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PRACTICE ARTICLE

Library Publishing in Practice: A Case Study in Open Course Publications

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Open course publications provide students with real-world experience of the scholarly publishing process, engaging students as information creators rather than consumers. Open course publications, an example of open pedagogy in action, can be journals or monographs created as an assignment in a credit-bearing course. Supporting open assignments is one of the most impactful activities undertaken by Digital Publishing units in academic libraries, educating the next generation of scholars about the value of open access. This article describes Simon Fraser University Library's approach to supporting in-class publication projects, focusing on in-class open monographs.

Description of the service: The Digital Publishing Librarian and Copyright Specialist collaborate with an instructor to plan support for their course publication. This includes working with the instructor to plan the project; providing an in-class workshop on key scholarly publishing topics, including an introduction to open access and Creative Commons licences; ongoing support as needed through the semester; and production and publication of the finalized monograph.

Next steps: The Library is currently addressing long-term sustainability needs for these publications. The authors are considering further opportunities for outreach to instructors beyond the humanities and social sciences, as well as potential connections to undergraduate research activities, while recognizing the capacity required to provide and expand this service.

Keywords: open pedagogy, open course publications, in-class publications, course books, academic libraries, digital publishing, library publishing

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INTRODUCTION

Background/context

Simon Fraser University (SFU), a public research university in British Columbia, Canada, serves a diverse population of over 37,000 students (2023 calendar year) across three campuses in Burnaby, Surrey, and Vancouver. With 368 undergraduate degree programs and 149 graduate degree programs, SFU is a comprehensive, mid-size institution committed to innovation and excellence in research, teaching, and learning ([Simon Fraser University, n.d.](#)).

SFU Library plays a central role in supporting this academic community, with branches at all three campuses and services that reflect a strong commitment to equity, access, and inclusion. The Library supports a wide range of scholarly activities, including scholarly communication, digital publishing, research data management, and Indigenous initiatives.

As reflected in the library's Academic Plan 2025-2030, "SFU Library is a global leader in open scholarship initiatives and will continue to advance the development of open research platforms, infrastructures, and services." SFU Library actively supports and advocates for open scholarship, including open access, open-source, open data, and open educational resources (OER). This commitment has been demonstrated through initiatives like SFU's Open Access Policy, spearheaded by SFU's Senate Library Committee and adopted by SFU in 2017, and the library's administration of the Central Open Access Fund, which provided financial support for open access publishing by SFU authors from 2010 to 2025. For over two decades, the Library has led the institution's efforts in advancing open access and open scholarship.

The library's Digital Publishing program further exemplifies this commitment. By providing access to open-source publishing platforms, expert support, and training, the Digital Publishing program enables SFU students, faculty, and staff to create and maintain online, open access publications, including scholarly journals, textbooks, conference proceedings, and student volumes. Many of these projects are enabled by open-source tools developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), a core facility at SFU that advances open access scholarly publishing through the creation and development of free, open-source software like Open Journal Systems (OJS) and Open Monograph Press (OMP).

Open course publications

Among the most impactful activities supported by the SFU Digital Publishing are in-class publishing projects, where instructors partner with librarians to embed open

access, course-integrated journals or books into undergraduate and graduate courses. These course-integrated projects offer students hands-on experience with the scholarly publishing process, from editorial review to licensing, while fulfilling academic requirements. Librarians from both Digital Publishing and the Copyright Office contribute instruction and support in copyright, author rights, open access, and Creative Commons (CC) licensing, offering students a comprehensive introduction to scholarly publishing practices and open access. Most of these projects use PKP's open-source software OJS and OMP.

At the time of writing, Digital Publishing at SFU Library is hosting and supporting over 40 active open access journals, including undergraduate student-led journals, graduate student journals, and faculty journals, in addition to open access monographs and course-based or in-class publishing projects.

