

**LOUIS Membership with Open Textbook Network Brings Incentive for
Faculty OER Advocacy on Campuses**

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Abstract

Open access textbooks are at the forefront of discussions on textbook affordability. LOUIS membership with Open Textbook Network (OTN) helped push campus-focused textbook adoptions with workshops hosted by librarians. Five librarians from across Louisiana who hosted OTN workshops on their campus share their experiences, discuss faculty participation, and unexpected outcomes of these sessions.

With the cost of textbooks soaring, many universities and their faculty are seeking out ways to reduce this burden as much as possible. Librarians have been at the forefront of this, connecting faculty with existing resources and seeking out new sources to support faculty and lighten the burden of cost to students. One of the ways librarians are helping support this initiative is by educating faculty on free, openly-licensed course materials. While affordability, in general, is a widely-discussed topic in higher education today, many faculty are still unfamiliar with resources that help lower the cost of education.

An option for increasing affordability is open educational resources (OER). Open access advocacy organizations have begun to pool OERs together to help make more affordable resources easily discoverable. One of those organizations is the Open Textbook Network (OTN), a membership network of individuals and consortia higher education institutions working to advance the use of open textbooks and open educational practices on campuses. The OTN supports members in these efforts by providing training tools, professional development opportunities, a space to share questions and best practices, and a model for introducing faculty to open textbooks and inviting them to engage with an open textbook by completing a review.

For librarians, this support helps build their relationships with faculty. OTN provides the Open Textbook Library which contains quality, peer-reviewed, open-access textbooks that can be shared and adapted freely. Through their partnership with OTN, LOUIS was able to provide stipends to faculty who willingly participated in the workshops and textbook review process. Paying faculty for their time is a commitment to enhancing OER support within the state. The following article takes an anecdotal assessment of the impact these OTN workshops had on faculty impressions of OER. Five

academic librarians compiled faculty feedback through emails and post-workshop conversations. These librarians represent a statewide library consortium, the largest university in Louisiana, the top regional university in the state, a private liberal arts college, and an urban public university.

For these higher education institutions in Louisiana, participation in the OTN began when LOUIS, the LOUISiana Library Network, joined as a consortial member. Formed in 1992, LOUIS is the statewide academic library consortium composed of 47 public and private college and university libraries in the state. LOUIS supports membership through activities including resource procurement, professional development, communications infrastructure, and initiative and program coordination. A central program is Affordable Learning LOUISiana – an umbrella program that covers a variety of initiatives that support student success and retention by lowering the cost of and increasing access to course materials.

After becoming consortial members of the OTN, LOUIS began by coordinating the training of a small cohort of library leaders before organizing two statewide trainings on the OTN model using a train-the-trainer approach. In this approach, attendees learned the OTN model that uses a workshop structure to introduce teaching faculty to open education and open textbooks before inviting them to review an open textbook. These open textbooks are openly licensed to allow them to be free to download and that have permissions to allow users to interact with the textbook in ways like saving, editing, and sharing. The OTN maintains the [Open Textbook Library](#). Faculty that attend the workshop are invited to review a textbook found in the Open Textbook Library related to their discipline using a [rubric](#). The model promotes providing a financial incentive to

recognize the time taken by participating faculty to attend the workshop and complete a review.

Since becoming an OTN member, LOUIS has provided campuses with financial incentive allocations. Rolling out the workshop model in Louisiana in 2016, LOUIS has since collaborated with members to introduce over 170 faculty members to these concepts. At the beginning of 2019, LOUIS put out the call for campuses to host Open Textbook Network (OTN) workshops for faculty. These were held February-April 2019 at a number of Louisiana institutions, both public and private. Examining a selection of these workshops as experienced by the librarians who participated in presenting them reveals the current relationship between faculty, librarians, and the OER movement.

