

Towards DIY OCW: A sustainable model for producing OpenCourseware at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M)

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Abstract

In current times of economic crisis and consequent budget restrictions for universities it is important to look for ways to support OCW production with limited resources. In this paper we describe the solution sought by the UC3M, by designing a system to foster DIY (Do-It-Yourself) production of OpenCourseWare by the university teaching staff. The results obtained over a period of four years prove that the system is effective. We would like to share this model with universities that are newcomers or institutions that are looking for ways to sustain the project with a low level of resources.

Keywords

Sustainability, support system, course production, resources, authors guide.

Introduction

The Universidad Carlos III de Madrid is a relatively new university, established in 1989, with three campuses, Getafe and Leganés, towns located to the south of Madrid, and Colmenarejo, to the northwest. It is composed of three academic and research centers, the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Humanities, Communication and Library Science, and the School of Engineering, that offer a wide range of degrees both at undergraduate and graduate level. The university has around 1,900 faculty members, with 700 people on the administrative staff. The current student population is approximately 19,000.

The UC3M joined the OpenCourseWare movement in 2006. The project is coordinated by the Library Service, given the involvement of this service in digital content and e-learning projects, as well as having considerable experience with Intellectual Property issues. The OCW Office (OCWO), based at one of the libraries, is run with limited human resources: 1 coordinator (part time dedication) and 1 student (full time dedication), plus some support from the university Computing Centre. However, this situation has not been a drawback to being an active member of both the OCW-Universia consortium and OCWC, and to arousing the interest of UC3M faculty in the project.

The development of the project in terms of faculty interest can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: Faculty response to annual call for proposals

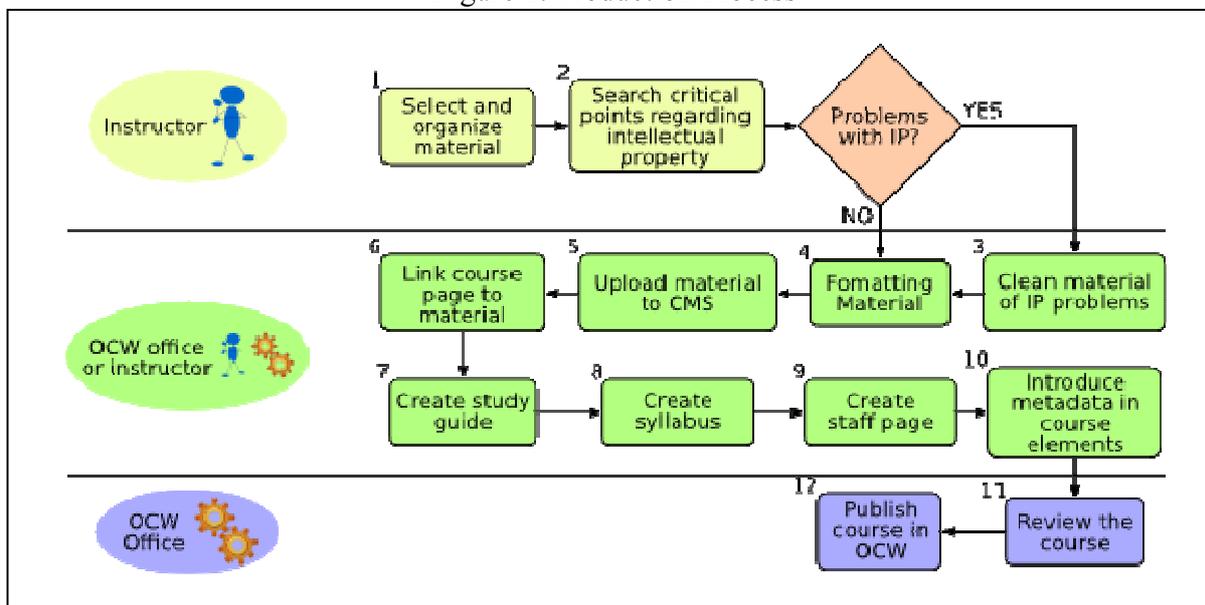
Year	Project Phase	N° of proposals presented
2007	Pilot phase	10
2008	First Open Call	68
2009	Second Open Call	38
2010	Third Open Call	48
2011	Fourth Open Call	57

A model for sustainable course production

During the initial pilot phase most of the production work was carried out by the staff at the OCW Office. The high level of response from faculty to the first open call, launched the following year, meant it was out of the question to continue offering this level of support with the limited human resources available. So we designed a model to encourage instructors to be as self supporting as possible throughout the production process.

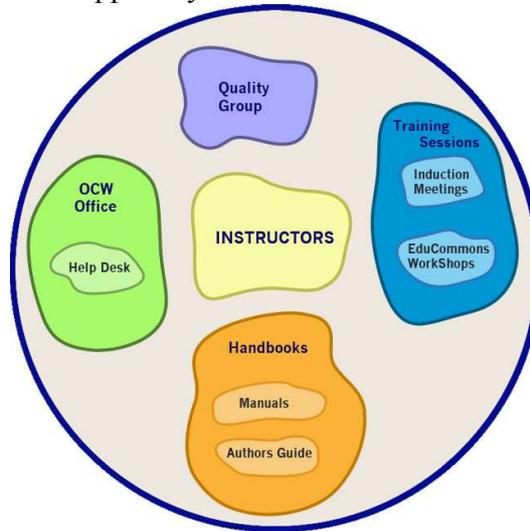
Figure 1 depicts this process clearly identifying the different agents involved at each stage. Obviously there are certain steps which are the direct responsibility of the OCW Office, such as reviewing and publishing the final product, as well as helping instructors to clear IP (Intellectual Property) rights, but the main part of the process, steps 3 to 10, which largely involves working with the CMS (Content Management System), can be carried out either by the instructor him/herself or by the OCW Office.

