

## **OER Column: Small Wins Can Be Big Impacts**

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This Codex issue's OER column is short and to the point. Honestly part of that is because of the COVID-19 pandemic and managing my other responsibility. The other part of it is because sometimes over-talking about a simple topic can make the point get lost. So let's get to it.

In October 2019, I was fortunate enough to attend the OpenEd Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Part of the reason I attended was a poster presentation on the motivation behind open access and the financial impact OER adoptions make for students. I was surprised by how many people stopped by my poster to ask questions about how I calculated the financial impact for students.

Nicholls State University faculty saved their students \$212,500 in one semester by switching from a traditional textbook to an open access book. That seems like a lot, right? Well it is, and it is not. The \$212,500 is broken up among 12 courses, many of which fall within the required general education courses. These general education courses tend to have higher enrollments and multiple offerings per semester, so they are the big impact makers for institutions who are starting an OER initiative. For example, Nicholls State University Biology 105 and 106 courses use the same textbook. When they swapped to the OpenStax Biology 2e, their students saved a potential of \$81,000. The potential savings is calculated by taking the cost of the previous traditional textbook and multiplying it by the current enrollment counts. I make sure to always report the savings as potential, because we do not track which students opted to pay for the printed version of the OER, which for this specific title is \$50.

So why go through the time to explain this? Because while I was at OpenEd I met several librarians who were the only OER advocates on their campus and felt defeated that they only had one or two professors willing to adopt open textbooks. Small wins can be big impacts. You have to market OERs to your faculty, administrators, and students correctly. Faculty may only be thinking about the individual costs to their students. Professor A requires a \$100 book, but if their 101 course has 50 students and an OER option, their class would save \$5,000.

Administrators like hearing about the big impacts their faculty are making and they hear about a lot of campus activities so it is important to make OER successes stand out. Highlighting the big impacts also helps turn some of your faculty “maybe” responses into “tell me more about OER” emails. I speak from experience.

In partnership with the Open Textbook Network and LOUIS, I hosted two workshops on campus for faculty to learn about OER, what successes were already happening on campus, and review an open textbook for a \$200 stipend. One of the Psychology 101 professors attended the session and reviewed a book. It made her start looking into other open access options for her course. Once she found one she liked she went to her department head about the book. Multiple professors teach different sections of Psychology 101 so the department head took the preferred OER to her team and recommended they all use it for that semester’s Psychology 101 sections. Just like that their students' potential savings soared to \$70,000.

My point for all of this is to highlight that no switch to OER is small. They all have big impacts. Even when we look at the individual student, being able to spend \$50 on a college memory or putting it towards a bigger goal rather than a textbook is still a big impact. If you are just beginning to start an OER initiative on your campus or possibly in a time without any new faculty interest on your campus, take this opportunity to look at your success from a different

perspective. Take the time to look at the impacts your work has already made and how you can use that to your advantage. If you have primarily been working with faculty, switch it up and gear your message towards the students. If you feel you have squeezed one department dry, look into your general education courses and see where they are on OER adoptions. If you feel stuck and not sure where to look next, feel free to reach out to me at [elizabeth.batte@nicholls.edu](mailto:elizabeth.batte@nicholls.edu) and let me know how I can help.

Thank you all for taking the time to read this column.