Collaborative Partnerships between State Agencies and Institutions of Higher Education: Working Together to Save Students Money through OER

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**Abstract**

Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) recently collaborated with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) and the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) to engage in two open educational resources (OER) projects designed to educate higher education faculty and staff and to provide affordable access to education for students in Alabama.

This article highlights the two grant projects the authors spearheaded, and their impact and relationship with the statewide OER initiative focused on education, promotion, and content development over the course of a year. The first project was a statewide OER workshop the
AUM Library hosted. This workshop brought together speakers and researchers from the national and local OER movement, who educated students, faculty, and staff from Alabama institutions about OER. The second project involved the creation and publication of the first open textbook published on the newly formed statewide Alabama OER Commons.

The authors describe the purpose of the grant projects, and how their work aligned with global OER strategies like those agreed upon in the Paris OER Declaration 2012. The authors also explore how building relationships with ACHE/ACCS, higher education institutions in Alabama, and departments across their campus allowed them to obtain funding and participation in the projects. Additionally, the authors detail the outcome of the three workshops, which were the catalyst for a successful statewide OER initiative. Moreover, the authors examine the standards that must be followed when creating an OER textbook, how technology such as Pressbooks help facilitate the ease of development for an electronic text, and how they incorporated and openly licensed multimedia for engagement. Finally, the authors discuss publishing the textbook in the Alabama OER Commons, while tracking global usage with Google Analytics to gauge the impact of the project.

**Keywords:** Auburn University at Montgomery, Alabama OER Commons, OER, open educational resources

**Introduction**

Academic institutions have long recognized that student loan debt is a complicated issue, and many have recently taken steps to help alleviate some of the financial pressures experienced by their students. Open educational resources (OER) quickly became a topic of discussion at most institutions of higher education when the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) reported in
2012 that the cost of textbooks over the past 35 years had increased 812%. Using Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau data, AEI concluded “college textbooks [had] risen more than three times the amount of the average increase for all goods and services” (Perry, 2012, p. 1). This oft-quoted information was certainly not lost on families already struggling to meet the high cost of education, and marked a turning point in the intensity of those conversations (Perry, 2012).

This paper highlights the two grant-funded projects the authors spearheaded, and their impact and relationship with the statewide OER initiative focused on education, promotion, and content development. Project 1: OER Statewide Workshops involved an OER workshop hosted by the Auburn University at Montgomery Library in collaboration with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) and the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). The workshop brought together speakers and researchers from the national and local OER movement, who educated students, faculty, and staff from state institutions about the many aspects of OER. Project 2: ACHE/ACCS Open Educational Resources Grant resulted in the creation and publication of the first open textbook published on the newly formed Alabama OER Commons.

The textbook, *Composing Ourselves and Our World: A Guide to First-Year Writing*, was created by Auburn University at Montgomery as part of the grant program. Along with its partner institutions, Bishop State Community College and the University of South Alabama, a reported 4,148 students in English 1010 and 1020 saved an estimated $386,841 off the cost of textbooks as a result of the project. A reported 1,102 students saved an estimated average of $88.45 each in English 1010, for a total of $97,471. A group of 3,046 had an average savings of $95.00 for English 1020, for a total of $289,370.
Project 1: OER Statewide Workshops

In the State of Alabama, student loan debt has long been a topic of intense discussion. As a result, Auburn University at Montgomery, a four-year regional school in the central part of the state, began working on ways to reduce the costs of textbooks for their students in early 2017. The impetus to reduce education expenses came when students questioned the cost of a required accounting textbook. In response, Auburn University at Montgomery created the Required Reading Cost Committee, an ad hoc Faculty Senate Committee dedicated to evaluating options that faculty members could use to reduce the high costs of required textbooks. One of the many affordability options discussed by the committee involved OER materials.

At the same time Auburn University at Montgomery was forming their committee, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education hired a new executive director, Dr. Jim Purcell. A native of Alabama, Dr. Purcell obtained degrees from three separate universities within the state, and was thus uniquely familiar with many of the issues facing higher education in Alabama. As a result, he was quick to announce efforts to combat the high cost of education via cost-saving measures such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Project and the use of OER materials (Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 2018a). Not only did ACHE implement the OER program, it showed commitment to OER initiatives by adding them to its strategic plan. According to the ACHE’s 2017-2018 annual report, the program “will help to replace expensive, commercial print textbooks with free digital learning tools for general education courses that have high enrollments” (Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 2018b, p. 3). The projected outcome of the program was a cost savings of more than $2,000,000 that would affect over 18,000 students (Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 2018b). Moreover, to ensure the projects had the necessary support to succeed, Dr. Purcell appointed Ron
Leonard, the Director of the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, to the newly created position of Director of Special Initiatives. Thanks to his new position, Leonard was ideally situated to further state OER efforts.

