

Open Educational Resources (OER) Update

Over the past few years there have been a great number of high quality educational resources made available via the Internet. As the learning materials are free to use they are generally referred to as “Open Educational Resources” (OER). This movement to provide OER started with some of the nation’s most prestigious colleges and universities when they began making lectures available to the public via their websites (i.e. EdX, or Coursera). Over time the movement has grown and now many individuals, organizations and foundations are adding high quality OER to the Internet. The 2011 NMC Horizon Report identified OER as an innovation which will have a major impact on K-12 education in the next five years.

Here in the Wickenburg Unified School District the movement to use OER in our online and blended learning programs is both a function of innovation and cost savings. At this stage the District spends over \$50,000 per year to use commercial online learning systems and conversion to an OER-based environment would create substantial savings and make these programs financially sustainable as time progresses.

As we continue the journey to convert our existing online and blended learning programs to OER we are starting with courses which students need to make up credits, although we are quickly expanding to develop ACT aligned courses which match what is being taught at WHS. We are considering partnering with other districts in this endeavor so that the work load might be shared. All of the OER courses are being entered into a Learning Management System (LMS) titled Moodle Rooms, which is designed to “speak” to our Student Information System titled PowerSchool. Once we complete the development work, we will make courses available through the internet as once again, these will be “open” educational resources. Although we believe we will be able to develop high quality OER-based online and blended learning curriculum for the core courses we teach (English, math, science and social studies), it is also recognized that we will likely continue to need to use courses from other entities for various subjects such as world languages. Regardless, a move toward an OER-based core curriculum for online and blended courses will definitely produce cost savings for the district, which is vitally important at this financial environment.