

# Faculty Conversations About Teaching

## Teaching Without Textbooks: Collaborating and Developing OER for Your Courses

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Catherine Saunders teaches introductory and advanced composition and literature in face to face, hybrid, and online formats. Her research interests include 19th-century American literature, with particular focus on works by women and African-Americans; the antislavery movement; the novel, and digital humanities. Cathy is the coordinator of the English 302 Open Educational Resources Working Group.

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### What We've Tried

"The composition program already has a well-established practice of using locally-created curricular materials, and of sharing them among instructors. We have tried a variety of ways of making syllabi, assignments, and other materials available to the English 302 instructor community, but each approach presented problems. We like the idea of creating an outward-facing, easily updated, and possibly searchable collection. Our current Bb platform offers some of these features, and we're planning a transition to one that offers more.

We also needed a way to give each other credit for assignments which we borrowed, revised, or remixed, and to ensure the materials submitted for department review and promotion accurately reflect our own and others' contributions. Creative commons licensing solves that problem."

- **"Transition to the Mason Journals Platform:** This will allow us to create a public-facing collection with better indexing/tagging and a generally more user-friendly interface. We need to think about our possible audiences (GMU and non-GMU) and how to present the materials in a way that will be useful to them. Issues include deciding how many files should be included with an individual item, and how to handle framing material (syllabi, calendars, major assignments) that provide context for smaller activities or assignments (but may also serve as the focus of items themselves).
- **Peer Review Process:** We'll also be creating a peer review process for new items, and figuring out how to make that process sustainable in our institutional context."
- **"OER offer students** several advantages over commercial textbooks: lower cost, and materials that are both more up to date and more closely adapted to the particular needs of GMU course curricula.
- **OER offer instructors** the opportunity to make practical use of the pedagogical research that naturally occurs while teaching a class, and to share the results of that research with other instructors. This process especially benefits new instructors, who have access both to current, tested materials and to mentoring by the authors of those materials."

### What We're Exploring

### Advantages & Opportunities



# Faculty Conversations About Teaching: Teaching Without Textbooks

Sean Dunaway, MA, Term Instructor, Language Education,  
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Sean Dunaway has taught and tutored English language for over ten years.

His interests include teacher training and how best practices can be applied for greater outcomes in the classroom. He also is interested in app development and creating better learning tools for teachers and students.

Sean uses OER for activity learning in his courses.

At Mason, Sean has taught 2 courses and courses in Active Learning Classrooms.

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## What I've Tried

- "I used **Khan Academy and Edx** to have students learn about a topic outside of class, and then write summaries about what they learned.
- I used **subreddits** to introduce students to Reddit as an academic and social tool. Students wrote summaries on the purposes of subreddits and gave examples with explanations of how the posts fit the subreddit's purpose.
- I used **YouTube** as a means for students to discuss education methodologies, learn other students' languages, and explain concepts in their languages to other students."

## What I'm Exploring

"While games are a good source of input and give a more realistic feel to a situation, they do require additional time in explaining directions (i.e. how to play?) Which games are just gimmicks and which games are actually enriching?"

Student assessments and final grades should indicate their ability to perform in real-world situations using readily-available tools. Changing test practices to allow for groupwork or use of smartphones may better reflect their future use of class content. Such practices are referred to as dynamic or human assessment."

## Educational Approaches

"Traditionally, much of the course content is taught through reading in the United States. This is not true for the rest of the world... Sociocultural approaches to education see learning in universities as socialization to enter into communities of professionals and academics; in the terms of **Wenger-Trayner's "Communities of Practice"**, learning moves students inside occupational domains to become well-versed in scripts and jargon of a particular pursuit. In other words, if after our classes, students can "walk the walk" and "talk the talk", they show ability to future professors and employers."

Reference: Wenger-Trayner, Etienne & Beverly (2015) Introduction to communities of practice. <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

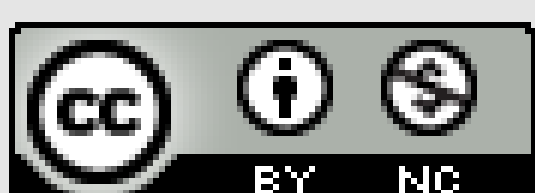
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## TRY IT!

How might you apply these ideas, tips & best practices to a course you are currently teaching?

What additional information or resources might you need in order to try it?

For info and guidance, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning (4th Floor, Innovation Hall)



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