The OER initiatives put forth by ACHE would eventually encompass two vastly different efforts. The first was a learning initiative designed to educate librarians and faculty members on the use of OER materials. This effort included both the Alabama Community College System and four-year institutions, blanketing the state in an effort to provide coverage to as many librarians and educators as possible. To accomplish this, ACHE made three $5,000 grants available to academic libraries willing to host all-day OER workshops. The intent of each grant was to cover deliverables such as reimbursement for speakers and their travel expenses, honorariums, food, and other related expenses. Geographically, Auburn University at Montgomery made it an ideal choice for a workshop in the center of the state; Athens State University covered the northern portion and the University of South Alabama covered the southern portion.

The workshop at Auburn University at Montgomery brought together a diverse group of speakers and researchers from the national and local OER movement, who educated nearly 150 librarians, students, faculty, and staff from state institutions about OER. The Dean of the Library brought in nationally known OER speakers to open and close the March 2018 workshop. David Ernst, Director of the Center for Open Education and Executive Director of the Open Textbook Network (OTN), was the keynote speaker. OTN is a vibrant OER community of over 630 higher education institutions committed to improving access, affordability, and academic success through open education (Falldin & Lauritsen, 2017, Community Support). Moreover, OTN has been a key mentor in helping the OER movement spread in the state. In a bookend approach, Jeff
Gallant, the Program Director for Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG), agreed to close out the workshop. ALG, a University System of Georgia Library Services initiative, aims to lower the cost of textbooks for students and contribute to their course retention, progression, and completion. Gallant focused on best practices as learned from ALG’s long history of working to save students money.

To round out the workshop speakers, a number of Alabama educators involved with OER discussed their efforts to save students money. In addition, Charles Lee, an Alabama student directly impacted by the high cost of college education, told his real Horatio Alger story. Lee’s story, previously published in Forbes, provided perfect context to the OER workshop. In the article, Lee describes living with the burdens of financial pressure related to the high cost of education. He detailed how in the past he had not been able to afford classroom materials, and even had to decide between paying for gas and food for the week (Lee, 2017).

The remainder of the morning session consisted of a panel discussing successful OER initiatives at their institutions, followed by an educator who discussed a survey of the prevalence of OER in the Southeast. OER on Your Campus: Challenges & Solutions was the topic for the table discussions conducted during lunch. In the afternoon, another panel discussed the initial steps they undertook that resulted in OER success at their institution. To give a different perspective on OER options, a vendor discussed turnkey solutions for open and e-Textbooks that they make available to higher education institutions.

In response to the discussions generated by the three statewide workshops, the Council of the Alabama Virtual Library stepped in to begin developing a plan for a statewide OER repository using a common publishing mechanism. The effort had significant backing from ACHE, ACCS, and public and academic librarians, which quickly led to the Council reviewing a number of
possible options for the repository. Eventually, the Council developed a partnership with OER Commons to create the Alabama OER Commons. After considerable work by the Alabama OER Commons Hub Design Group, the site went live in April of 2019.

Figure 1. Alabama OER Commons website.

Shortly after the completion of the workshops, ACHE and ACCS developed a collaborative program to provide project grants ranging from $250 to $5,000 to public two- and four-year institutions interested in authoring OER materials (ACHE/ACCS, 2018). The joint Open Educational Resources Grant Program funded 23 of 37 proposals submitted in 2018. The projected outcome of the projects would involve 18,000 students with a cost savings to those students of over $2,000,000. One requirement of the program was that all resources developed as a result of the grants had to be uploaded to the newly developed Alabama OER Commons. Auburn University at Montgomery was the recipient of two grants out of the twenty-three awarded throughout the state in 2018.
Project 2: ACHE/ACCS Open Educational Resources Grant

