

Open Educational Practices (OEP) for Research Skill Development in a Graduate Program

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Open educational practice (OEP) is a promising pedagogical approach for research skill development using participatory technologies in high-quality online learning experiences with graduate students. OEP provides flexible options and possibilities for enhanced student engagement and learning in graduate programs. In this paper, we describe our analysis of a graduate-level program with courses delivered using OEP approaches in which students developed research skills through layered assignments and multiple rounds of edits and revisions of their work, as well as engaged in self-reflection and idea-sharing using shared online spaces and social media.

The following research question guided the study: How are graduate students supported in open and online learning and the development of research-based skills? In the first year of the study, there were 12 students in the cohort and 8 students ($n = 8$) completed a survey about the activities that supported their learning during their course work. A subset of participants ($n = 5$) agreed to participate in interviews following the completion of the program to provide further detail and insights about their learning experiences. We are currently collecting data from a second cohort of students. Analysis of year one data has involved descriptive statistics for the quantitative survey data and two cycles of coding for the qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey questions and interview transcripts. In the first cycle, descriptive codes were assigned to each individual response to capture the key idea(s) provided by each participant and to note any patterns. In the second cycle, similar codes were clustered together and informed the development of themes.

Results from the first cohort demonstrate how OEP supported students with layered assignments and formative feedback for continual improvement. The study provides a contextually rich example of how OEP can enable an authentic learning experience with opportunities for students to receive feedback from multiple sources (e.g., peer groups, instructors, outside experts found by students, outside experts found by the instructor, alumni) while developing research-based skills. At the time of the presentation, we will also share research insights from our analysis of student experiences in the second cohort. The study is significant and can inform instructors and institutions on open educational practices and creating high quality, online learning experiences and the conditions that support students in research skill development in post-secondary programs. The study also contributes to the growing field of open pedagogy and research skill development in online professional graduate programs.