

## Open Educational Resources (OERs) and the Health Science Information Landscape: What I Want People to Know

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I have been asked to discuss what I want every librarian to know about open educational resources (OERs) and the move toward a more equitable health science information landscape. However, it isn't the librarians who need to know how important this is, because they already know -- it is the people who still believe that OERs are somehow less accurate than traditionally published materials, and the publishers that see OERs and even open access (OA) as some sort of conspiracy or competition that is out to get their bottom line. However, it isn't about that, or the university administration that won't provide funding to support open education initiatives, particularly in the health sciences. The people who need to understand that we need OERs and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as part of our normal collection development practices are the ones who want to ban health educational materials from classrooms and library shelves under the misguided belief that these resources are offensive or pornographic -- the groups and governments that want to restrict access to medical information in order to keep the public uninformed. Those are the people I am addressing.

What would I want them to know? I want them to know that free access to medical research and quality health information can save lives. By providing global, equitable, and accessible research, we can support areas of the world where infrastructure is failing, and people cannot afford to pay \$40 for an article or \$400 for a textbook. I would argue that OERs are not created in competition, but in partnership toward the same goal of education. I would tell publishers that the work I have done on my library's collection and policies to include DEI practices was not executed simply so we could say that the library addressed a hotbed issue, but because it was the right thing to do and is our new standard. I would explain how OER and OA discussions grew around my work with DEI and necessitated the creation of a new librarian position to support my university's values of "We Care" and "Better Together," which guide all employees to share knowledge and fight for global equity.

Truthfully, the librarians who work with OER or OA materials generally understand the importance of making health science information open and available for global equity. We work hard to educate researchers and students on the importance of publishing their work under an open license that, at bare minimum, enables people to read new research without the inhibition of a paywall or library subscription, in an economy that has library budgets growing smaller each year and journal costs rising at a rate that is outpacing inflation. My fellow librarians and I talk about how we can partner with each other, departments across campus, and vendors to use our voice and purchasing power to support DEI. I meet with university leaders to discuss new NIH guidelines and how the library can support open publishing. We negotiate transformative agreements that make sense for our universities so that publishing open is more affordable for our faculty, staff, and students. Library staff create widgets which allow anyone to search all OA and OER materials within our collections without having to create an account. The library partners with course designers and faculty to find alternative resources which are more equitable, affordable, and accessible. We also work together to create free open access medical education (FOAMed) courses and materials available to anyone around the globe who wants to supplement their medical education and learn new skills.

By far, the one aspect I most want people to know is that your librarians are always here. Librarians who work with OERs are always available to talk to you and help you find a solution, especially those of us who are fighting to bring OERs into the health sciences in a more visible and larger scope. For those who do not know where to begin, I would say start small. Remember that OERs are not just textbooks. They include articles, new apps, software, images, entire courses, and anything you can imagine using to promote education. The seeds of OERs are already in the health sciences landscape. We just need to water the soil so that they will grow.



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- Speer, E.S. (2022). DEI Collection Evaluation: Lessons Learned. *Texas Library Journal*, 98(4), 9-11. [https://txla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/TLJ-Winter-2022\\_web.pdf](https://txla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/TLJ-Winter-2022_web.pdf)
- Speer, E.S. (2022). Communicating with Vendors in Support of DEI Collection Evaluations. *Online Searcher*, 46(1), 26-29. <https://www.infotoday.com/OnlineSearcher/Articles/Features/Communicating-With-Vendors-in-Support-of-DEI-Collection-Evaluations-150915.shtml>

- Collection & Vendor Relationships: Diversity Evaluation & Communication presented at North Carolina Serials Conference, April 2022. <https://youtu.be/pKq6K4QKYC8>

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