The OTN provided an outline for the workshop and presentation slides. These materials highlighted the need for textbook affordability, basics on copyright and open-access licensing, and OTN as a source for open-access textbooks. Librarians were encouraged to customize their presentations by incorporating local data and emphasizing points of particular interest or importance to their campus. The majority of librarians surveyed for this article did incorporate custom elements into their presentations. These ranged from adding data points reflecting costs or data from their campus to clarifying terms associated with affordable learning, to reducing or eliminating extraneous, repetitive, or site-irrelevant material. Each librarian customized his or her presentation and workshop based on the needs of his or her institution and the background knowledge of the faculty in attendance.

For example, when LOUIS put out the call for participation in the OTN workshops, Loyola University New Orleans Library Associate Dean Laurie Phillips'

initial thought was that her university would not be able to participate. Of their library faculty, only she and one colleague had worked on open and affordable resources and, unfortunately, this colleague would be unable to participate beyond the initial workshop. Because Laurie had taken on significant new responsibilities this year, she was unsure that she would be able to schedule a workshop, recruit faculty, offer the workshop, and manage the payment on her own. Nonetheless, she passed the opportunity on to the Dean of libraries and to the university's Senior Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and Faculty Development. This Senior Director was an early adopter of affordable course materials and a participant in the OTN workshop held at the university in 2017. She immediately offered to schedule and host the event and they began a discussion about when to hold the workshop and ways to attract faculty interest.

OER Coordinator and Electronic Resources Librarian, Elizabeth Batte's experience also revealed the institutional support for the affordable learning initiative. When LOUIS put out the call for campuses to host OTN workshops, Elizabeth notified their Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, who happily helped spread the news. This workshop was crucial for Elizabeth as the new OER Coordinator for Nicholls. The faculty at Nicholls demonstrated such great interest that she decided to host two workshops. This overwhelming interest in the workshops reminded Elizabeth that faculty really do care about textbook affordability and the burden expensive textbooks can be for students. Interestingly, the faculty who registered for the workshop were not the ones who were already open access advocates on campus, they were the ones who were still hesitant to adopt OERs. Elizabeth's workshops became an opportunity to meet new faculty and really have time to work with them face to face.

Likewise, Head of Resource Management and Discovery at Louisiana State University Shreveport Sarah Mazur's experience putting on the workshop for faculty was very positive — but in unexpected ways. Being new to her institution (starting there in December 2018), she had to work pretty quickly to put together the workshop for faculty. She attended the online training for presenters and adapted the given presentation to fit their faculty. In this adaptation, Sarah actually removed several of the slides which discussed student cost and how students are coping with the cost of textbooks. Her rationale included: (1) she felt faculty were well aware of the expense textbooks add to the cost of attending school at this point in the discussion on open- and zero-cost textbooks, (2) attendees of this workshop are already interested in reducing the cost of textbooks, (3) Sarah had a limited amount of time for this workshop and wanted to use time defining what open means, discussing the options that faculty has for reducing the cost of textbooks, exploring OTN with the faculty, and answering their specific questions.

Louisiana State University's Science Librarian David Dunaway attended the train-the-trainer OTN workshop in 2017 but OER initiatives were not a part of his responsibilities until the fall of 2018. He requested that Emily Frank from LOUIS host his university's OTN workshop. He spoke with Emily about recruitment and possible numbers of participants to expect, given her experience with OER on his campus. The workshop was announced on the library's Facebook and Twitter account and added as a blog post to the library's homepage. Email announcements were also sent out by subject specialist librarians to the faculty in their areas. David used a registration form in Springshare's LibCal to make it easy to keep track of how many people signed up. Three

people signed up for the workshop, but only one of those came.

Overall, these workshops were successful in raising awareness of the OTN and its library of open-access textbooks. Each site surveyed reported new or renewed faculty interest in open-source materials, evidenced by librarian and faculty conversations, faculty-initiated requests for follow-up appointments, or the adoption of materials. However, the biggest and most important impacts of these workshops were on librarian and faculty relationships.