Overview of SFU Library support for open course publications

The SFU Library has provided support for instructors using open course publications in their courses for the last decade. Usually, this support is undertaken by the Digital Publishing Librarian, with support from the Copyright Specialist. Typically, an instructor contacts the Digital Publishing Librarian to request support for implementing an open publication in their course, and the Digital Publishing Librarian then coordinates with the Copyright Specialist to plan their approach to providing this support. The Digital Publishing Librarian liaises with the instructor throughout the semester.

Library support for open course publications includes providing the instructor with information about technical requirements for producing the journal or book; a workshop for the class covering open access publishing, copyright, and open licences; ongoing support throughout the semester for any questions or issues that arise; and production and publication of the completed journal or book.

The instructor is responsible for instruction related to the content created by students, deadlines, grading, guiding students through the process of selecting a CC licence for the journal or their contributions, and collecting and collating the student contributions. The instructor typically also either selects a cover image or guides students through a process to select or generate a cover image for the publication, with the library providing design support to create the cover.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Open pedagogy

These open access course-based projects are examples of open pedagogy in action. Open pedagogy (OP) can be broadly defined as “a site of praxis, a place where theories about learning, teaching, technology, and social justice enter into a conversation with each other and inform the development of educational practices and structures” (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017). Values or key elements of OP have been identified as including valuing social learning, balancing privacy and openness, developing digital literacies, and challenging traditional teaching role expectations (Cronin, 2017, p. 9), as well as sharing, transparency, collaborative knowledge construction, deconstructing traditional power structures, personalized learning, and learner empowerment (Werth & Williams, 2022, pp. 10–11; see also Tietjen & Asino, 2021). Jhangiani devised “5Rs for Open Pedagogy,” comparable to the 5 Rs of Open: respect, reciprocate, risk, reach, and resist (2019).

Case studies have described various approaches to and results of incorporating OP in courses. Bussell & Larson (2023) found it challenging to include an appropriate level of scaffolding for all of the topics required in an OP course and ultimately recommend starting at a smaller scale, such as one assignment, before scaling up to a full course (pp. 292–293). Chen & Hendricks (2023) emphasize the need to talk with students about the benefits and risks of working publicly and understanding how their work may be used by others (p. 34), and to provide the option to not share the work at all or to share it without an open licence (p. 35).

Orozco’s (2020) critical examination of OP also highlights the importance of allowing students to make informed decisions about sharing their work openly, arguing that “Open practice is only powerful when the students involved understand why they are engaging in this work and deciding for themselves that this is something they are personally and politically invested in” (see also Chen & Hendricks, 2023). Integral to this is ensuring that students understand their rights as authors and copyright owners and how those rights are affected when they openly share and openly license their work. A small number of authors have discussed copyright instruction specifically, including Folk-Farber (2016), who emphasizes the importance of students seeing themselves as creators and rightsholders (p. 462; see also Rodriguez et al., 2014).

Library support for OP

In addition to using OP in their own instruction, library workers have also provided various types of support for instructors using OP in their courses. Hare et al. (2020) highlight the value librarians bring to this work: “teaching students about evaluation, curation, and their

rights as authors” (p. 436). Goodsett’s (2022) case study of librarian involvement in a multimodal composition project concludes that “The overlap among the goals of OP, multimodal composition, and information literacy provides a strong foundation for librarian-instructor collaboration, resulting in memorable learning experiences for students” (p. 159). The alignment between OP and information literacy is also noted by Bond (2022, pp. 42–43).

Some studies have addressed the resources and capacity required for librarians to support OP (e.g., Smith & Lee, 2016; Schultz et al., 2025). McGeary et al. (2021) used examples of a variety of OER undertakings to compare the cost of librarian support to the cost savings to students, and concluded that libraries should be strategic in considering staffing needs when planning their involvement in open projects (p. 20). Carter & Santiago (2023) tracked the scope of support provided by librarians in consulting with an instructor, providing technical support, and providing instructional support throughout an OP course; their library used this data to develop reusable lesson plans as well as “a framework of criteria for future [OP] collaborations” (p. 250).

