



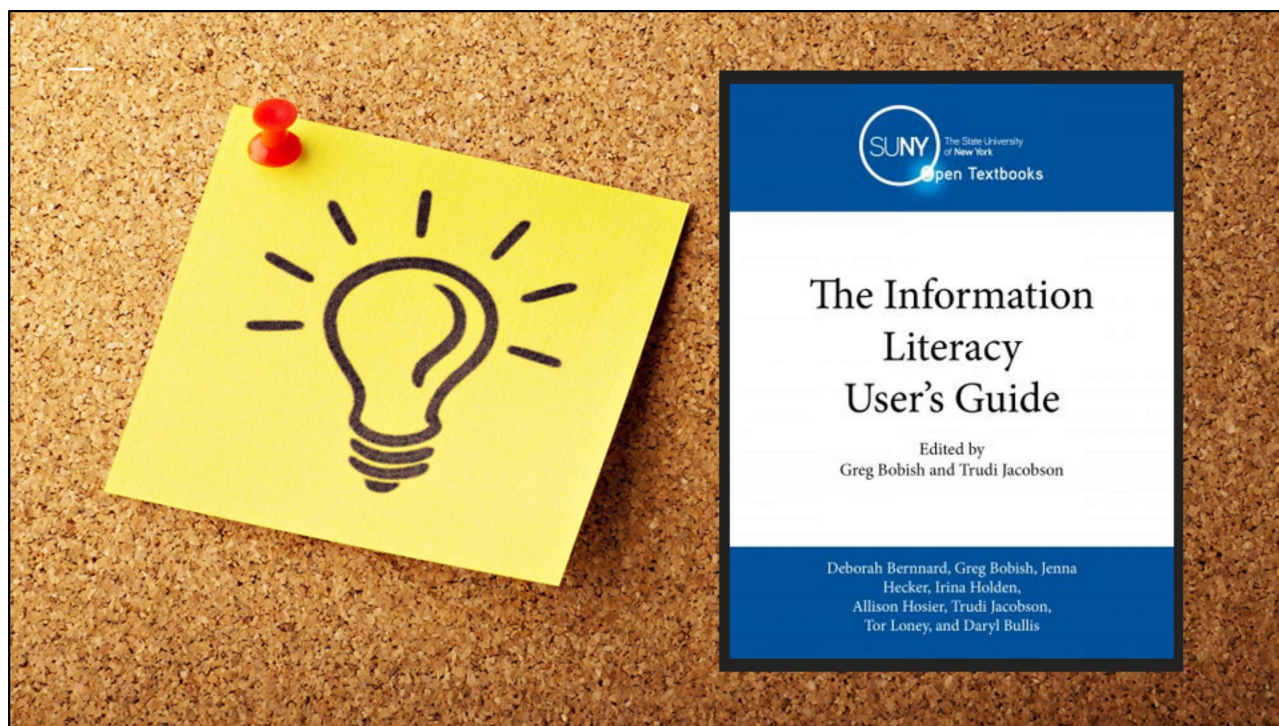
Information Wants to Be Free: Using an OER in the Classroom

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Topic: Using an OER in the classroom

Outcomes: An example of teaching with an OER: students' engagement, challenges, benefits

Hi, I'm a librarian at the University of Lethbridge who is primarily responsible for Indigenous programs. Part of my work involves teaching full semester information literacy courses. Today I want to talk a bit about the OER I use in the classroom, how students engage with it, and the challenges and benefits of working with an OER to teach information literacy.



<https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/>

When I began my position here, I was given a few exercises from other teaching librarians and a syllabus that was very different from the way I understand information literacy instruction. I came into librarianship having taught academic writing, literature, and women and gender studies. Most of the courses I taught had textbooks, and the ones that didn't, I would cobble together readings to make unique content. This was particularly important to me when I taught at tribal colleges because I wanted to provide students with content that was culturally relevant to them, respectful, and encouraged them to see themselves in the stories.

Library instruction at the undergraduate level is, for the most part, a hands on research project with a lot of time spent teaching advanced database searching, citation skills, and so on. I looked for a book that was open access to provide the basic backdrop on which to hang the course and the practical skills. *The Information Literacy User's Guide* is that book. It is Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike CC BY-NC-SA licensed text, published in 2014, and can be downloaded as a Pressbook.



There are several reasons I chose this book but my first thought was that, as a librarian, I cannot promote open if I am asking my students to purchase a textbook. It is unethical, quite frankly. And if we believe in the open project and expect faculty to do the same, we must lead by example.

From a philosophical standpoint, I believe the first year experience should include an academic writing class and a library research skills class. These are the two areas where most students could use help and it would set them up for success in their degree programs.



As I mentioned, *The Information Literacy User's Guide* contains the basics of what students should know about information literacy and information behaviour. The goal of the book is to help students understand that metaliteracy is essential in today's world and to university learners. It is organized using the SCONUL 7 pillars of information literacy which are more common in the UK & other commonwealth countries but are more easily accessible to students as a framework for learning than the framework for information literacy created by the American Library Association.



