Transcript: Open Access and OER

[upbeat music featuring a mandolin]

This is Learning About Creative Commons. I’m Rachael Nevins.

[music fades out]

This podcast will be the last one in this series. I’m recording it on August 2, 2022. As I remember it, last August is when I first learned about Open Access and OER, in a class on reference services. In the year since then, thanks to an OER fellowship with CUNY’s Office of Library Services, I’ve learned so much more.

In this podcast, I want to share some of what I’ve learned about Open Access and OER. CUNY faculty and librarians are actively engaged in these areas of practice in ways that
I didn’t know about a year ago—and in ways that I find compelling. If you are like me, an LIS student—especially an LIS student at Queens College—planning a career in academic librarianship, I’m hoping to encourage you to see why Open Access and OER matter for the institutions where you work now or eventually will work, either at CUNY or elsewhere.

So what is Open Access?

Open Access refers to an approach to scholarly communications. Scientists and scholars generally share, or communicate, new knowledge by writing up their research findings in papers that are submitted to, reviewed by, and published in scholarly journals. The copyright to a paper is typically transferred to the journal, and access to the journal is often limited by paywalls. You’ve likely encountered these paywalls in your own research. Libraries pay hefty fees to gain access to the journals for their users—including, often, libraries at the institutions that funded the research to begin with.

You can see—and perhaps in fact have yourself experienced—how this approach to scholarly communications actually inhibits communication and slows down or even gets in the way of new research. Open Access publishing, on the other hand, is an approach to scholarly communications without these barriers. Scientists and scholars retain the copyright to their work, so they are able to deposit their papers in accessible institutional repositories—like CUNY Academic Works. There are also Open Access journals, which publish papers with open licenses. A number of Open Access journals, such as the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* and *Theory, Research, and Action in Urban Education*, have been published on CUNY Academic Commons, where this podcast is also hosted.

So Open Access publishing makes research freely available to other scholars and to the public at large. Similarly, Open Educational Resources, or OER, make learning materials freely available to teachers, students, and the public at large.

OER are educational resources that are in the public domain or have been openly licensed so that teachers and students are free to use, distribute, and adapt them. The ability to adapt OER—for example to update them, or to modify them for use in a longer or shorter course, or to make them culturally relevant for a local audience—is an essential aspect of OER, so resources licensed CC BY-ND or CC BY-NC-ND cannot be considered OER. Works with these licenses are Open Access works, but they are not OER.

This podcast and the related website are examples of OER. I have created them to be used in and adapted as needed for other educational contexts. CUNY Academic Commons hosts countless other examples of OER, including course sites created by CUNY faculty. CUNY faculty can also deposit OER, including syllabi, assignments, and entire textbooks, in CUNY’s institutional repository, CUNY Academic Works. CUNY faculty can also share OER at OpenEd CUNY, publish OER using CUNY’s instance of Manifold, and create OER using CUNY’s instance of Pressbooks.

This variety of platforms reflects the variety of OER, which includes all kinds of educational resources: textbooks, courses, assessments, individual lessons and assignments, videos, podcasts, interactive activities, games, and so on. It also reflects the depth and breadth of engagement in OER at CUNY, which is crucial to the university’s mission to “provide a public first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background.”

OER are crucial to the university’s mission in two ways. First, OER are free, so their use at CUNY means a reduction of textbook costs for our fellow students and us, a significant portion of whom come from households with annual incomes of less than $20,000. Due to digital redlining, OER cannot be said to be fully accessible, but they are more accessible than a textbook that costs $100 or more. Second, OER can be adapted for the needs of specific audiences. Because of this adaptability, OER can be shaped or created so that they are relevant to our diverse student body.

[upbeat music fades in]

I’ve been energized by my work helping launch CUNY’s instance of Pressbooks and helping faculty adopt and create OER for their courses. The work is creative, and it is founded on a deep care for students and the knowledge we can create together. Check out the show notes for links to resources on Open Access and OER at CUNY—and take care!

[music concludes]