Recentering Relevance: Exploring the Role of Academic Libraries and Library Consortia in Supporting OER Localization

Executive Summary: The University System of Maryland seeks $147,168.00 for a two-year NLG planning grant to clarify and frame the role of academic libraries and consortia in supporting open educational resources (OER) localization. This work aligns with NLG Goal 5, Objective 5.1 via the development of an adaptable localization framework that leverages academic library and consortia experience and expertise to enhance OER relevance, and Goal 3, Objective 3.1 in laying ground for more inclusive digital OER materials through localization.

Content and teaching affordances made possible by open licensing (e.g., customization of content through adaptation and creation; engaging students as collaborators in OER development) allow for OER *localization*, which we define as the practices and partnerships necessary to increase the relevance of open educational resources to local student populations, student learning needs, and institutional and community contexts. To that end, OER localization has the potential to help institutions move from conceiving of equity only in terms of "day one" access to materials to embrace a fuller notion of equity made possible by OER being free and openly licensed: equity of access, equity of representation in content, and equity of participation in content adaptation and development (O'Neill, 2021).

OER localization can be accomplished through deliberate focus on adaptation and creation, and academic libraries and consortia can play a key role in this effort. We seek to identify the conditions, practices, and partnerships necessary for a library to support the refreshing, retention, and redistribution efforts that can enable localization while recognizing the unique circumstances of libraries across sectors and institutional types. Leveraging Maryland's mix of institutions, academic library consortia, and sector organizations[1] will allow us to examine why academic libraries and consortia are not central to OER localization and what conditions would allow them to become key partners in those efforts. We intend to construct a flexible framework for OER localization that the field can adapt, with the goal of centering equitable partnerships between libraries, library consortia, OER creators, and campus communities.

National Need: This project addresses three national needs. *Redressing an overemphasis on OER adoption:* In the U.S., OER use has been promoted largely to reduce textbook costs (Bliss & Smith, 2017) and enable "day one" access for students forced to forego traditional texts due to cost (Achieving the Dream, 2017). Importantly, these benefits come by simple adoption of existing OER, irrespective of how OER is used once adopted. While simple adoption has led to student cost savings, it has not had an appreciable impact on improving student outcomes (Hilton, 2016). *Redressing an overemphasis on discoverability and curation:* An overemphasis on OER adoption has led to academic libraries frequently serving as the locus for the identification/discovery and curation of existing OER (MCCLC, 2018). Recent studies have found little mention of academic libraries as sources of support for faculty in engaging in the adaptation and creation related to OER localization (Griffiths et al., 2022; O'Neill, 2021). Discovery and curation leans on libraries' and consortia's role in resource acquisition but does not embrace their roles as drivers of equity-centered practices (American Library Association, n.d.); bridges between community and campus groups; experts at description, collection management, systems, and preservation; and as virtual and physical centers for academic inquiry and engagement. In part, this work seeks to uncover why academic libraries are not a central part of OER localization efforts and what conditions would allow libraries and consortia to become key partners in those efforts. *Increasing the relevance of OER:* At its core, a library's mission is to center the needs of the communities it supports. OER localization moves us toward development and use of OER that addresses local student populations, student learning needs, and institutional and community contexts. For students, perceptions of relevance in course content and assignments are positively associated with course satisfaction (Belet, 2018) motivation to study (Frymier & Shulman, 1995), and perceptions of learning (Fedesco, Kentner, & Natt, 2017). Relevance also has critical equity and inclusion considerations. Gay (2010) emphasizes the need to "[use] the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (31).

Project Description, Design, & Plan: We seek to identify the current conditions, assets, and possible barriers that exist across diverse higher education institutions and use the results of our information gathering to articulate the academic library and library consortia leadership, capacity, and partnerships that are needed to accomplish OER localization. Specifically, we seek to

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[1] Institutions include 2-yr/4-yr, public/private, historically & predominantly Black universities and predominantly white institutions. Library consortia include the University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI) Library Consortium, Maryland Community College Library Consortium (MCCLC), and Congress of Academic Library Directors-Maryland (CALD). Sector organizations include USM, the Maryland Independent Colleges and University Association (MICUA), and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC).

understand: **1)** the role libraries/consortia see themselves occupying in OER support and in OER localization, **2)** the barriers preventing academic libraries/consortia from collaborating in OER localization efforts, **3)** the optimal academic library and consortia roles in advocating for and supporting OER adaptation and creation practices that lead to localization (looking at mission, policies, resources, reporting lines/organizational configurations, existing intra- and inter-institutional partnerships); **4)** the academic library and consortia supports necessary to refresh, retain, and redistribute localized materials and **5)** the academic library and consortia role in building and sustaining practice and partnership models that enable localization.

