The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries is pleased to announce six new recipients of the UTA CARES Grant Program. Since 2017, the Libraries has offered these grants to the UTA community to encourage educators to replace commercial course materials with open educational resources (OER) or other content available at no cost to students. The Libraries’ $18,000 investment in the grants will yield actual cost savings of just under $80,000 during the first year the OER are used, impacting almost 500 UTA students enrolled in engineering, social work, history, mathematics, and anthropology courses.

OER are free teaching and learning materials that are licensed to allow for revision and reuse. OER can be fully self-contained textbooks, videos, quizzes, learning modules, lesson plans, syllabi, worksheets, data, and more.

“Students employ a number of coping strategies to reduce or eliminate the cost of textbooks and access codes—too often by choosing to go without a required resource,” said Michelle Reed, Associate Librarian at UTA Libraries and UTA CARES Grant Program administrator. “Once educators remove that financial barrier, student behavior changes. They struggle less. They worry less. They stop spending time hunting workarounds and comparison shopping. What follows is improved course grades, reduced drop-fail-withdrawal rates, and increased persistence and intensity.”

UTA CARES awards grants in three categories to support UTA educators in redesigning their courses using alternative materials. Three professors were awarded Adoption Stipends, which are intended to promote rapid adoption of OER or other free resources to increase affordability for students.

Dr. Ashley Lemke, assistant professor of Sociology and Anthropology, will be working on an OER for Introduction to Archaeology (ANTH 2339). “I chose to adopt an OER for this course for several reasons, but the most important was a response to students’ comments,” said Lemke. “Even though I was using an older edition, many students still told me that they were unable to purchase the textbook due to the cost. Students in higher education have made a commitment to better themselves and no one should be excluded from this experience due to financial limitations. These zero cost materials will go a long way towards their success.”

Dr. Bonnie Boardman of Industrial, Manufacturing, and Systems Engineering also received an Adoption Stipend for Introduction to Industrial Engineering (IE 1205). She is currently at work customizing an open textbook to meet her students’ learning needs by incorporating engaging, interactive features into the UTA version to be
published in the Mavs Open Press OER collection. Likewise, Ms. Aida Allen of Mathematics received an Adoption Stipend to transition a business math course to OER (MATH 1315). She hopes her use of the OER will be a “gateway for more future adoptions of the OER in Math 1315.”

UTA CARES Scale Grants focus on broader OER adoption by supporting the transition of all sections of a single course, course series, or program. Dr. Rebecca Mauldin, assistant professor of Social Work, was awarded a Scale Grant to adopt OER for research methods classes across the Bachelor of Social Work (SOCW 3308) and Master of Social Work (5308) programs.

“As soon as I heard about OER, I was excited about the possibility of doing it. With the UTA CARES grant funding, adopting OER will become a reality,” said Mauldin. “At the School of Social Work, we are very proud of the fact that UTA students graduate with some of the lowest student debt in the nation. Our students put in a lot of effort into balancing their studies with earning money for school. Providing OER is one thing we can do to support our students, continue to help them minimize their student debt, and make higher education more accessible to a broad range of people.”

The UTA CARES Grant Program also offers an Innovation Grant. This grant assists educators in the creation of OER when no existing OER or library-licensed content meets the learning objectives for a course. As Mavs Open Press, the Libraries supports UTA creators in producing and disseminating locally authored OER, whether developed from scratch or remixed from existing work.

“Cost gets a lot of attention because prices are startling and savings accumulate quickly, but feedback from our grantees and their students over the last two years of the program tells us content customization is also highly valued,” said Reed. “Our teachers are energized by the freedom and flexibility of using openly licensed materials and are encouraged by the impact of publicly sharing their own work. Plus, students really appreciate when an OER is designed specifically for them.”

Dr. Kimberly Breuer and Dr. Scott Palmer of History received the Innovation Grant for 2019 and are creating an OER for Introduction to Historical Research (HIST 3300) and the department’s first-year-experience course.

“Obviously, one motivation to create OER derived from a desire that students would not have to spend additional money on textbooks,” said Palmer. “At the same time, a common set of OER materials will enable us to ensure a degree of uniformity and consistency across multiple sections of a course that is foundational to the department’s various B.A. programs.”

The grant program is a component of broader open initiatives that increase the resonance of UTA authored work and improve public access to information. “We are pleased to offer these grants to increase affordability for our students while providing opportunities for our talented faculty to create valuable new teaching resources that will be available for a global audience,” said Rebecca Bichel, Dean of Libraries.

“I think this funding through UTA Libraries is an amazing opportunity,” said Lemke. “More and more we see that OER and open access resources are important in academia in general and I am proud to be part of this movement. The Libraries has been extremely helpful in advertising these grants and providing support.”

UTA Libraries sponsors the grants under the auspices of the UTA Coalition for Alternative Resources in Education for Students (UTA CARES). The program was established in 2017 to support educators interested in practicing open education through the adoption of OER or library-licensed content, through the creation of new or
remixed OER, and through the exploration of open educational practices, such as collaborating with students to produce educational content accessible to a wider community. Applications and awards are accepted annually. Please visit https://libguides.uta.edu/utacares/grants for more information.

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**About the UTA Libraries**

Supporting The University of Texas at Arlington and the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan region, UTA Libraries create transformational learning experiences by connecting people to first-class resources, empowering knowledge creation, exploring ideas and pursuing innovations in learning. The UTA FabLab offers all students access to cutting-edge technology for research in digital fabrication and data visualization. UTA Libraries Special Collections focuses on the history of Texas, Mexico and the Southwest, and includes one of the finest cartography collections on Texas and the Gulf of Mexico in the world. To learn more about the UTA Libraries, please visit http://library.edu.edu.