLINK. That just means that the recipe is evolving. As long as the best interests of the students are kept in mind when cooking, it’s destined to be a success. Enjoy!

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Affordable Learning Ambassadors Website and How to Register for Institutional Workshop. <https://affordablelearning.ohiolink.edu/Guide/Ambassadors>

OhioLINK Affordable Learning Summit. <https://affordablelearning.ohiolink.edu/summit>

OhioLINK Affordable Learning Website. <https://affordablelearning.ohiolink.edu/>

OhioLINK Open Course Content Library. <https://ohiolink.oercommons.org/hubs/OOEC>

Open Education Network (formerly Open Textbook Network) <https://open.umn.edu/otn/>

Registration Form Example for Statewide OTN Workshop. <https://affordablelearning.ohiolink.edu/blog/registration-for-march-open-textbook-network-workshops-open>