Research Brief:

OER Introduction Sources: Generating Awareness

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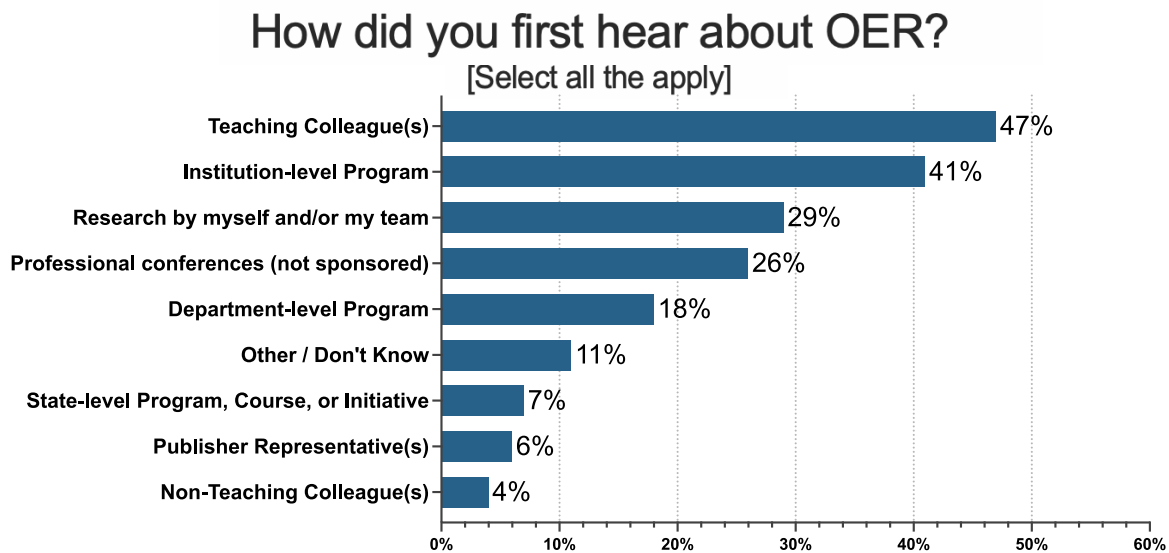Research Director, Bay View Analytics

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Two-thirds of Faculty are aware of OER — let's explore how, and why

Bay View Analytics has been tracking the evolution of higher education in the U.S. for almost two decades. The steady rise of online and digital curricula and tools is of particular interest, as the shift from traditional, in-person instruction is poised to fundamentally shift the ways we learn and interact with education.

How did you first hear about OER?
[Select all the apply]

Source	Percentage
Teaching Colleague(s)	47%
Institution-level Program	41%
Research by myself and/or my team	29%
Professional conferences (not sponsored)	26%
Department-level Program	18%
Other / Don't Know	11%
State-level Program, Course, or Initiative	7%
Publisher Representative(s)	6%
Non-Teaching Colleague(s)	4%

We've paid particular attention to open educational resources (OER), free or low cost alternatives to commercial publishers with the potential to upend the traditional, textbook-centric education model. Our research has shown that OER use by higher education faculty and administrators goes hand-in-hand with OER awareness: educators are likelier to adopt OER once they are aware those options exist, and can potentially meet their needs.

Our recent national survey of higher education educators in the U.S. shows that two-thirds of faculty report some level of awareness of open educational resources (OER). But how did they become aware?

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Close to Home

The most common source of information on OER is right on campus, from colleagues or institutional level programs. Nearly half (47%) of faculty report first hearing about OER from a peer. We call these "one-on-one" discoveries, which might result from casual conversation — "Hey, look what I found" — or to help fill a specific request, such as looking for a resource to help cover a topic.

A slightly smaller percentage of faculty (41%) hear about OER from an Institution-level program, department course, or initiative. We refer to these discoveries as "one-to-many," where an institution's goal is to introduce OER as a curriculum option. The reasons for one-to-many initiatives vary, but one consideration is curtailing the rising costs of education, and the burden that places on students — we broach the topic of the cost of education in our latest report, which you can find on our website.

