

Access for All at Laredo: An Innovation Case Study

The Institution

Laredo College, located on the U.S.–Mexico border in South Texas, is a community college that serves a predominantly Hispanic, first-generation student population. With a strong commitment to access and affordability, the college enrolls a high percentage of students receiving financial aid and maintains robust dual-credit partnerships with local high schools. Approximately 13,000 undergraduate students attended in 2023–24, with around 32% enrolled full-time and 68% part-time.

Laredo College has embraced a mission of educational equity, implementing strategic programs that reduce barriers to student success, such as meal plan vouchers, textbook alternatives, and faculty-centered instructional support.

Its recent pivot toward Open Educational Resources (OER) reflects this ongoing commitment to remove cost burdens and improve academic access across its curriculum.

The Challenge

Before adopting Open Educational Resource (OER), Laredo College used an “all-inclusive” textbook model through its campus bookstore. While this model was intended to streamline access and reduce costs, it quickly became a source of frustration for faculty, students, and administrators. Access codes were often delayed, dual-credit students encountered incompatibilities, and publisher support was unreliable, especially during the critical first week of classes.

Faculty and staff in e-learning and instructional technology fields were overwhelmed with troubleshooting tasks, and the institution lacked direct control over content delivery or affordability. In many cases, faculty had grown reliant on publisher-created courses and materials, leading to a disconnect between instructors and their own resources. As Dr. Elizabeth Rodriguez, Dean of Academic Innovation and Technology, observed:

“Faculty had a very difficult time letting go of the publishers... part of the problem with that was that they were using 100% of publisher material.

I mean they weren't even familiar with the material themselves anymore... were they still the subject matter experts in those courses?”

On top of this, students, many of whom are first-generation college attendees, were disproportionately affected by textbook costs and delays. These systemic issues made it clear to institutional leadership that a scalable, equitable solution was necessary.

However, transitioning away from the familiar publisher model to curated OER materials

posed its own set of challenges: faculty resistance, tight timelines, and the absence of existing infrastructure to support such a major shift.

The Innovative Solution

Laredo College's transition to Open Educational Resources wasn't incremental, it was immediate and institutional. When the all-inclusive textbook program was reassigned to Rodriguez's division, she seized the opportunity to rethink course material delivery entirely. A long-time advocate for OER, Rodriguez had already created a team in anticipation of this moment. This team included librarians, instructional designers, e-learning staff, and faculty leaders affiliated with the college's Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning. Rather than piloting OER in isolated departments, the college committed to a full-scale transition. The initiative was presented to President Dr. María Minerva "Minita" Ramírez, who approved it swiftly, followed by unanimous support from the Board of Trustees. The administration mandated that all traditional courses transition to OER by the following fall, and all dual-credit courses by the spring.

This bold move was backed by a grassroots implementation strategy. As stated by Rodriguez,

"We kind of had our boots on the ground and just started working with all of the different departments."

Rodriguez's team visited departments, embedded themselves in faculty meetings, and offered hands-on support for course redesign. The Center for Teaching Excellence launched a specialized OER branch, and the college later introduced a stipend-funded OER Faculty Fellowship to incentivize broader participation. All of this occurred without significant increases in staffing, demonstrating how institutional alignment, careful planning, and shared purpose can rapidly scale innovation.

Takeaways

Laredo College's rapid transition to Open Educational Resources reveals how institutions can drive meaningful change through a mix of administrative urgency, creative staffing, and responsive faculty support. These lessons, drawn from the implementation experience, can guide other colleges pursuing similar innovation.

Administration: Prepare for innovation and resource allocation.

Laredo's leadership didn't wait for the "perfect moment" to begin the OER transition. Preparation was done in advance by building a team, researching alternatives, and staying alert for opportunity. Due to this, Rodriguez and her team were able to act quickly when the textbook program was reassigned. The formal directive from Provost Dr. Marisela Rodríguez Tijerina and President Ramírez gave the initiative clarity and momentum, reinforced by public support from the Board of Trustees.

While the mandate was crucial, it wasn't the only driving force. Administrative leaders paired it with meaningful support systems, including department visits, structured training,

and later, stipends. They're now focused on long-term sustainability, building internal policy and infrastructure to keep OER content current and consistent.

Staff: Partner with other stakeholders to implement the innovation vision.

Instructional designers, librarians, and technology teams were the engine of implementation. With no additional hires, staff took on new responsibilities, collaborated across departments, and developed practical solutions like sourcing an open alternative to MyMathLab in partnership with UTRGV. Their hands-on support helped translate the OER vision into functional, teachable courses.

This group also plays a role in quality control, helping develop an OER repository and preparing for annual course content reviews. Their evolving involvement ensures the system can adapt and grow beyond its launch phase.

Faculty: Understand the potential gains for students.

For many faculty, the transition to OER was abrupt and initially unwelcome. The short timeline, combined with the loss of publisher-provided content, made some instructors feel unprepared and unheard. Rodriguez later acknowledged that involving faculty earlier in the process would have helped reduce resistance and fostered greater understanding and encouragement for the initiative.

However, support and incentives helped turn the tide. Faculty-led workshops, one-on-one guidance, and the promise of restored academic freedom reframed the change as an opportunity rather than a burden. The creation of an OER Faculty Fellowship (with paid stipends) provided a formal structure for sustained engagement. Many instructors now serve as internal advocates and content creators, and feedback from students has affirmed the impact of more relevant, accessible course materials.