Another benefit of this OER is that it is free information. I can download it to Pressbooks. I can swap chapters out. I can add readings from elsewhere. It is adaptable.



With the text having been created in 2014, some areas have evolved quite rapidly and are not represented in the text. For example, the following quote: “Today, information is still published in traditional formats as well as in newly evolving formats on the Internet. These new information formats are loosely defined as Web 2.0 formats and can include electronic journals, books, news websites, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and location postings.” is pretty outdated. Web 2.0 isn’t talked about much anymore and responsive web design is a given. However, students for the most part are unaware of Web 2.0, and it doesn’t hurt them to read about it. It also gives me a place to talk about the evolution of tech and add in current content.

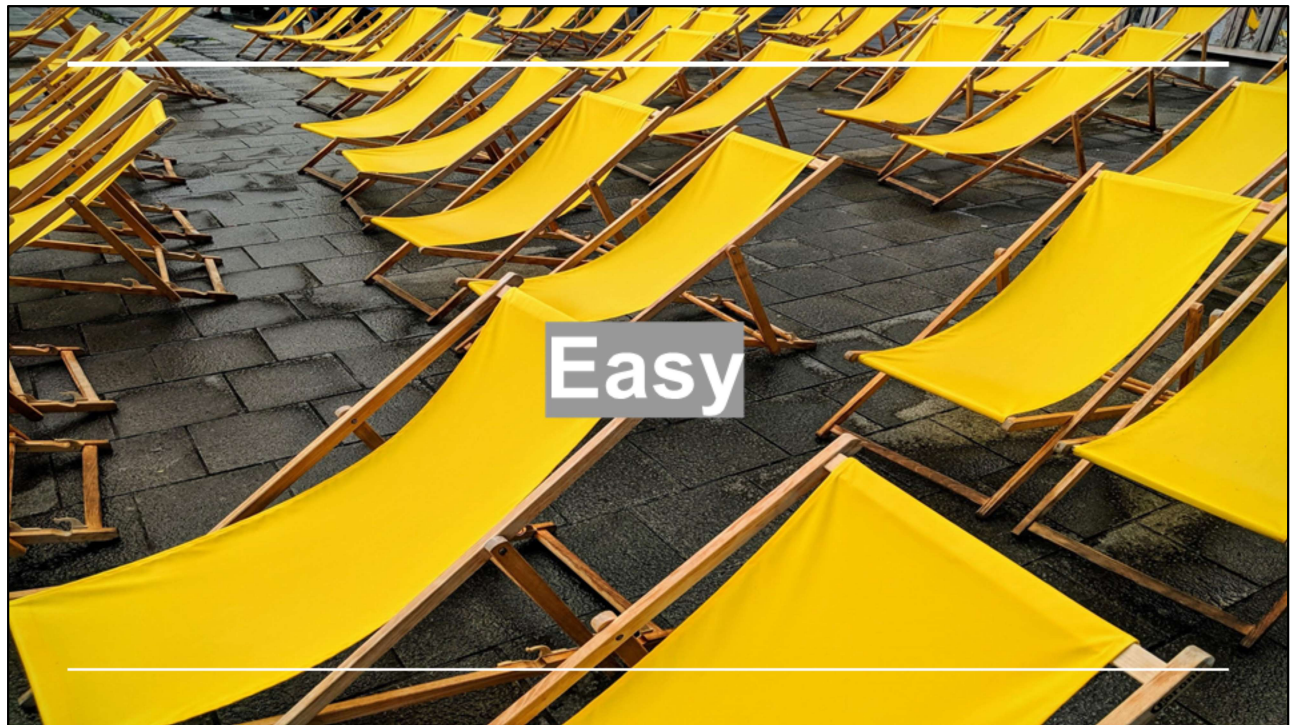


Since the onset of the pandemic, using a digital OER has proven more difficult than when we were in the classroom as many of my students come from rural areas where internet access is poor or non-existent. This past year is the first time that I had students ask for a printed text. Our bookstore made a limited print run and charged students \$19.

Savings



So, what do students say about using an OER? I have had many comment on the fact that the text is free. They also appreciate the idea of Open as we learn about Creative Commons licensing in the course. Once students learn of the Open movement, they are shocked by the predatory nature of traditional academic publishing. I try to avoid saying that they have “free” access to databases thanks to the library, as this is factually incorrect: students pay a hefty fee to attend university and some of that pays for library licenses.



Another frequent comment is how easy it is to access the text. It is available anywhere there is Internet, and can be downloaded and printed. In the Moodle shell, I link to the text in the syllabus and introductory course information but I also include chapter links in the weeks in which they are due.



Using an OER in the classroom has helped me provide a no-cost structure to my courses and one that is easily adaptable and augmented. My next step is to update content using materials that I have found to enhance the text. Ideally, I will create a bespoke open access info lit guide using the text as a template.



Thank you very much for your time! It's been a pleasure sharing my OER journey with you.