ACHE and ACCS offered multiple grants to develop OER to replace textbooks and other costly teaching and learning materials at Alabama higher education institutions. At Auburn University at Montgomery, a collaborative team of English Composition faculty, librarians, and instructional designers submitted a proposal to replace the English Composition I and II required course materials with an open textbook. Besides saving students money, the project would ultimately provide timely access to course content. This is particularly important to the students at Auburn University at Montgomery, where approximately 68% of the undergraduate population receives financial aid (U.S. News & World Report, 2019). It is well documented that some students do not have their textbooks purchased on the first day of classes as they deal with the high costs associated with purchasing commercial textbooks (Richard, Cleavenger, & Storey, 2014). Additionally, students at some institutions are unable to purchase books until after the first or second week of classes due to late disbursement of financial aid. Moreover, despite having funds to purchase textbooks, some students elect not to purchase them as a way of saving money to put themselves through school. As numerous studies have shown, students who do not have timely access to course content have greater challenges achieving successful learning outcomes (Colvard, Park, & Watson, 2018). Thus, having an OER available on the first day of classes ensures all students have access to the course materials they need to be successful. Utilizing OERs, Auburn University at Montgomery sought ways to lighten the financial pressures of students, create measurable improvement of student learning outcomes, and improve student retention.
Project 2: Inspire Engagement and Empower Results through OERs

Because the commercially published English Composition I textbook at Auburn University at Montgomery cost $60.00, the OER project team sought to adapt and create an open textbook for this required high enrollment freshman composition course. The purpose of English Composition I is to teach students the essentials of composition and rhetoric in order to prepare them for ongoing writing instruction in English Composition II. In Composition I, students learn a fundamental approach to writing (and reading) tasks at the college level with an emphasis on developing proficiency in the writing process, writing with a variety of purposes for various audiences, and writing in a variety of genres. Project 2, aptly named Inspire Engagement and Empower Results through OERs, sought to develop a textbook using a compilation of existing open content and original content developed by Auburn University at Montgomery faculty. To keep costs at a minimum, the team planned to create the textbook on the Pressbooks platform. To provide students with easy access, the textbook would be made available through web links in Blackboard, the University’s learning management system (LMS).

The first phase of the project was to develop the textbook in anticipation of a pilot project during the Spring 2019 semester in both the online and on-campus English Composition I and II sections. Based upon the feedback received from students after the pilot semester, it was anticipated that the open textbook would be offered for all sections in Fall 2019. Once the open textbook is available in all sections, the estimated savings impact for students at Auburn University at Montgomery will be over $100,000 annually.

The projected timeline for the development of the open textbook was four months, which was met. A schedule of milestones and tasks were assigned to the faculty and instructional
design teams to keep the project on track. That project plan, shown below, provided a logical sequence of events during development and implementation.

1. Conduct baseline pre-implementation textbook survey during the Fall 2018 semester.
2. In a shared document, create a table of contents with links to the specific OER content.
3. Create a style guide.
4. Create a Pressbook title.
5. The instructional designers will verify the Creative Commons rights and place content with attribution into Pressbooks.
6. The team will curate university photographic resources and contract with a student to create cover art.
7. Faculty team will review textbook, provide feedback, and sign off on changes.
8. Pilot the textbook during Spring 2019 semester and implement a qualitative textbook survey.

**Project 2: Open Textbook Creation**

The mantra of the Rebus community is, “The idea that books are the work of a single person, the author, is a bit of a myth, really. In reality, it takes a village to create any book” (Ashok & Hyde, 2018, p. 1). During the creation of the textbook, the team relied on this mantra and the work of the Rebus community. To facilitate the creation of the Auburn University at Montgomery open textbook, an intensive outline was created using tables inside of Google Docs. This gave the entire team the ability to add structure, such as chapters, sections, chapter objectives, key terms, and exercises. Using the shared document, faculty provided the design team with links to open resources that were to be included in specific areas of the textbook. The
final column in the table provided an area to communicate notes and receive sign off on final edits before content was moved into the textbook.

As previously mentioned, Pressbooks was selected for the creation of the open textbook. Ideally suited for creating OER materials, Pressbooks’ slogan is “The Open Book Creation Platform” (https://pressbooks.com/). Pressbooks was also chosen due to the designers’ experience with the platform, and because it is built on WordPress, which allows for the creation and sharing of electronic textbooks. Moreover, Pressbooks is one of the most commonly used platforms for publishing open textbooks globally (Falldin & Lauritsen, 2017). Pressbooks is also extremely affordable. Auburn University at Montgomery chose their PDF + EBOOK Pro plan, which has a small fee of $99.00 per developed book title. This plan includes hosting, software, and public access, along with the ability to provide a printable PDF for students. This demonstrates that with minimal initial investment, a university can see a major return in savings for their students.

To highlight the need to differentiate a work that is intended as a classroom learning resource from a novel, Daniel K. Schneider created a textbook writing tutorial where he identified three areas of a textbook: openers, closers, and integrated pedagogical devices (Schneider, 2008). The project team implemented these instructional design elements to assist faculty with adoption of the open textbook.

