



Great Thinkers – Student Research Partners

Transcript

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:05:25

Riley: Great Thinkers project, Student research partners Interview.
Introduction.

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Gurinder: My name is Gurinder S. Purewal, and I am a master's student in the Human Rights and Social Justice program here at Thompson Rivers University.

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Riley: Please introduce your project and how the TRU Open Press team was able to support you.

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Gurinder: My project was, creating an open educational resource for first year philosophy students and working with Dr. Jenna Woodrow as a research assistant. And so the ultimate goal of this task was to create a space where new students can first start to learn about philosophy, can learn how to introduce to the discipline, write about it, and then also hosting all their course material on that same page. So this project or the OER book, as we call it, was essentially a project to help students have all their reading materials, any supports that they might need for class, all encompassed in one place. And of course, applying equity, diversity and inclusion perspectives and principles into this project. It's free for students, and that's one of the most important things for our students in accessibility. In terms of the support from the team that we received. A lot of the task involved, you know, kind of technical parts when you have to format text, format words, put links in, make sure you're doing copy writing and editing properly and making sure you're taking all the right steps to ensure people have been awarded the right credit for their work and not to plagiarize. And so the team was incredibly helpful for supporting us during this journey. There's so many nuances that the team was experienced in and could point us to the right direction. And especially when we found something challenging or something that we weren't able to figure out. The team was always there and ready to help. And so it was a really great system.

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Riley: Have you encountered any challenges or limitations while working on this project? If so, what were they?

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Gurinder: Nothing major. I think maybe some of the limitations would be sometimes the connection wouldn't work to the website, but very occasionally nothing that was coming up often. Other things would be, you know, specific technical tasks, like how do I format this textbox or this part of the page? How do I make this link perform a certain function? But we were advised whenever we would encounter those difficulties to please contact the team, and they were always so efficient at supporting us. And so really, even though we did face maybe some technical issues and things like that, it was always well mitigated by the team.

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Riley: Have you had a chance to share your experiences with your peers? What were their thoughts on this project?

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Gurinder: I have actually, yeah. I've had to share with my friends and some of my peers in my program as well, and they thought that the project was very cool. They're really excited about, you know, this type of opportunity and especially me telling them about, you know, how important it is for students to have access to, you know, books like these that we've made for them for their study material, you know, free, free textbooks is a very big piece of making sure higher education is equitable and inclusive for all students. And so, you know, most of the students I talked to were very interested in it, they were really eager to learn more about it. I also have a research fellowship, I work study position at research studies, and I was talking my manager there about it, and she's very interested in learning more, so I've definitely spread the word and there's definitely interest in it.

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Riley: How thoroughly does the project address fairness, inclusion and accessibility?

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Gurinder: The project addresses inclusion equity and accessibility in a few different ways. One of the biggest things is that, it's a free resource for students. And in higher education, it's very important to have these resources for students because there's a lot of different things that go into finances, and having free reading material is just one easy way we can make students' academic life a little bit easier. Another thing is when you just approach the discipline of philosophy, there's quite a few readings you have to go through because you're going through ancient philosophers to an enlightenment philosophers and then modern philosophers. And so to ask students to purchase, you know, what would be over, probably 40 to 50 different readings isn't sustainable, so this is one way to mitigate that. Also to help introduced to the discipline of philosophy and help them gain, and that inclusive knowledge and access to knowledge that perhaps wasn't always there for previous students. Another way is the actual formatting of the pages and books. We've included sections that go over an introduction to

students for the discipline of philosophy. It teaches them how to write, how to read, in philosophy. What the purpose of philosophy is, how would you approach research in philosophy and even writing a philosophy paper? It goes into further links that make it very accessible to navigate the pages, whether you want to go from top to bottom, bottom right back up, and also the creation of multiple table of contents. This is very helpful for accessibility and inclusion and also making readings equitable for the students. This is because being able to click on links and being able to navigate sites easily is very important for students to be able to do their readings efficiently, so that's another point.

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Riley: What might a future project scope entail?

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Gurinder: A future project scope could include considering how we could improve upon the book that we've already created. And so that could mean a different a couple different things. It could include thinking about other types of formatting that might be more accessible for students or even gaining feedback specifically from students once they've used this resource to see what they would like to see, and if there's any changes they would like to make because it's really important to gain firsthand experience and knowledge from the students we are trying to support as well. Another kind of future goal could be to do some more research on equity and inclusion in terms of, is there any modern literature coming out for helping students learn online and in remote environments because as book they would be accessing on their own time. So of course, the teacher is there to support them 100% and knows about the book. But is there further ways they can integrate the book into the class in a more holistic approach for them.

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Riley: Did you know about TRU Open Press and open educational resources before you were involved in this project? If so, how did you learn about them?

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Gurinder: I actually did not know about TRU Open Press or OER before this project. I guess in the sense of OERs, I knew about them if I would access one online through my own personal research, but I didn't know they were called OERs. So after this project, it really introduced me to this realm of accessible teaching essentially and accessible resources that are out there and being created for students.

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Riley: What was your experience like using TRU Open Press and receiving support from the team?

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Gurinder: It was a great experience. It was a lot of fun. Sometimes it was overwhelming just because of the project and having a deadline and knowing that, you know, there's so much information that we wanted to have in so students were well supported. But it was a it was a really fun experience, and it really helped me learn a lot more about the nuances of EDI. And also the support from the OER team was absolutely fantastic. There was really, you know, any issues you had, they were there to support us. So it was a well-oiled machine, and it was a really great experience.

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Riley: How do you think open educational resources will improve students' education? How would the quality of the education differ without OER?

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Gurinder: I think the future of education is the root of OERs. I think having equitable, diverse and inclusive resources for students is the way of future academic learning. And I think we can see that from what's out there already. There are so many spaces all over the world and academic institutions that are working on open educational resources. And I think the more we can practice integrating EDI principles into academic learning and understanding that students have very diverse learning needs, and the more resources and supports we can create for them is only going to improve our education system and add to more robust knowledge and experience.

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Riley: What types of open educational resources would you like to see in the future?

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Gurinder: The types of OERs, I think I would like to see in the future are OERs that are based around first year courses. I think regardless of the type of course, whether the discipline of science, arts, social sciences, I think an OER for first year learning is really important, and it can help students have a lot of resources on hand for this new discipline that they're encountering likely for the very first time in their life. And able to learn and navigate information at their own time and pace. And so I think whether it's political science, philosophy, biology, chemistry, and all the other types of courses that are out there in disciplines, I think an OER is only going to help students further their knowledge in those disciplines.

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Riley: Thank you for the interview, Gurinder.

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Gurinder: Thank you. That was great.