SUPERVISOR/S: Stephen Harlow and Nicole Pepperell

PROJECT TITLE: How Open Are We? Waikato Academic Staff Perspectives on Textbooks

FIELD: Educational Research, Library & Information Studies

DIVISION/SCHOOL: CETTL - Centre for Tertiary Teaching & Learning

PROJECT LOCATION: Hamilton

PROJECT ABSTRACT: Waikato University has been a leader in Open Access to information in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, Waikato was the first University to have an Open Access policy guideline for staff and students publishing their research. The next step on our openness journey could be to encourage the use of Open Textbooks, but what do our academic staff think?

Open textbooks are freely available online, do not require logins and can be printed, adapted and shared. With over 40,000 Open Textbooks catalogued, many of which are very high quality, there is the opportunity to adopt Open Textbooks for many Waikato papers and programmes. Open Textbooks are also able to be adapted to better reflect the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Research has shown that textbook costs impact students’ choice of papers and programmes and their academic achievement. Students found access to textbooks proved to be a challenging aspect of emergency teaching during Covid-19. Adopting Open Textbooks represents a more equitable approach as every student can access an Open Textbook regardless of study mode or financial status. Just one class adopting an openly licensed textbook can save tens of thousands of dollars. Money that can be spent by students to pay for food and accommodation.

We want to understand why Waikato academics choose to use textbooks, what influences their choices and how ready they are to adopt Open Textbooks. To do this, the project will adapt an existing survey and deliver it electronically to Waikato academic staff. Designed in 2020, this survey was designed for a national study into Aotearoa New Zealand academics’ use of and perspectives of prescribed textbooks. An audit will also be undertaken in order to create a baseline measure of textbook use and that data submitted to the Open Syllabus project to look for trends and correlations with other Universities.

This project offers an opportunity to apply research methods in an authentic context and to make an impact on the future student experience at the University of Waikato.

STUDENT SKILLS:
- Desire to learn more about the research process, including software for delivering electronic surveys.
- Interest in one or more of the following topics: open access research, library and information studies.
- A familiarity with academic literature review strategies, including literature search skills, and an ability to summarise and synthesise academic research.
- Ability to apply the conventions of academic writing.
- Ability to work well in a team environment and collaborate with others.
- Ability to work independently.
- Good organisational and time management skills.

PROJECT TASKS:
- Carry out a literature review of the use of Open Textbooks in the academy.
- Adapt the Academic Perspectives of Textbooks survey to suit the Waikato context.
- Build and deliver the survey using an appropriate electronic platform (e.g. Qualtrics).
- Data analysis and interpretation.
- Audit Waikato Reading Lists, compile and submit the data to https://opensyllabus.org/ (with assistance from library staff).
- Creation of a final research poster that meets the requirements of the Summer Scholars programme.
- Verbal presentation reflecting on your own role in the research, followed by a supportive Q&A discussion of your research experience.
EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Student’s Research Poster (as per clause 6 of the Scholarship regulations)
- An online survey delivered and data analysed and presented.
- Dataset of textbooks contributed to Open Syllabus.
- Conference presentation(s).
- Online summary of key findings.