The University of Minnesota (n.d.), in their open course entitled OTN Publishing Curriculum, defined openers as items such as learning objectives, introductions, and focus questions. When creating a digital textbook today, one might also expect to see an introductory video that relates to the chapter or section content. These videos add a layer of student
engagement and can be embedded from sites such as YouTube in the electronic version or linked via the use of QR Codes in an offline format.

The University of Minnesota described closers, which can help learners reinforce their learning. These items can be chapter summaries, review problems, and links to further reading. Closers in Project 2 were titled Important Concepts and Reflective Writing Prompts. Other development recommendations may include reinforcement tools like Key Takeaways and Chapter Review Questions.

The University of Minnesota described Integrated Pedagogical Devices (IPD) as instructional design elements in a textbook that assist with student learning. IPD could include things like bolded vocabulary words that are important concepts in a chapter. IPD can also be biographies of an author discussed in the open text. Case studies can also be created to provide students a bridge from the readings to real world examples.

Creating a textbook involves planning design elements that help students process content material in order to gain knowledge. These elements are particularly important when developing open textbooks, which often lack ancillary resources that may be found in commercial publishing.

**Project 2: Openly Licensing & Including Multimedia**

Auburn University at Montgomery’s staff photographer, Frank Williams, played an integral part in the creation of the open textbook by providing access to his digital collection of photographs hosted on SmugMug. The photos date back over a decade and number in the thousands. In return, he simply asked for attribution for providing the team with permission to use the photographs.
Culling a group of photos from the larger archive, the design team developed a collection of photographs on Flickr, an online tool used to organize and embed the media in Pressbooks. Flickr contains built-in tools that allowed the team to select all of the images and license them using Creative Commons Licensing. Attribution (CCBY), the license chosen for the images, is a license from Creative Commons that “lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work” (Creative Commons, n.d., p. 3). At the beginning of each chapter, the team placed images of students in a variety of settings around Auburn University at Montgomery. This added a level of engagement and familiarity to the text for their students.

Figure 2. The design team used images of Auburn University students for each chapter.

For the textbook cover art, the team hired a student from the University’s Fine Arts Department. She produced a variety of concepts while gaining valuable experience working with Auburn University at Montgomery as a client. For her efforts, she was provided attribution in the acknowledgement section of the open textbook. A link to her personal website was also provided in the acknowledgment section, so that everyone who reads the book has the opportunity to view other work she has completed in her portfolio.
Figure 3. Cover artwork created by a student from the Fine Arts department at Auburn University.

To provide engaging learning material that aligned with the textbook, educational YouTube videos were embedded in Pressbooks preceding the body of each chapter section. Each video was embedded directly below the section objectives so that students did not have to follow outside links that could distract from their readings.

Following the creation process of the textbook, it was sent back to the faculty for final review and feedback. The project then moved to the pilot stage for implementation in classes.

**Project 2: OER Pilot Implementation Survey Results**

Two different surveys were distributed to students in the English Composition I and II classes. The first survey was distributed in Fall 2018 before the open textbook pilot implementation. This survey was used to set a baseline for comparison. At the end of the Spring 2019 pilot semester, a second student survey was distributed to capture data on satisfaction and achievement of learning outcomes. This survey measured the changes and impact of introducing the open textbook.
In Fall 2018, the Pre-Pilot Open Textbook survey was distributed to the English Composition I and II students, for both those taking on-campus and online courses. When students were asked if they had a textbook on the first day of class, 64% of respondents reported they did not. Of this group of students, 22% were waiting for Financial Aid or VA money, 19% indicated the book was too expensive, and 13% were waiting for their paycheck. The survey results support the efforts of Auburn University at Montgomery to develop an open textbook and show that with it the gap of nearly 64% of students without a textbook on the first day of class can be closed (See Table 1).
Table 1: Pre-Pilot Open Textbook Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Percentage of students participating in survey</th>
<th>Number of students participating in survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Composition I</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition II</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Delivery</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you have your textbook on your first day of class?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you did not have your textbook on the first day of class, which of the following best describes the reason?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for Financial Aid or VA money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for my next paycheck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not plan to purchase the textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookstore did not have the textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased the book online and waiting for it to arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled late for the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second survey, the Open Textbook Preference Survey, was sent to a mix of participants and measured students’ reaction to the open textbook after the pilot semester.

