

## OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES – A RESOURCE FOR LEARNING

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### Introduction

The use of open educational resources (OER) in Swedish higher education is still rather limited despite several commendable initiatives. Per Westman and Jonas Paulsson presented an overview of OER in Sweden in 2008 (Westman and Paulsson) which still holds true today with the added complication that the authorities previously most involved in the promotion of OER have now been disbanded. The Swedish National Library has now taken the lead by incorporating OER into their Open Access initiative and this project is one of several financed within this framework.

Several projects in recent years have investigated the creation, storage and retrieval of open educational resources as well as the related copyright issues. Several OER repositories have been established and despite ambitious plans and thorough research they have not attracted significant interest or volume. Interest in OER is still at a grassroots level but without clear approval and stimulation from educational authorities and academic leadership it is almost impossible for the movement to gain serious credibility and momentum. Without coordinated national initiatives and stimulation the development of OER in Sweden will remain on an ad hoc basis.

The global trend towards increasing openness in higher education, in particular in the USA, has led to increasing numbers of European institutions distributing lectures and course material via channels such as iTunes U, YouTube Edu and Academic Earth. At present the University of Dalarna is the only Swedish institution openly distributing its resources (via iTunes U) though several others are pending. There is, however, a general lack of awareness about OER among teachers and a mistrust in open publication. Discussions tend to focus on copyright issues and the protection of immaterial property (IP) instead of fostering a climate of sharing and transparency. The use of Creative Commons licenses is also rather limited at Swedish universities and there is a need to raise awareness among university teachers of the opportunities inherent in its use.

If university course material is made more visible, protected by Creative Commons licences, there will be several benefits for all interested parties: good material

will be widely used thus heightening the teacher's and university's reputation, open publication stimulates higher quality and potential students will be able to preview the courses they wish to take.

We see the need for three different types of projects in this field:

- **OER production**  
There is already an abundance of OER today but it is often rather simplistic in form (e.g .PowerPoint presentations). More advanced resources in Swedish that are more widely applicable and easily retrievable are needed.
- **Storage and retrieval of OER**  
It is essential for the growth of OER that resources are easily retrievable and not locked in separate repositories. The success of iTunes U is an inspiration but there are question marks about universities relying on commercial and proprietary solutions for the distribution of resources. The use of universities' open archives and standardised search criteria is an important avenue to develop.
- **Use of OER**  
This is where this particular project will have its focus. OER must be seen as a resource for learning. Teachers have always exchanged ideas with each other in the staff room. Now that staff room is global and teachers can exchange ideas and material with colleagues from all over the world. The barriers to the development of OER in Sweden can be considered as a combination of teachers' uncertainty of the quality of their own material, unawareness of copyright issues and a lack of support from the top. More open discussion and greater awareness of the issues are required and that is where we intend to work. We see clear parallels with the establishment of Open Access where the key factor was the EU directive and consequent support from the leading authorities.

There is a wealth of OER in national and international

repositories that teachers are free to use in their courses. Why then do so few Swedish university teachers make use of this wealth? We believe that teachers simply do not know that these resources exist and do not know how best to use them. If teachers start using other teachers' material this will inspire them to make their own material available. At many universities there are already support staff (educational technologists, library staff etc) who can help with OER production and several have already started to collect, catalogue and distribute their resources.

### **OER - a resource for learning**

The project OER - a resource for learning is run by representatives from nine Swedish universities who are also members of the Swedish Network for IT in Higher Education (ITHU). The participating institutions are Linnaeus University (project leader), Blekinge Institute of Technology, Lund University, Umeå University, Mid-Sweden University, University of Jönköping, University of Gävle and The Royal Institute of Technology. The National Library of Sweden funds the project as part of its Open Access initiative. The project will run from spring 2010 until spring 2011.

The question of OER is so complex that one project cannot possibly attempt to deal with all aspects. The project aims at addressing only a limited number of issues with the principal aim being to awaken interest in OER among HE teachers by highlighting examples of good practice. We wish to stimulate interest in using other teachers' material and hope that by doing so many teachers will also realize the advantages of making their own materials freely available. The project does not intend to tackle the legal aspects of copyright but will instead focus on the practical use of Creative Commons and demonstrate how teachers can share material correctly.

The project's main target group is teaching and library staff in Swedish higher education. In addition we will make our resources as freely available as possible so that students and teachers and library staff from other levels of education will also be involved.

### **Seminars**

Our primary channel for communicating with our target group is by organising a number of regional seminars from spring 2010 to spring 2011. These are all free of charge and the material will be made as widely available as possible. Although each seminar aims mainly at a regional audience they are also streamed on the net and therefore available to all. We also plan to offer a completely web-based seminar which will be open to a national audience in all levels of education. The seminars will deal with how social

media can be used to distribute OER, practical use of Creative Commons, showcasing good practice and initiatives and how the interests of different groups (students, teachers, university leadership, general public) can be addressed.

