Chapter 1
Open Educational Resources Potential at The University of the Bahamas

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the potential for implementation of OER at the University of The Bahamas (UB). Several questions guide the chapter's review: (1) How are OERs currently utilised in the Caribbean region? (2) What challenges must be overcome in order for UB to address concerns of the Bahamian government, academic faculty/staff, students, and future accreditation standards necessary for development and recognition in the region and internationally as a credentialed institution? (3) What are the benefits for a newly minted university to implement OER within the context of national development? The chapter concludes with recommendations for UB to consider as it transitions to providing a world class education for the citizens of The Bahamas.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement in recent years has given way to a meaningful option for tertiary-level institutions to make education accessible to a broader segment of society. This trend in higher education is touted as a means to improve educational access and the quality of education without restrictions (Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2013). Standard digital systems such as email, websites, learner management systems (LMS), and content management systems within institutions established globally over the past five decades are today's norm. The impact of new technologies at the infrastructural level within higher education is evident; they have radically changed departmental and institutions' abilities to conduct administrative tasks strategically. However, will a new strategy such as OER provide the catalyst for change in pedagogy and practice within higher education situations that are challenged in geographic location, educational access, and equity?

This chapter explores how OERs provide a university in an archipelago country such as The Bahamas the opportunity to increase its reach equitably, efficiently, and economically. Because of UB's geographical location and challenges to provide affordable education across its archipelagic country, OERs' potential to increase the quality of teaching, improve teaching efficiency, and reduce economic and geographic barriers to education makes a compelling case as UB contemplates its strategic plans for teaching and learning.

UB is the Caribbean region's newest university, chartered on November 10, 2016. With the transition from college to university status, the need for immediate increase and access to higher education proves to be a challenge and an opportunity for the archipelagic country to examine the use of OER's to expand its reach across its own country. In order to understand the unique challenges and opportunities facing UB as it forges ahead, the context of how the country operates is imperative in the development and sustainability of the University. The newly legislated law (UB Act, 2016) provides a foundation for UB to collaborate with the government in shaping national development. It empowers the university to operate very differently from the past governance and organizational structure of the former College of The Bahamas. The UB Act necessitates that a Board of Trustees manage the governance of the institution's policies with its chief responsibility to pioneer the implementation of the UB Act. The university president and CEO responsible for the day-to-day operation of UB serves as the face of the institution nationally, regionally and internationally. Unlike previous councils that governed and intervened in the day-to-day operations of the institution, the Board of Trustees is entrusted partner with the president to achieve the country's educational and national development goals.

Higher education in The Bahamas is comprised of UB and a vocational education institution, the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI). Both institutions are governed by a board and council at this time. Currently, the University has four campuses with the main campus located in Nassau, the country's capital. With over 5,000 students situated across the archipelago: Oakes Field Campus (Nassau), Grosvenor Close Campus (GCC) houses programs in Allied Health Professions and the School of Nursing, Northern Bahamas Campus (NBC; Grand Bahama), and The Gerace Research Centre on the island of San Salvador. The university offers associate's, bachelor's, and signature master's degree programs.

An examination of OER pedagogy and practice is necessary to explore how the concept is a potential fit for UB. The chapter briefly reviews OERs and relevant pedagogy and practice at the tertiary level in an effort to align OER use with UB's goal of providing equitable and quality educational access across the archipelago nation. An exploration of issues, controversies, and problems UB should consider before adopting OERs is followed by solutions and recommendations for future pedagogy and practice at the university.

BACKGROUND

Champions of OERs believe that OERs associated with and/or developed by institutions have "the potential to generate indirect revenue by marketing institutions' reputation and the quality of their materials, which may convince (prospective) students to enroll in fee-paying courses" (Butcher & Hoosen, 2012).

A brief history of OER will aid in fully understanding the latest developments and trends in the field. This section is not a comprehensive review of the field but a summary of significant issues. The movement originated in the late 1990s with the first major initiative coming from the Massachusetts Institute

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