English Composition I represented 18% and English Composition II represented 82% of the surveyed students. Of this group, approximately 75% of the students attended on-campus classes.
and about 25% attended online. The Spring 2019 survey asked students about their preference for using the open textbook compared to purchasing a textbook. Students indicated they preferred access to free digital textbooks at a rate of 77%. Of those surveyed, 71% indicated they liked using the free digital textbook. The results of the second survey indicate that students have a strong preference for using and accessing free digital textbooks.

The survey also asked students about their learning experience with the open textbook. Of the respondents, 76% felt they were able to get better grades during the course by having a free digital textbook. Having the free textbook on the first day of class was important to 71% of students surveyed. For 74% of the students surveyed, responses showed they felt the free textbook enhanced their learning experience. This evidence demonstrated that students value OER, and Auburn University at Montgomery used the results to encourage further development of OER materials (see Table 2).
### Table 2: Open Textbook Preference Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Percentage of students participating in survey</th>
<th>Number of students participating in survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Composition I</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition II</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Delivery</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The free digital textbook enhanced my learning.</td>
<td>61.80% (55)</td>
<td>14.61% (13)</td>
<td>10.11% (9)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>13.48% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the free digital textbook on the first day of class is important to me.</td>
<td>59.55% (53)</td>
<td>11.24% (10)</td>
<td>15.73% (14)</td>
<td>3.37% (3)</td>
<td>10.11% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I’m able to get better grades during the course by having a free digital textbook.</td>
<td>64.04% (57)</td>
<td>10.11% (9)</td>
<td>14.61% (13)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>11.24% (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like using the free digital textbook.</td>
<td>65.17% (58)</td>
<td>5.62% (5)</td>
<td>13.48% (12)</td>
<td>7.87% (7)</td>
<td>7.87% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer access to a free digital textbook.</td>
<td>67.42% (60)</td>
<td>10.11% (9)</td>
<td>13.48% (12)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>8.99% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer purchasing a textbook.</td>
<td>23.60% (21)</td>
<td>5.62% (5)</td>
<td>20.22% (18)</td>
<td>3.37% (3)</td>
<td>47.19% (42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Project 2: State OER Commons and Google Analytics

Because of the OER projects funded by ACHE and ACCS, the growth of OER in the state, and generous support from the Alabama Virtual Library, the Alabama OER Commons was developed. The Alabama OER Commons contains a collection area called Alabama Open Textbooks, which is specifically designated for textbooks created within the state. The textbook from Project 2 was the first to be published in this area.
Upon completion of the open textbook and subsequent publishing in the Alabama OER Commons, ways to measure usage were explored. A focus on the potential audience and what the impact could be on students was at the forefront of the discussion. After performing research, the team decided to use Google Analytics. The process was simple to initiate because the book was already hosted by Pressbooks. Once Google was provided with the link to the textbook, the team was able to track usage by country, users, sessions, and more.

Google Analytics also offers the ability to track the book by referral. If Google Analytics reports a referral, it means that the work was published on another site and a user is accessing it from a link from within that site. Between January 2019 and October 2019, records indicated that 4,683 users accessed the text from referrals. Of those users, 3,158 accessed the textbook from the Auburn University at Montgomery Blackboard system, and 47 accessed it from a link sent via email. Over 900 users accessed the textbook from a LMS outside Auburn University at Montgomery, while the remaining users accessed the textbook from a variety of sources such as Facebook and Internet search engines. The fact that so many users accessed the book from an LMS other than the Auburn University at Montgomery Blackboard system suggests that other universities are already using the textbook in their courses. Moreover, reports from Google Analytics show the textbook has been accessed by users in 52 countries and counting.

**Conclusion**

Students in Alabama have suffered significantly in terms of high education costs. The state is in the top tier for cutting appropriations to higher education, and students also fall into the top tier for debt load, averaging $35,364 per graduate (Purcell, 2019). According to Census Bureau estimates, the state has a median income of $48,123, which is well below the nationwide
median household income of $61,372 (Gore, 2019). These disparate numbers highlight the hardship suffered by many graduates as they struggle to pay off their student loans.

Thanks to the vision of ACHE, ACCS, and state institutions of higher education, collaborations to reduce the cost of educational materials have sprung up throughout Alabama. Moreover, with schools and higher education agencies collaborating effectively, students are already benefiting from substantial savings in a very short period of time. The results of the statewide workshops and OER grant projects prove that making education affordable can be accomplished with a small amount of seed money. As evidenced by the partnerships established from Project 2, students in the state saved an estimated $386,941 in 2019 alone. However, sustainability becomes the key issue to be addressed as Alabama seeks to adopt, adapt, create, manage, and continuously support OER efforts.

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