



Creating OER Champions for Colleges in Ontario

Promising Practice

Implemented by: eCampusOntario (eCO)

Where: Ontario, Canada

Status: Started in 2023

Summary: eCO hosts one of the largest OER repositories in Canada and provides its member institutions with free access to OER authoring tools. Leveraging these resources depends on capacity and expertise in Open Educational Resources (OER) within post-secondary institutions. To develop this capacity, eCO launched the OER Ranger programme and its companion professional development programme, Mastering Open Ed.

Overview

Providing support in using education technology and online learning

eCampusOntario (eCO) is a provincially-funded non-profit organization that leads a consortium of the province's publicly-funded colleges, universities and indigenous institutes to develop and test online learning tools to advance the use of education technology and digital learning environments.

In this space, eCO

- Supports the development and delivery of quality online learning experiences across Ontario;
- Leads in research, development and sharing of exemplary practices in online and other forms of technology enabled learning;
- Supports member institutions in fostering innovation, collaboration and excellence on behalf of Ontario students and faculty;
- Contributes to the evolution of teaching and learning by responding to emerging tech and the development of state-of-the-art online courses and programs.

Promoting Open Educational Resources

Through its Open Library, eCO supports Ontario's higher education sector in the creation and use of high-quality Open Educational Resources (OER). As part of this work, eCO hosts one of the largest OER repositories in Canada and provides its member institutions with free access to OER authoring tools including a Pressbooks instance and H5P Studio.

Leveraging these resources depends on capacity and expertise in OER within postsecondary institutions.

To develop this capacity, eCO launched the OER Ranger programme and its companion professional development programme, Mastering Open Ed.

Description

The OER Ranger programme

The overarching objective of the programme is to place OER Rangers in eCO member institutions across Ontario. A Ranger is an employee of a post-secondary institution typically in the role of instructor, instructional designer or librarian.

Following completion of the training, the Rangers actively engage colleagues within their institutions on the integration of OER into practice. Educators often cite the lack of knowledge as a common barrier to the use of OER and the Rangers are seen to ameliorate this challenge.

Possible Ranger activities include hosting training sessions on OER topics and supporting OER adoption and creation through conducting sprints. Having Rangers embedded in institutions allows them to promote OER use generally while also being responsive to the unique needs of the learners and educators within their institutional context. Through this engagement, Rangers will create more OER Champions who recognize the importance of OER in the promotion of equity and accessibility in higher education.

Mastering Open Education

Foundational to this programme was the development of a common training programme entitled Mastering Open Ed. The programme takes would be OER Rangers through six modules including:

- Open Education and OER
- Open Licensing
- Accessibility
- H5P
- Pressbooks
- Building Open Education Initiatives

The screenshot shows the Open Library website homepage. The top navigation bar includes links for FIND OER, GET SUPPORT, EVENTS, SPECIALIZED OER PROJECT, SUBMIT AN OER, SUBMIT UPDATED FILE(S), IMPACT, ABOUT, CONTACT, LOGIN / REGISTER, and FR. The main content area has a yellow background on the left and a dark blue background on the right. The yellow section contains the text 'Welcome to the Open Library' and 'The home of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Ontario'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search Resources...' and a 'SEARCH' button. At the bottom of the yellow section, there is a link 'Or browse all educational resources >'. The dark blue section features a large icon of an open book and the text '1,742 Resources in the Open Library' and '7,170 Activities in H5P Studio'.

Addressing local needs

To ensure that the training reflects the needs of Ontario educators, it is developed in collaboration with five subject matter experts on OER from throughout Ontario. For language accessibility, the programme is bilingual by design to ensure its usefulness to both English and Francophone institutions in Ontario.

eCO Open Library

All training materials are published as an OER and are publicly available in the eCO Open Library in a variety of formats under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Implementing the training

An open call for OER Rangers resulted in over 200 applications from across Ontario. Selected applicants completed the Mastering Open Ed training programme and earned a badge that can be shared as part of their professional profile. Rangers are required to complete key deliverables at their institution to earn their badge.

While activities of Rangers are flexible, they often include conducting training sessions, participating in the creation of new OER, or leading capacity building initiatives such as the development of OER studios. At its core, this programme and its supporting resources provides on the job training that addresses OER knowledge gaps that have consistently been identified by higher education stakeholders.

