

TEXAS LIBRARIANS – OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES (OER)

Texas Library Association (TLA) April 15, 2019

In the last decade the costs of college textbooks rose by 88% according to a 2016 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹ Textbook affordability is a real issue. Data from The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance show that the cost barrier kept 2.4 million low and moderate-income college-qualified high school graduates from completing college in the previous decade.² These estimates are extremely conservative and total losses, including those among middle-income students, are much higher. First-generation college students are affected in particular. These are students who did everything “right”, but cost kept them from completing college. They are capable and qualified but financially strapped.

Textbook Affordability: The Need for Libraries

- **Libraries already work intensively with academic publishers.** The partnerships give us opportunities to help develop licensing, contract terms, pricing structures, and business models that are sustainable for students, institutions, and publishers alike.
- **Libraries have experience working across institutional boundaries and using consortial purchasing power to significantly lower costs.** For the past thirty years and more, library consortia have been negotiating with publishers to lower costs for member institutions.
- **Libraries have managed past transitions from print to electronic formats.** Leasing semester-long access to an e-textbook is similar in many ways to setting up a year-long subscription to an e-journal.
- **Libraries already provide access to thousands of e-books,** many of which can be used as texts in courses on campus.
- **Libraries manage long-term storage and preservation of electronic publications.** Institutional repositories, managed by libraries, preserve and make available the scholarly output of higher education. Repository networks provide security and backups for peace of mind.
- **Libraries are trusted providers of information.** Studies in the United States and Great Britain consistently show that librarians are among the most trusted providers of information. Faculty and students trust libraries to provide high-quality, credible resources in print and online.
- **Successful evolution and implementation of e-textbooks on our campuses requires the participation and collaboration of many different areas on campus:** libraries, campus stores, information technology departments, learning management system administrators, accessibility/disability services offices, instructional designers, and even legal counsel. **Libraries play a central role on campus and can serve as coordinators who bring these groups together.**

From our experience, the time is right for academic institutions to recognize the advantages of allowing libraries to play a larger role in the provision of textbooks on campus.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2016. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm>

² US Department of Education. 2006. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED529499.pdf>.

OER ““Open Educational Resources” are “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that allows for free use, reuse, modification, and sharing with others, including full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge”.³

OER are generally developed by faculty; are free for students and researchers to read online or download; can be customized for individual classes; offer perpetual access; and allow unlimited printing, copying, and sharing. This is all possible due to the open license assigned to OER. OER advocates frequently discuss open licensing in the context of an open license that gives faculty and students the permission to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute content⁴.

OER differ from inclusive access. Inclusive Access refers to a publisher-driven model that bundles textbook costs into tuition and gives all students digital access to a required textbook and other course materials on the first day of class or soon thereafter. By increasing the number of students purchasing textbooks, publishers are able to discount the price paid by any individual student. Most textbooks offered under an Inclusive Access model are licensed under traditional copyright, making revising or remixing impossible. Publishers also include other license provisions that may limit the time that the content is available, generally one year or one semester, and often limit the copy/paste or printing functions to make the textbooks impossible to copy or resell on the used textbook market⁵.

Both models improve textbook affordability, and many academic institutions are using a combination of the two. Faculty grants to create OER and flipped publishing models, where the cost of publication is paid by the institution rather than the purchaser, offer the largest potential return on investment in terms of lowering the costs paid by students in pursuing their college degrees.

Libraries have taken the lead on textbook affordability at many institutions.

Academic librarians:

- Lead in the development & promotion of OER
- Operationalize project work toward successful OER integration and use
- Partner with subject matter experts, library colleagues, faculty members across campus, and other community members on open education initiatives

Academic Libraries collaborate to bring community members together

- Texas Digital Library and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission helped organize a **Texas Statewide OER Summit** in November 2018 bringing together more than 100 librarians, administrators, faculty, and students from over 60 institutions across Texas to learn more about OER and work together towards consensus on a statewide agenda for affordable resources.
- **OER Texas Toolkit** designed for Texas colleges and universities to share information with students about courses that use OER. Now students should be able to search for courses that use only OER when they are registering for courses. This toolkit is a living document that can help when implementing the course marking requirements.⁶

³ S.B. 810. 2017. <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/85R/billtext/pdf/SB00810F.pdf>

⁴ 5 R activities. <http://opencontent.org/definition/>

⁵ Butterfield, Bob and Cheryl Cuillier. 2019. OTN All-Access Working Group paper. Inclusive Access Talking Points. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZttGL7Q8W04mooUDhOzi2ej-OrFXZjJRdXGfaTctb3M/edit?userstoinvite=ariana.e.santiago@gmail.com&ts=5b5a00fe>

⁶ Reed, Michelle. 2019. OER Texas Toolkit. Accessed 4 April, 2019. <http://libguides.uta.edu/TXtoolkit>