Let's Get Open About Open Access in Louisiana

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Like many campuses around the nation, Louisiana universities and colleges have started to explore open educational resources (OER) or affordable educational resources (AER). For librarians working on textbook affordability initiatives on their campus, it can be overwhelming at first and hard to see through all of the different textbooks to help find just the right one for their faculty. This is where I can help!

If you do not know me already, I am the OER Coordinator at Nicholls State University and chair of our campus Textbook Affordability Taskforce. I will be writing an ongoing column for Codex focusing on open resources, open initiatives across the state in higher ed and other highlights useful to those of us working toward making college a little more affordable for our students. My goal is to help OER advocates keep up to date on what is happening while also proving some advice along the way. The open access community is supportive of each other, so this column seeks to be the same.

First, a little bit about myself. I first got into open access when I was asked to present on OERs for my job interview with Nicholls. I thankfully knew of open access advocates who were faculty on campus and willing to give me the rundown before my interview. Since then, I have continued to nurture relationships with faculty and administration to make our textbook affordability initiative successful. By implementing OERs and AERs on Nicholls' campus, faculty have been able to save students over $65,000 in textbook costs since January. That

amount is only going to grow as we move forward into the Fall semester and beyond focusing on affordability.

Is your campus part of the LOUIS consortium and taking advantage of their curriculum driven acquisitions (CDA)? Do faculty on your campus use library resources in place of costly textbooks? Have any of the departments that also require courseware swapped to low-cost options? If so, your campus is already actively providing AER.

Most recently, the Louisiana legislature passed SB117. This bill defines an AER as "a single or collection of required educational resources that may be offered at no or low cost to a student through a postsecondary education institution or an affiliated college bookstore at a pre-sales tax cost to a student that does not exceed an amount equal to four times the federal minimum wage. AER includes copyright protected material purchased by a library and provided to a student at no cost." For librarians, this means encouraging faculty to adopt library resources or purchasing digital textbook adoptions with unlimited user access is considered part of the AER push. Faculty adoption of library resources is obviously the more cost efficient option. However, libraries must work with faculty to assess if current library resources cover current needs and if not, consider looking into purchasing eTextbooks. When having these conversations with faculty, it is important to also discuss adoption timelines. When I look into purchasing an eTextbook with unlimited user access, I often will talk with faculty about how long they plan to use this particular text. Of course the longer an eTextbook is adopted, the more usage it will receive.

The most important thing to remember is that what faculty need from the textbook they adopt is most important. There have been countless times where I have suggested open access textbooks, ancillary materials, and courseware to faculty that they did not end up adopting. Do

not let this dissuade you from continuing to advocate for OER and AER. With a plan to circle back to that faculty member at a later date, present your findings to other faculty or move on to another department. Like all things, the more you work with OER and faculty the more you will improve. The number of peer-reviewed open access textbooks now compared to two years ago is astronomical. As the open access movement spreads nationally and globally, OERs continue to improve and grow.

My last tidbit of advice for this column is to join the open access community. If you use social media there are countless accounts to follow that will expose you to real-time open access developments. If your inbox can handle another listserv, I recommend LibOER from the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC). Surrounding myself with this community has given me the most impactful growth in my career. I look forward to continuing to discuss affordable learning in *Codex* and would love to hear from you. If you have suggestions for future OER column topics or questions for me please reach out! My email is elizabeth.batte@nicholls.edu.

Until next time friends,

Elizabeth Batte