

Abstract

South Carolina State University, a land-grant, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) seeks a \$249,376 Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian, National Digital Infrastructures, Project grant to engage HBCU academic librarians, the target audience, in continuing education activities that will strengthen their knowledge and skills in Open Educational Resources (OERs). Textbooks have increased 88% over the last decade, averaging about \$1,250 a year at four-year public colleges. The cost of textbooks and other course materials present barriers to the completion of a college education. Congress and other leaders consider OERs as one solution to promoting college affordability. Empirical evidence demonstrates that OERs address affordability and attainment gaps by improving student outcomes, particularly among Pell Grant recipients and populations historically underserved by higher education. Many of the underserved population represent low-income, first generation college students, who would greatly benefit from the use of OERs to lower their cost of attendance. U.S. academic libraries have been at the forefront of the OER and affordable textbook movement to support the creation, adaptation, adoption, awareness of open and affordable textbooks. However, HBCU librarians have limited resources to support their professional development. Through the lived experiences of the librarians participating in this project, advocates for open and affordable learning resources will become aware of the unique challenges HBCU librarians encounter in their efforts to promote the use of OERs on their campuses and strategies for fostering success.

This project will empower librarians with knowledge and skills about the OER curation process; will empower librarians to become advocates and serve as resources for free and low-cost textbooks; and will introduce librarians to best practices for the development, maintenance, and sustainability of an OER initiative on their respective campuses. Specifically, the project is designed to lead to the following outcomes:

- Increase knowledge among HBCU academic librarians on the various types of Open Educational Resources.
- Increase awareness among HBCU academic librarians on the strategic role of the library in promoting and sustaining Open Educational Resource initiatives.
- Increase the number of academic courses utilizing free textbook or low-cost materials within HBCUs.

This 24-month project will encompass a summit with an anticipated attendance of 100 librarians and faculty, representing 50 HBCUs both public and private institutions, a project website, textbook transformation grants, and a series of professional development webinars on OERs. The webinars will provide more focused and in-depth training on specific aspects of OERs. The webinars will be open to librarians at HBCUs and non-HBCUs and the online delivery format will provide greater flexibility and offer the potential to reach a larger audience of librarians. Additionally, the findings from this project will be disseminated through the publication of a White Paper on the project website and through a presentation at a national library conference.