Figure 1: Production Process



The question was, of course, how to put this model into practice without jeopardizing the quality of the end product. So, we consequently devised a system to provide teaching staff with the necessary resources for DIY course production, such as induction sessions, eduCommons (CMS) Workshops, Help Desk (e-mail, telephone, face-to-face), as well as manuals and reference guides. The recently published *Authors' Guide*, as an example of the latter, describes each step of the production process with links to on-line examples of best practices of published course materials. It is intended, above all, to help instructors when selecting, classifying and structuring course materials, as well as recommendations for clearing their courseware of third party IP rights. This support system is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Support System for DIY Course Production



After each annual open call all the proposals are reviewed by the OCW Quality Group. Very few are rejected, mainly due to not adhering to the submission guidelines. The OCW Office then invites the instructors to an induction meeting at each campus, which involves a detailed presentation of the project, an eduCommons demonstration, and a talk on IP issues. The next step is to visit each instructor to review his/her course materials, clarify any doubts regarding third party intellectual property issues and, if necessary, decide how best to tackle this problem. It is at these meetings that the OCWO staff and the instructor decide on the work method, i.e. whether s/he will follow the DIY model or rely on the OCW Office for the large part of the course production process. In the case of the former, eduCommons workshops are organized on demand, though most instructors find this platform to be quite easy and straight forward to use.

Not all the selected proposals reach the publication stage, a certain percentage (around 28%) fall by the wayside for various reasons, mainly due to instructors having underestimated the workload involved. All accepted proposals have to be published within a certain time limit, approximately nine months as from the acceptance notification date. In this case, instructors tend to submit the same proposal to the next open call so as to have more time to finalize the production process. In some cases proposals are discarded by the authors of the course materials due to having included a considerable amount of third party materials.

Spanish Intellectual Property Law includes an exception for teaching purposes which allows instructors to incorporate a maximum of 10% of third party materials in their work as long as it is adequately cited. However, instructors are encouraged to resort to any of the following mechanisms to clear their course materials:

- Substitute the critical content for work of their own.
- Search for similar content on the Internet that is licensed under Creative Commons or similar.
- Eliminate the critical content, including only the reference to such work.

- Contact the author or publisher to request permission to use this work in their course materials.

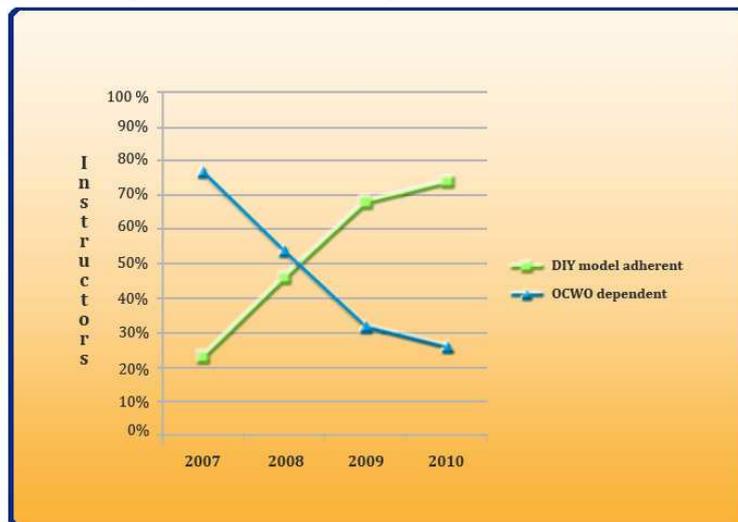
In this latter case, it is usually the staff of the OCW Office that initiates this procedure, and so far permission has always been granted. However, including third party materials in course materials is problematic when it comes to users making derivative works. To make this quite clear to the user we have inserted a note on the homepage of our OCW site to the effect that ‘*This Creative Commons license (BY-NC-SA) only applies to the work of the authors, and should not be considered extensive to fragments of work of third parties that may be included in the main course materials*’.

Finally, before the course is actually published, both the OCWO staff and the Quality Group review the final product. The former checks the course content from a more technical point of view, considering such aspects as: authors’ rights, metadata, use of reference codes for identification of teaching materials, external links, etc. Whereas the Quality Group is more concerned with the pedagogical aspects, for example, in terms of clarity and coherency of the didactic proposal, structure of course materials, balance between course notes and assignments, etc.

Results of our model

Since the onset of the project with the pilot phase in 2007 the percentage of instructors who have chosen to be self supporting and adhere to the DIY model has gradually increased from 23% to 74% over a period of four years, as can be seen in the following graph. In contrast, the percentage of instructors who are heavily dependent on the OCW Office has slowly fallen, during the same period, from 77% to 26%.

Graph nº 1: Instructors’ preferred work method



We feel that implementing this model has not affected the quality of our courses. Last year two of our courses ‘[Instituciones Básicas del Derecho Administrativo](#)’ and ‘[Técnicas de Expresión Oral y Escrita](#)’ were among the ten finalists in the III edition of the Ministry of Education–

Universia OCW Award, and '[*Química de los Materiales*](#)' won second place in a previous edition. This is our star course with an average of 4,000 visits per month.

Conclusions

The current number of courses on our OCW site totals 131, having published an average of 40 courses per year, after the pilot phase. This would not have been possible with the limited human resources available at the OCW Office if we had not put into practice our DIY model. So, as interest in the project continues to grow at the UC3M it is thanks to this model for sustainability that we can maintain the current level of course production.

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