Mastering Open Ed micro-credential

The first round of the OER Ranger programme concluded in March 2023. Feedback from participants and a comprehensive accessibility review has driven a new iteration of Mastering Open Ed as part of a continual improvement process. To leverage the work from the past year, eCampusOntario will continue to engage existing Rangers and grow their number through launching the Mastering Open Ed micro-credential to the higher education sector more broadly.

Objectives

The main objective of the OER Ranger programme was to place OER champions in post-secondary institutions in Ontario. This is achieved through the implementation of a professional development programme that is responsive to the unique needs of educators and institutions.

The target group for this initiative are faculty, librarians and teaching and learning support specialists at eCampusOntario member institutions.

Outcomes and impact

At the launch of this programme, we expected 27 OER Rangers at 27 member institutions. After the inaugural year, we achieved 80 Rangers in 44 of our member institutions. Importantly, within these 44 institutions we had representation from several bilingual/Francophone institutions and Indigenous Institutes which are both historically underrepresented stakeholders.

Better engagement

The programme helped to increase engagement from both Indigenous Institutes and Francophone institutions. Both stakeholders are historically under-resourced and under-represented in Ontario higher education and both benefited from the capacity building efforts of the OER Rangers. Additionally, these institutions often rely on sessional faculty that may lack the knowledge base to support the use of OER. This programme provided on the job professional development support that ultimately benefits learners.

Development of new OER

Important to the success of OER repositories is ongoing improvement of existing catalogues and the development of new OER. The OER Rangers and the Mastering Open Ed Micro-credential build on the skills of Ontario educators to engage in the work of OER.

Increased capacity

The programme increases the capacity for institutions to engage with OER through placing expertise within their institutions. This is a significant resource that can alleviate bottlenecks in obtaining the necessary support educators need as they engage with OER.

Challenges

Addressing diversity

eCampusOntario's 53 member institutions are diverse in terms of location, capacity, culture and language. It was important that the programme meet very unique and context specific needs.

Wide range of prior OER knowledge

Educators come to Open Education on a spectrum of knowledge ranging from novice to expert. Engagement across this spectrum was important if the programme was to be successful.

Funding guidelines

Time – Ontario operates on tight funding guidelines that are fiscal year contingent. The programme needed to be developed and launched quickly while recognizing the challenges imposed by the first two items on this list.

Insights

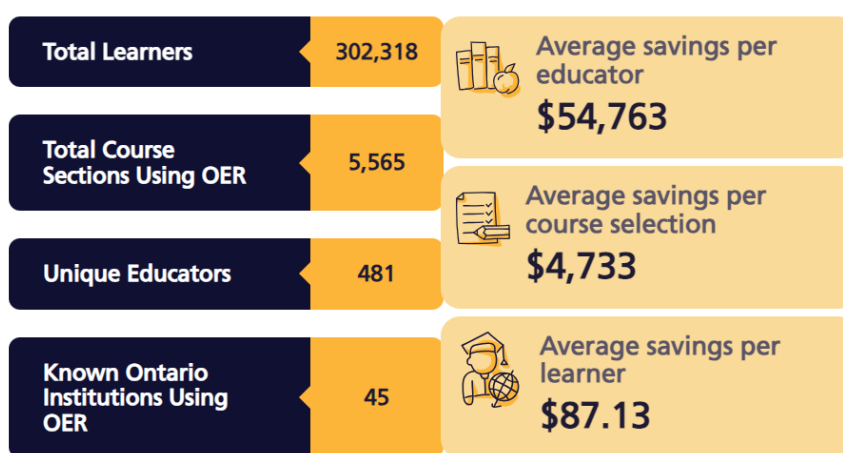
As with development of any education resource, it is important that the end user is represented in the creation process. The success to date hinged on our selection of SMEs, diverse perspectives and ongoing support of programme participants throughout the academic year.

It is also important to recognize that the adoption and creation of OER uses resources and that resources are finite. Where possible, sustainable funding for those engaged in programmes is important. This remains an ongoing challenge everywhere.

Next steps

eCampusOntario has plans to continue supporting the OER Ranger programme through community of practice initiatives and the launching of the Mastering Open Ed micro-credential broadly with our member institutions. Additionally, we will continue to look at iterating on the training materials as part of a quality improvement process.

Statistics



Source: <https://openlibrary.ecampusontario.ca/impact/> (accessed June 2024)

Learn more

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To learn more about eCampusOntario, visit:
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