Interestingly, faculty who report that there is an institutional or departmental policy on OER use at their campus are no more likely to have learned about OER from formal institutional or departmental sources than faculty teaching at institutions with no such policy. That said, they are 25% more likely to report learning about OER from a teaching colleague than faculty at institutions without formal policies, and 200 to 300% more likely to have heard about OER from an OER publisher or vendor. A mere 6% of faculty learn about OER from OER publishers themselves. This is in stark contrast to traditional publishers, who will often host sponsored events, and otherwise promote their materials through sales calls and other methods.

Measuring Demographics

Some OER introduction methods are more common with certain faculty.

Faculty Characteristic *More Likely to Learn About OER From:*	**Non-Tenured** OER Publishers	**Tenured** Institutional Policies

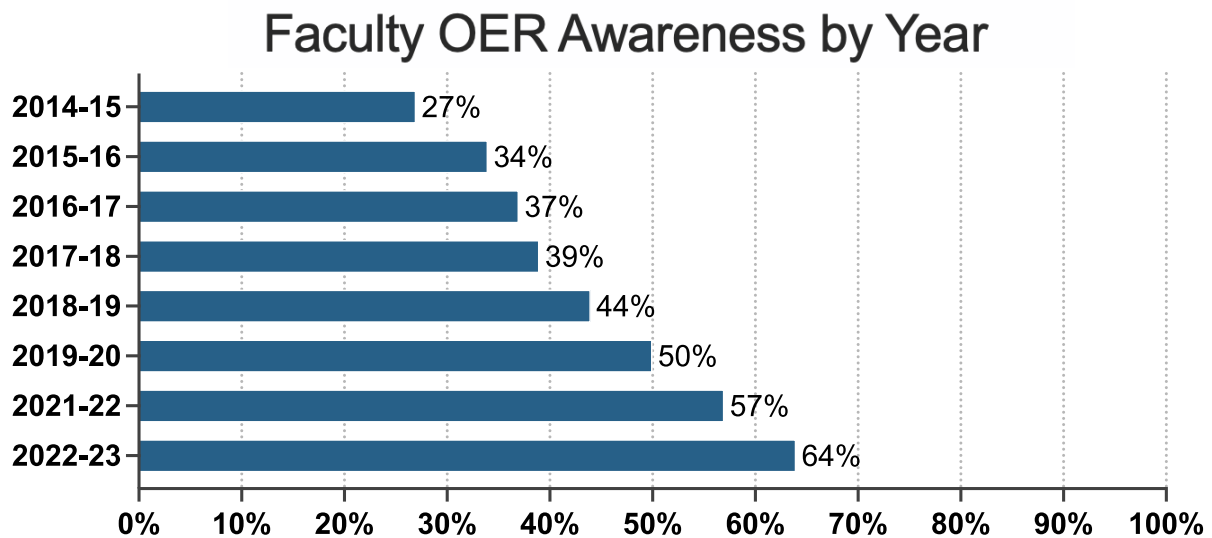| *Faculty Characteristic* *More Likely to Learn About OER From:*	**10+ years teaching**	
	State Initiatives	Conferences

A few interesting trends have emerged through our research data, surrounding OER awareness among particular faculty demographics. Tenured faculty are 50% more likely to learn about OER from institutional programs than part-time, non-tenured, or adjunct faculty, and less likely to learn about OER from OER publishers.

Additionally, non-tenure track faculty who have taught for more than 10 years are more aware of OER initiatives at the state level, though their overall level of awareness remains low. Learning about OER from professional conferences also grows linearly for every 5 years a faculty member teaches, from 3% reporting awareness at 0 to 5 years experience, up to 31% for faculty with more than 26 years experience.

Measuring Awareness

Faculty OER Awareness by Year

Year	Awareness
2014-15	27%
2015-16	34%
2016-17	37%
2017-18	39%
2018-19	44%
2019-20	50%
2021-22	57%
2022-23	64%

OER awareness is an important factor in OER adoption, and faculty awareness of OER has seen steady, year over year growth since we began tracking this metric during the 2014. Local network connections have been the catalyst for this growth, as faculty turn to peers with questions, or institutions share information. But can this trend continue? Will OER advocates need new methods to reach that last third of unaware faculty? We'll continue to track these metrics, and more. You can find all of our OER research, and more, on our website.