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‘Embracing Open Education’ – Honouring Students’ Voices: Designing Course Packs for Graduate Level Courses

DR. SANDRA DIXON AND JOERDIS WEILANDT

In this brief interview Dr. Sandra Dixon (SD) talks about the steps she takes in the direction of academic freedom and pedagogical empowerment by creating two impactful course packs for her Master counselling psychology students.

Teaching Centre (TC): Can you tell us briefly what your Open Education Project is about?

SD:

The primary goal of this innovative project is to create open access resources for graduate students in the two courses within the Masters of Education Counselling Psychology program that will generate a high impact learning experience for them as counsellors-in-training. Ensuring that students have access to meaningful resources at no cost is a step in the right direction of academic freedom and pedagogical empowerment. Also, it is rare to find a textbook that offers an in-depth Canadian perspective on the topics addressed in the above courses. I would like to honour the students’ voices by undertaking this project, which I believe will benefit their learning. The materials in these course packs will help to diversify their knowledge with readings that are grounded in evidence-based practices as well as practice-based evidences for a more holistic worldview to augment their growth and development. This project is informed by constructive feedback from the Fall 2018 final student evaluations where the students’ comments (below) that the textbooks often provided a limited scope of the course contents and contexts:

Anonymous Student Comments:

I While the textbook provided a Canadian perspective, I felt as though large swaths of each chapter were quite repetitive from week to week. This made for less than inspiring course readings.

2 I appreciate Dr. Dixon's engagement in the class. She often challenged me to think critically and further reflect on my initial responses to the material. The textbook was a bit dry and repetitive, but I think Dr. Dixon enhanced my learning.

3 I am finding the course content very relevant. The textbook seems to be a little too basic and a bit dry in content.

4 The textbook was challenging to read through as it oversimplified complex issues, showed callous disregard for clients and supported a status quo view of health issues.

TC: Why does Open Education matter to you?

SD: It provides an academic platform to honour students' voices and enhance their learning through evidence-based and practice-based scholar resources. Utilizing a collaborative approach in my teaching and course design where students' feedback is privileged, invited and welcomed allows me to embrace best pedagogical practices such as Open Education. This form of teaching flexibility demonstrates my ability as an instructor to be open to change and displays my willingness to integrate innovative teaching tools into my course development and designs in order to cater to the unique learning needs and styles of my diverse students.

TC: How will you go about creating the resource?

SD: I have been fortunate to consult with some amazing experts at the University of Lethbridge prior to undergoing this project. These individuals are informed in their knowledge of Open Educational Resource (OER), and I wanted to ensure that I am following all the policy and ethical guidelines around copyrights and so forth. Dr. Rumi Graham, University Copyright Advisor & Graduate Studies Librarian, is instrumental in assisting me with permissions clearance and covering licensing fees, if needed. Paula Cardozo who is the Professional Librarian – Liaison to Faculty of [Education](#) has been effective in working alongside myself and the two graduate assistants (GAs) undertaking this project with finding useful resources. Additionally, Joerdis Weilandt who is an Educational Consultant in the University of Lethbridge Teaching Centre has provided ample support in addressing my inquiries about the project. Lastly, Kristi Thomas, Online Teaching Development Coordinator, in the University of Lethbridge Teaching Centre should be acknowledged for drawing my attention to this OER grant that I was not aware of as a new faculty member. With this amazing team of experts, I felt confident to move forward with the project. Prior to moving forward, I had a collaborative meeting with the above-mentioned individuals and both GAs (excluding Kristi) to ensure that all our questions were addressed, and we were privy to all the supports available at our disposals. By so doing, the GAs felt more confident and supported in their roles to assist with this project.

TC: Have you received some support for your work?

As mentioned above, I do believe I have a strong team supporting this project. They are also accessible should I have any questions about accessing library sources and /or other copy-right related issues. As well, the GAs are doing an excellent job with collecting the relevant resources for this project with my guidance. I also provide the GAs with ongoing constructive feedback through regular bi-weekly/monthly check-ins to ensure that they are meeting the objectives for this project.

TC: What is involved in creating your openly accessible resource?

SD: Based on the nature of this project, this openly accessible resource will be developed into course packs for my respective courses (EDUC 5622 Diversity and Culture + CAPP 6635 Biosocial Foundations of Health Psychology + CAAP 6607 – Counselling Diverse Clients). These course packs will entail a compilation of resources including peer-reviewed articles, videos, professional articles, book chapters, and other relevant resources related to the topic being addressed. These resources will then be placed in a folder on Moodle – the online teaching platform – where students will be able to access them for class purposes at no cost to them. Given the nature of the OER grant, it had to be a free course pack for students to access. The benefit of this format is that following the completion of the project I will be able to modify, change and update any of the resources at any given time while teaching the course.

TC: What digital technology will you use to publish the resource?

SD: This course pack will be available on Moodle, the online platform I use to teach the courses.

TC: When do you expect the resource to be available for instructors/ students?

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the timeline had to be changed. However, the hope is to fully complete the project by Fall 2021.