In-class open access publishing projects

Open course journals or books, also referred to as classroom or in-class publishing projects, are an OP approach in which students produce an open access journal or book within a structured course environment. The model can situate students not only as authors but also as peer reviewers, editors, and journal managers (see, e.g., Koskinen et al., 2021; Shuttleworth et al., 2019). While some projects operate as “mock journals” without public dissemination (Koskinen et al., 2021), many are published open access, often using platforms such as OJS. The literature demonstrates the diversity of such models, including student-led, course journals, and mock formats (Koskinen et al., 2021), but also their flexibility in format, which may include multimodal publishing combining text, multimedia, and other creative works (Stranack, 2017; Goodsett, 2022).

Libraries play a central role in these initiatives, providing technical and software infrastructure and support, scholarly communication training, and connections to institutional partners, with in-class open access publications described as being at the intersection of OP, scholarly communication, and information literacy, where students act as authors, editors, or journal managers. (Dawson & Marken, 2019; Shuttleworth et al., 2019). This work aligns with the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy, particularly in relation to the concepts “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” and “Information Has Value” (Shuttleworth et al., 2019; for the Framework, see ACRL, 2016).

The literature also points out that in-class open access publications involve university students as active participants or content creators and curators rather than passive consumers in the

scholarly communication cycle (Buckland, 2015; Gilman, 2013). Koskinen et al. (2021) describe a Helsinki University Library pilot that used a digital publishing platform as a pedagogical tool for doctoral students, improving their digital competencies, peer review skills, and ability to respond to editorial feedback. In Canada, Shuttleworth et al. (2019) document Simon Fraser University Library's partnerships with instructors across various departments and disciplines, including English, Publishing, World Literature, and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, to integrate course journals into curricula. In Canada, this work takes place within a diverse journal ecosystem where diamond open access predominates, adopted by 61% of journals, and where university libraries play a key role in sustaining open infrastructures (van Bellen & Céspedes, 2025).

Course journals and course books: Value and benefits

From the student perspective, the benefits of course publishing projects include "increased knowledge of the material" and course content being "more engaging and relevant" (Hilton et al., 2019, p. 279). Students also "appreciate[] the personalization" that OP allows for (Hilton et al., 2019, p. 279). Chen and Hendricks (2023) found that students felt more interested and engaged with open assignments and put more effort into assignments when they knew they would be made public (p. 32). These projects transform the "disposable assignment" into a public scholarly contribution, providing students with a real audience and increasing motivation and quality of work (Shuttleworth et al., 2019).

From an institutional perspective, open access classroom projects showcase student scholarship, strengthen university-community connections, and advance open access principles and open access activities on campus (Buckland, 2015; Stranack, 2017). They offer an opportunity for discussions on open access, author rights, ethical publishing, and inclusion, which can be particularly relevant in contexts involving Indigenous knowledges or sensitive content. Although longitudinal studies remain limited, existing evidence suggests that both course journals and books increase student engagement, promote open access, and strengthen collaboration between librarians, instructors, and faculty across disciplines. They are empowering students to contribute to scholarly discourse and develop digital and scholarly communication literacies, while also increasing the visibility and accessibility of their research.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE

Working with the instructor

Models for course journals (i.e., students as authors; students as editors) have been previously described in the literature (e.g., Shuttleworth et al., 2019, p. 2) and our focus is on working

with the instructor in the context of a course project, to publish a collected volume of essays, where student work is shared as chapters in a digital monograph published with OMP, rather than as journal articles.

The course book project begins with a consultation between the instructor and the Digital Publishing team to establish the scope, objectives, and workflow for the term. In recent Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Fall 2024 terms, in courses including ENGL 417 (*Seminar in Gender, Sexuality, and Literature*) and ENGL 320 (*Poetry of the Long Eighteenth Century*), the main assignment took the form of a traditional academic essay. Students are invited, but not required, to contribute their work as chapters in an open access published anthology. If a student feels their work is personal and not meant for sharing, they can submit it only to the instructor; students can also publish anonymously or under a pseudonym. This approach underscores the importance of consent and agency in open access publishing.