We will accomplish this by engaging an intentionally diverse set of Maryland and national colleagues in information gathering and analysis and in the development of an adaptable framework for OER localization highlighting potential roles for academic libraries and consortia in those efforts.

Goal 1: Assess the existing literature and expert thinking nationally related to academic library and consortia roles in OER localization. Mechanism: Virtual summit featuring national library experts in OER; literature review [YEAR 1]. **Goal 2:** Identify institutional and consortia strengths, collaborations, and gaps. Mechanism: Design and test a survey and focus group protocol aimed at understanding current library and consortial roles in supporting OER efforts at a representative sample of higher education institutions across Maryland [YEAR 1]; administer survey, analyze results, hold regional focus groups to elaborate on survey findings with qualitative data [YEAR 2]. **Goal 3:** Identify and share resources to support OER creation, revision, publication, and retention, drawn from an examination of key aspects of academic library structures and culture: mission, policies, resources, reporting lines/organizational configurations, as well as existing intra-institutional and inter-institutional partnerships. Mechanism: Survey and focus groups [YEAR 1 and 2]. **Goal 4:** Draft and test framework with national and Maryland academic library experts in OER and practitioners both previously and not previously involved in the developmental phase. Mechanism: Convene experts to prototype the framework [YEAR 2].

Outcomes: Primary activities in this grant will be data collection and analysis followed by the development of a framework for leveraging academic libraries and consortia in OER localization. Data collection in Year 1 will come from on-the-ground practitioners situated in Maryland and key national thought leaders in OER library leadership, including library consortia active in OER (e.g., LOUIS, PALNI, GALILEO, VIVA). Local practitioners include library departments (access services, reference, cataloging, and IT), teaching and learning centers, information technology and security groups, and consortial interest groups and leadership. Emphasis will be on probing the five topics listed above, identifying gaps between current and optimal roles and responsibilities for the support of OER localization, and determining what tasks and challenges are best suited for addressing at the campus level vs. the consortial level. The development of the framework for OER localization will take place in Year 2 and will include multiple feedback cycles with Year 1 participants as well as additional thought leaders who can offer fresh perspectives on the emerging framework. The results will pave the way for implementation of the framework, adapted to specific contextual conditions, in Maryland and nationally.

National Impact: Throughout, we will make the tools we develop--the survey, comprehensive bibliography, our process steps, partner contributions, and the OER localization framework--openly licensed and discoverable through a dedicated website and Maryland's OER Commons microsite. We will also make our summary data findings open access and discoverable. We will engage the field in our process and findings through webinars, social media, and in-person and virtual conference presentations related to library practice (including library consortia organizations) and Open Education. Moreover, the Maryland Open Source Textbook initiative (M.O.S.T.), led by the USM Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation, is a co-founder of the national statewide OER organization (DOERS3) and has access for dissemination purposes to the leadership of 30 (and growing) statewide OER efforts.

Project Team: Nancy O'Neill, Acting Director, USM Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation; Andrew Pace, Executive Director, USMAI; two lead academic librarians (from a 2-yr and a 4-yr institution, respectively).

Budget Summary: The total 2-year request of $147,168.00 includes: $40,000 for Project Management (graduate assistantship); $15,000 for Literature Review/Survey Development; $40,000 for Subject Matter Experts (partial salary for 2 library experts from Maryland 4-yr and 2-yr institutions); $2,000 for Materials & Supplies (meetings, convenings, subscriptions); $19,800 for Travel, Conferences, and Convenings (Conference travel; 2 regional convenings); and $30,368 in Indirect Costs.