These workshops facilitated a dialogue between librarians and faculty surrounding OER and affordable learning materials. First, these workshops served to personalize library services and resources to faculty, allowing them to have a known point of contact for future inquiries. This personal connection led to multiple follow-up appointments and conversations. In these post-workshop discussions, librarians were able to connect faculty to affordable library resources that fit their needs, even if these resources were outside the scope of the workshop. These meetings helped introduce faculty to the many options they have when looking to adopt an open-source textbook. It also demonstrated to the faculty that the library can and will help them find what they are looking for. These workshops allowed librarians to meet faculty who are interested in taking steps to reduce the cost of higher education for students. Finally, the dialogue initiated by these workshops allowed librarians and faculty to express and share their joint interest in helping students get access to affordable, quality learning materials. As one librarian surveyed stated, “When learning and working together, the best thing to do is listen to one another.” The renewed connection between librarians and teaching faculty is potentially the most important result of these workshops.

Laurie's experience is a perfect example of how librarian and faculty relationships contributed to the success of these workshops. She decided to meet with faculty who had shown interest but were unable to make it to the workshop. At these meetings, she shortened her presentation and was able to have a bit more conversation about the slides in this less formal setting. One was a faculty member in technical theatre (her own liaison area), whom Laurie recruited to participate, as there was a book that specifically fit his expertise. Without that personal connection and invitation, he probably would not have explored it on his own. Four of the five of the faculty attendees from this workshop were participants in the other Affordable Learning LOUISiana programs coordinated by the library. So nearly all of them were familiar with the concept of textbook affordability, but this process did allow Laurie to explore the ideas in more depth with them. The Chair of the Languages Department attended the workshop and has continued to explore options for a departmental adoption. Laurie saw this workshop and incentive program as just another tool in the toolbox. Librarians throughout the state are learning to utilize all the tools accessible to them to make education more affordable.

While these sessions served to increase faculty interest in OER and strengthen library and faculty relationships, they also highlighted some of the ongoing concerns faculty have with open access resources. OERs are typically written for freshmen and sophomore level classes that usually have high enrollment, especially in the STEM subjects. These are mostly classes where all sections of a class are taught using the same syllabus and all students are given the same assignments, quizzes, and exams. These classes are sometimes taught by graduate students and most of the classes have adopted textbooks that either include or require an additional purchase of an access code for

online materials such as homework, quizzes, and exams. These also often include teaching aids such as Microsoft PowerPoint slides as well. Departments are reluctant to consider OER alternatives for fear of losing all these additional materials and the labor savings they provide. Some OERs do offer additional materials, but faculty don't feel that these materials are secure and are concerned about students cheating on exams. These concerns were first voiced in a forum with faculty that was held in the LSU Libraries in 2017. Many of them were described by a professor that was very pro-OER. These are not light concerns, and librarians and the wider OER advocating community must be prepared to address them.

Many of the librarians who hosted these sessions recognized that the participants felt more educated about the very real challenges that students have with the affordability of course materials. A critique of the workshops was that some felt there was a limited scope of available materials to review. Despite this drawback, all of the faculty who expressed interest were able to find open resources in the OTN that fit their expertise. Additionally, several of the librarians who hosted these sessions believe that the financial incentive for faculty participation was a contributor to their success. Faculty are often busy with their regular curriculum loads, making it hard to ask them to add more to their workload without financial reimbursement. Fortunately, LOUIS was able to provide these incentives, opening the door to increased awareness and discussion of OER, while strengthening librarian and faculty relationships.

Appendix: OTN Workshop Materials

Open Textbook Library catalog. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks>

Open Textbook Library rubric for faculty assessment of textbook(s). (n.d.). Retrieved

from <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/reviews/rubric>

OTN Workshop slides originally created cc-by David Ernst (cehd@umn.edu) and edited

by Emily Frank. Retrieved from [Nicholls OTN-2019](#)

OTN Workshop slides, originally created cc-by David Ernst (cehd@umn.edu) and edited

by Elizabeth Joan Kelly and Laurie Phillips. Retrieved from

[Loyola NO OTN presentation](#)