Other details usually confirmed between the instructor and the librarians at the start of the term or project are the title of the book, the number of students in the class, and the corresponding number of anticipated contributions, any special requests for the landing page for the book in OMP, and cover image details and creator(s).

During the course, students develop transferable skills by engaging in drafting, copyediting, revisions, and peer review, while also participating in collective decision-making about the form of the final publication. The class collaboratively selects the book's title, agrees on a CC license, and sometimes designs or contributes ideas for the cover design. These activities allow students to experience hands-on the editorial and ethical choices that shape scholarly publishing.

The in-class workshop and ongoing support

The “main event” of this collaboration is an in-class workshop by the Digital Publishing Librarian and Copyright Specialist, early in the semester, to provide the students with an introduction to open publishing, copyright, and open licences. The workshop starts with an overview by the Digital Publishing Librarian of the Library's support for digital publishing and the work of PKP. For a class creating a course journal, the workshop would include a description of the OJS platform with a focus on editorial workflow, submission, review, copyediting, production, and publication, and share examples of previous course journals. For a class creating an open access book, the workshop includes an overview of the PKP and its OMP platform, with less detail because, in the case of a book, the students are not typically directly involved in the administrative work of compiling content and actually producing the publication.

Next, the Copyright Specialist walks through an introduction to open access and copyright, describing the types of works that are eligible for copyright protection, the rights included in copyright, and the term of protection. Highlighted is the fact that the students own copyright in their work, with all the rights that entail, including the right to decide when and where to publish it. Also explained are the different ways copyright can be handled in scholarly publishing—assigned to the publisher, or retained by the author with only certain rights licensed to the publisher, as is common in open access publishing—and the implications of each of these for the author and their rights to their work. In a course publication, students will retain ownership of copyright and simply agree to make their work openly available in the publication. This stage provides the foundation for informed student decision-making about whether and how to share their work.

The Copyright Specialist also talks about strategies for finding images and other third-party content to include in the students' contributions, discussing barriers related to copyright as well as the time required to request and receive permission in the context of the project taking place within a single semester. Alternatives to copyright-protected materials are suggested, including using material in the public domain and openly licensed material, and sources like [Openverse](#) and the [Wikimedia Commons](#) are recommended for finding these types of content.

Finally, the Digital Publishing Librarian provides an introduction to CC licences and how they work. As part of the publishing project, students are tasked with deciding as a group which open licence will be applied to their course publication, so the session emphasizes that licensing is a shared decision that reflects how the group wants their work to be used, reused, and shared by others. This topic begins with the explanation that CC licences are built from four core conditions: Attribution (BY), Share Alike (SA), Non-Commercial (NC), and No Derivatives (ND), and that all licences require attribution, ensuring students receive credit for their work.

The librarian then walks through each condition with concrete, relatable examples to help students understand the real-world implications of their choices. For instance, SA is illustrated through a creative transformation, such as turning a poem into a song, and wanting to require the resulting song to be openly accessible and reusable by others as well. The ND condition is explored in depth, and students are encouraged to think critically about its limitations, particularly around accessibility and translation. This discussion helps students see licensing not just as a legal mechanism, but as a values-based decision that shapes how knowledge and creativity circulate.

Finally, the librarian looks at how these conditions combine into the six CC licences (Attribution, Attribution SA, Attribution NC, Attribution ND, Attribution NC SA, and

Attribution NC ND). These are presented as a spectrum ranging from the most open (Attribution) to the more restrictive options that limit commercial uses or adaptations. The session reinforces that there is no “right” licence, only choices that will align more or less with the group’s specific priorities.

Emphasis is placed on understanding how “open” open can be and making sure the students are aware that openly licensing their work means anyone—not just in academia—can use it in a wide variety of ways. The librarian reinforces the fact that CC licences are irrevocable – once an openly licensed work is made available, anyone can continue to use it under the terms of the licence, even if the author takes it offline or re-releases it with a different licence or no licence. It is really important to librarians that students make informed decisions about how they want their work to be able to be used in the future. Depending on the instructor’s preference, students may be given an option to submit their contribution directly to the instructor and not publish it openly; the authors support this approach and the agency it gives students.

