

Budgeting for Affordability

Supporting Affordable Learning Initiatives

by Jennifer Pate and Derek Malone

At the University of North Alabama (UNA) in Florence, Alabama we have instituted a robust Textbook Affordability Initiative (TAI) in response to ongoing campus initiatives to lower student costs and to help achieve the campus strategic plan aspirational goal to “adopt, implement, and utilize Open Educational Resources (OER) in half of all academic programs” (University of North Alabama, 2019). Collier Library and Information Services (CLIS) has prioritized budget spending to support and sustain these campus efforts. The TAI was developed and is managed by CLIS and includes three primary areas of focus: course reserves, strategic database and journal purchasing, and providing institutional support to the campus OER program.

Course reserves are rigorously examined each semester to assure confidence and currency in what is being loaned. Once the deadline for book orders for the next semester has passed, the campus bookstore provides CLIS with an Excel spreadsheet containing books and ancillary course materials (lab manuals, workbooks, readers, style sheets) requested for all courses at UNA. CLIS access services staff check that list against our print holdings. If a book is already on reserve, the staff ensures that it is the correct edition. If the book is not on reserve, the staff will pull that title and add it to the reserve holding list. Once this process is complete, the list is then given to acquisitions staff where it is checked against the course enrollment for the term.

Acquisitions staff and CLIS administration investigate course listings for high enrollment courses at UNA each semester. The acquisitions staff then checks the textbook lists to see the orders for those high enrollment courses. If the book has not previously been purchased and placed on reserves, a purchase list is originated from the comparison of high enrollment courses to textbook requirements. As an example, if History 101 has 250 students, but CLIS does not own the book or have it on reserve, it is highly likely that the book will be purchased and added to the reserve holdings. CLIS prefers to purchase unlimited e-book access if there is a version that is both available and cost effective but will defer to physical purchases if needed.

Similarly, CLIS is committed to strategically purchasing databases and journal packages for its users as a replacement for traditional textbooks and other required course materials. When librarians become aware of potential sources of course material replacements via database or journal purchasing, they inform their liaison departments to discuss how the department and their students can benefit by moving to resources provided by the library. Two recent examples include film database purchasing and anatomy database purchasing. A film database was purchased specifically to provide access to films that are used in Cinema Appreciation, English, Sign Language, and Foreign Language courses. By providing a wide variety of films to choose from, it eliminates the need for students to purchase a streaming service or rent a copy of a film that is required for class assignments. Having films available for streaming gives students point-of-need access as opposed to having to physically visit the library to borrow a DVD. An anatomy database was purchased for use in the classroom and as an intended textbook replacement for anatomy courses. The anatomy database is now used across a variety of disciplines including Nursing, Kinesiology, and Human Anatomy and Physiology. As UNA continues to expand their online course offerings, it makes it even

Jennifer Pate is OER and Scholarly Communications Librarian and Derek Malone is University Librarian at the University of North Alabama.

more important that we focus on expanding our online resources for students who do not have the ability to visit campus in person.

Journal purchases have been utilized to lower or eliminate course material costs in a variety of UNA classes. One professor has switched (to date) six of his Creative Writing and English courses to zero textbook costs by assigning works from UNA journals. UNA's Instructional Technology and Design Master's program is approaching the milestone of not having any course material fees – they are working to achieve this by utilizing e-books and journal articles exclusively as assigned course readings. We expect the program to have zero course materials cost by the end of the 2022-2023 academic year. Our Department of Communication plans to follow suit and is working to utilize OER as well as journal and database resources to make their program zero cost for course materials.

Finally, CLIS supports the provost's campus OER program in 3 distinct ways: first, by allocating a faculty position, the OER and scholarly communications librarian, to serve as one of the program managers, second by supporting the inclusion of textbook affordability measures in applications for funding through the OER program, and last by acquiring and managing both an institutional repository and a digital press platform for publication and dissemination of campus OER.

CLIS's commitment to OER began with supporting the scholarly communications librarian transitioning to include OER in her job duties. CLIS funded her participation in the Open Education Network's Certificate in OER librarianship course as well as her participation in the Library Copyright Institute. CLIS supported her application for a grant to receive Creative Commons training, and library administration was pivotal when advocating for the job title and duties to be changed to reflect the support for OER librarianship. As a part of this process, CLIS became the first academic library in the state to become a member of the Open Education Network.

CLIS works closely with the university's Educational Technology Services (ETS) to support faculty as they build new courses using TAI and OER. As of this past year, all initial new course development meetings include not only the instructional designers from ETS, but also include both the OER librarian and the liaison librarian. The OER librarian is there to discuss openly licensed course material substitutions, copyright, and fair use. The liaison librarian is there to discuss which library-funded resources can be utilized in the course. If a faculty member needs CLIS to purchase databases or journals so that they can keep their course low- or no-cost, the liaison librarian will take that request to the acquisitions department for an affordability review. Not all materials can be purchased, but if items are available and the budget is available, every effort will be made to have the material available prior to the first day of class.

The newest facet of CLIS's support for TAI and OER is the move into digital publishing of original works of OER or other scholarship. After a thorough review of digital publishing platforms, CLIS staff decided to purchase a subscription to the Pressbooks platform. Pressbooks provides an outlet to publish OER resources that are developed and authored at UNA. In early 2022, the Digital Press at Collier Library (DP@CL) officially started publishing OER material from University of North Alabama faculty, staff, and students. DP@CL is the first academic publishing imprint at the university.

Each book submitted for publication via the DP@CL is managed by the author in conjunction with a CLIS faculty member, currently either the OER librarian or the University Librarian. CLIS purchases ISBNs and assigns them to the book as it reaches the final stages of the publishing process. Within the first semester of launching the DP@CL, three books were completed and have been added to our public Pressbooks catalog as well as the Open Textbook Library and the OER Commons.

CLIS hosted a launch party to celebrate the launch of our first original OER titles. The publicity from this led to inquiries from faculty from disciplines across campus asking about adding their original course materials to the platform. This led to unprecedented growth: by the end of the launch semester ten books are awaiting publication through the DP@CL, and the growth shows no sign of slowing down. We anticipate continued growth as more faculty learn about this program.

CLIS also funds and supports the campus institutional repository, the Repository of Open Access Research (RoOAR). In the next academic year, CLIS will begin adding PDFs of the e-books published by DP@CL to the repository. The OER librarian is also working with a chemistry faculty member to build an open pedagogy project on RoOAR that will be utilized by students to create original profiles of marginalized chemists. This project is the university's first public open pedagogy project, and we are excited to begin work on this in conjunction with the faculty, liaison librarian, and students.

Utilizing and expanding library resources to support TAI and OER programs on campus is a critical component of the work we do at CLIS. We allocate our budget to prioritize supplying robust course reserves, journals, databases, publishing platforms, and library faculty to build and sustain these programs and to support our student population. We are committed to finding new ways to expand our support for these efforts across disciplines.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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