The overall aim of the seminars is to raise the participants' awareness of OER, the principles of Creative Commons and the implications of this movement for higher education. All seminars will include background information on OER and Creative Commons and each seminar will focus on different aspects of OER; teachers' perspective, students' perspective, university perspective, retrieval and tagging. We see each seminar as a stand-alone event but there will be an element of progression for those who wish to follow all or several seminars.

The seminars are scheduled as follows:

- 14 April 2010 - Mid-Sweden University (Sundsvall, Härnösand and Östersund) and the University of Gävle
- 8 September 2010 - web-based seminar
- 23 September 2010 - University of Borås and University of Jönköping
- 13-15 October 2010 - Stockholm. Workshop as part of the national conference NU2010
- 11 November 2010 - University of Karlstad
- 8 December 2010 - Linnaeus University (Kalmar, Växjö) and Blekinge Institute of Technology (Karlskrona)
- 3 March 2011 - University of Lund

### **Social media**

We also aim to stimulate a continuous discussion of OER through a number of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, the Swedish teacher network Dela! and social bookmarking tool Delicious. Here we can share links to other relevant OER material, discuss issues and share resources. All seminar presentations will be made available on the net via our social networks, our project's home site at [www.ithu.se/oer](http://www.ithu.se/oer) and the Swedish site for news on net-based learning, LearningNet. We will also publish filmed interviews with a variety of experts from Sweden and abroad.

### **Retrieval of OER**

As already mentioned it is very important that OER are easily retrieved and stored in open archives. There is a need for metadata standards which are fairly easy to use. At an OER conference in Stockholm earlier this year Jan Hagerlid (2010) from the National Library of Sweden suggested that the OER movement should take a closer look at the Open Access, also when it comes to metadata and storage.

There are different alternatives to search for OER. A few dedicated search engines exist, i.e. DiscoverEd and Xpert. Many universities have institutional repositories such as Open University's Learning Space, but also collaborate in joint initiatives such as Jorum and OER Commons. YouTube Edu and iTunes U are very large channels for OER.

To enable teachers to search and use OER we have compiled a guide with links to resources of high quality, [libguides.lub.lu.se/oer](http://libguides.lub.lu.se/oer).

### Collaboration and dissemination

The National Library of Sweden finances another OER project lead by the University of Borås, Model for increased use of OER. We see considerable common ground between our projects and therefore we have decided to run one of our seminars at the University of Borås in collaboration with our colleagues there. We have regular communication with the project leader in Borås.

The project has been featured in an article in the main Swedish university teaching union's magazine, *Universitetsläraren* (Eliasson, 2010) The printed edition of this is sent to the vast majority of university teachers in the country. Another article on the project has just been published in the August printed edition of the Swedish librarians' union (Linden) magazine.

In November we have been invited to present the project at the annual conference of NFF (Norwegian Association for Distance Learning) in Horten, Norway.

### Organisation

The Network for IT in Higher Education (ITHU) consists of representatives from most universities in the country. Within ITHU a focus group was formed to look at OER and one of the initiatives from this group was a project application to the National Library of Sweden resulting in this project. The project group consists of representatives from 9 universities though in a few cases there are two members from the same university.

One physical meeting was arranged to start the project and there will also be a physical meeting to close the project. Otherwise the work of the project group is based around monthly e-meetings that are recorded for those who were not present. All documentation and discussion takes place in a common forum in Moodle.

Regional sub-groups have been set up to arrange the seminars and their work is almost exclusively carried out by e-meetings and shared documents on, for example, Google Docs.

Project members, OER - a resource for learning Alastair Creelman (Linnaeus University, project leader), Lasse Bourelius (Blekinge Institute of Technology), Mats Brenner (University of Gävle), Peter Diedrichs (Linnaeus University), Åsa Forsberg (University of Lund), Margareta Hellström (Royal Institute of Technology), Bengt Nykvist (Mid-Sweden University), Ebba Ossiannilsson (University of Lund), Fredrik Paulsson (Umeå University), Markus Schneider (Karlstad University), Karin Wennerström (University of Jönköping)

### Conclusions

The main objective of the project is to increase awareness of OER among university teachers and to stimulate discussion of the issues involved (sharing material, Creative Commons, distribution). At present we have arranged one of our seven seminars and it is not possible to draw many conclusions. In this instant, when writing this article, we are planning the web-based seminar scheduled for this week. More than 350 participants have registered for the event, so it's evident that teachers and librarians are interested to know more about OER and consequently also to use them. We will present a final report to the National Library in spring 2011 and hope to present some of our findings in a future issue of *ScieCom*.

### Sources:

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