The session concludes by reminding students that applying a CC licence does not remove their copyright—they can do anything further they want with their work, they can grant additional permissions beyond the licence terms, and users can use the work under copyright exceptions such as fair dealing, regardless of the licence terms. Overall, the instruction is designed to be concise and practical, equipping students to make an informed and collaborative licensing decision.

Following the workshop, the librarians provide ongoing support as needed through the semester. This can include answering individual questions from students, providing additional information to the instructor, or possibly visiting the class again to answer questions in person or provide more information relating to a specific aspect of the project. In the past, there has not been very much follow-up contact, but occasionally students have reached out with questions about requesting permission for inclusion of content from copyright owners or finding additional openly licensed content.

Production and publication

Once student contributions are finalized and submitted, the project moves into production. Individual essays are considered as a collection, chapters in a book, with attention paid to consistency across the volume. The Digital Publishing Librarian provides templates to guide formatting and style, while the instructor and students take responsibility for most of the copyediting and proofreading work. If no student designer is available, the Library’s graphic designer produces a cover based on a description provided by the class, ensuring that visual design elements align with the group’s perspective. This phase enhances students’ editorial

understanding while allowing them to see their coursework transformed into an open access scholarly product. Far from being a “disposable assignment,” the students’ work can be accessed from anywhere in the world and is easily discoverable in both the SFU Library’s catalogue and WorldCat.

The CC licence selected by the class is applied to the volume. This can require further consideration, for example, in the case of multiple classes’ volumes being brought together in one publication. If different licences have been applied to each volume, they must be respected. In a recent example, one class selected a CC BY-NC-ND licence while two others selected CC BY-NC-SA, and all three classes’ work was collected into an anthology. Once a class has moved on, it would be nearly impossible to contact all students to request their consent to change a licence to match other volumes to simplify licensing, so the Digital Publishing Librarian must accommodate all licences. Articles with different licences can be included in a single publication; the licence details need to be made clear at the anthology, volume, and article levels.

The technical aspects of publication are coordinated by the Digital Publishing team, including the creation of publication-ready files (PDFs and EPUBs), consistent pagination, and accurate metadata. The Library also manages infrastructure such as assigning ISBNs and DOIs, depositing the volume with Library and Archives Canada, and hosting it in SFU Library Publication Series, within the Student Volumes collection.

NEXT STEPS

By integrating OP and open access publishing practices, these course publishing projects create opportunities for students to see themselves as creators, rather than only consumers, of information and as contributors to the scholarly record. Furthermore, they exemplify how libraries can act as partners in OP, research, and dissemination.

Long-term sustainability has been an important part of SFU Library’s conversations around in-class publishing projects, both for course journals and books. Strategies being considered for course monographs include integrating the projects into departmental curricula, ensuring that multiple instructors in a department are familiar with the publishing workflow, and providing library support for ongoing hosting and support. The goal is to build a sustainable model that can persist beyond a single instructor’s interest and involvement, allowing future students to continue contributing and evolving the publication as a series if that is desired. For discrete, one-time publications, the focus is on lasting value through ensuring preservation in the SFU Library Digital Publishing Publication Series, assigning a DOI, and documenting the workflow so it can serve as a model or inspiration for future classes.

While keeping in mind limits in librarian capacity, as noted by McGeary et al. (2021), Schultz et al. (2025), and others, SFU Library could explore more comprehensive outreach to raise awareness about the possibility of library support for open course publications. This might include reaching out to instructors who participate in communities of practice related to OP or OER; identifying instructors who have created OER but perhaps haven't implemented open possibilities in student assignments and contacting them directly; or marketing in disciplines other than the humanities and social sciences to reach beyond the departments worked with so far.

Thinking more broadly, connections could be made between instructors using open course publications and an increasing interest in undergraduate-level research, for example, by promoting the possibilities of open course publications at undergraduate research symposium and showcase events. OP and open course publications can also help to address increasing concerns about student reliance on generative AI by creating assignments that are iterative and involve peer review, revision, and response to feedback.

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