

Centralizing OER at Texas A&M: An Innovation Case Study

The Institution

Texas A&M University is one of the largest public research institutions in the United States, enrolling more than 70,000 students annually on its 5,200-acre main campus in College Station, Texas. As the flagship of the Texas A&M University System, the institution maintains a dual focus on academic excellence and research impact. It plays a central role in advancing innovation, inquiry, and student success across the state and beyond.

Open Educational Resources (OER) have become a central part of Texas A&M's strategy to reduce student costs and support faculty innovation. Previously scattered across departments, OER efforts were unified under a new Open Education department following a campus-wide library reorganization. This centralization has allowed A&M to scale its impact, becoming a leader in statewide and system-wide affordability initiatives.

At the helm of this transformation are Jennifer Pate, Director of Open Education, and Stephanie Graves, Associate University Librarian for Academic Engagement. Hired in 2024 as the department's first OpenEd director, Pate advanced system-wide initiatives like Pressbooks expansion far ahead of their original multi-year timeline. Graves, who helped lead the library's organizational restructuring, worked with university leadership to secure multi-year funding and position the library as a central hub for affordable course materials. Together, they have built a system of support that spans faculty outreach, Pressbooks publishing, course reserves automation, and student engagement. Their work has been instrumental in transforming what had once been "pockets of excellence" into a coordinated, institution-wide movement.

The Challenge

Before centralization, Open Educational Resource (OER) efforts at Texas A&M were decentralized and inconsistent. Faculty, departments, and committees had launched promising projects, some supported by Provost seed grants. However, there was no shared infrastructure, standard definitions, or centralized support. Course marking data was often inaccurate, with many courses mislabeled or lacking consistent criteria. In addition, students often misunderstood what "OER" meant. Meanwhile, textbook and third-party tool costs continued to burden students, especially in large-enrollment and

general education courses. Faculty who wanted to adopt OER were often unsure where to start, and librarians had no clear mandate or capacity to coordinate support.

In addition to institutional disorganization, external pressures from publishers complicated progress. Inclusive access programs, aggressive vendor marketing, and third-party platform fees presented significant barriers to affordability. Without a cohesive response, Texas A&M risked falling behind on both equity goals and innovation potential. The challenge was clear: build a coordinated, campus-wide OER strategy that could scale to meet the needs of 70,000 students and compete with the convenience of commercial solutions.

The Innovative Solution

Texas A&M's approach to OER innovation began with strategic library reorganization and a clear vision: to centralize and scale course affordability efforts. With strong backing from the University Libraries and the Office of the Provost, the institution created a dedicated Open Education department and hired Jennifer Pate as its first director in 2024. Pate, an experienced OER librarian and copyright expert, moved quickly, activating a strategic plan that soon outpaced the department's own timeline.

In collaboration with Associate University Librarian Stephanie Graves, Pate established the OER Campus Committee (OREC), bringing together representatives from every college, the Center for Teaching Excellence, Disability Support Services, the Registrar's Office, and the Student Government Association. This committee helped align course marking standards, define "low-cost" and "no-cost" labels in plain language, and streamline adoption pathways across the institution.

The team also built an interconnected infrastructure of support. A&M launched system-wide Pressbooks access, developed a course reserves automation workflow, and created flexible discovery tools that allow faculty to mix OER, licensed content, and library-purchased materials. In addition, their automated reserves program identifies eligible textbooks each semester, purchasing them without requiring faculty requests. The program notifies both instructors and students with direct access links.

Rather than piloting isolated projects, A&M prioritized scalable, replicable systems. By leveraging top-down administrative support and investing in grassroots service delivery, the Open Education team reimagined affordability not as a side project, but as a core academic service.

Takeaways

Texas A&M's approach to OER innovation is particularly effective because of its focus on systems rather than one-time projects—creating infrastructure that could scale to meet the needs of 70,000 students while competing with the convenience of commercial solutions.

Administration: Organize institutional structures strategically.

Texas A&M's library reorganization led to a dedicated Open Education department and demonstrates how structural changes can institutionalize innovation. In addition, appointing the first Open Education Director and recruiting a leader with relevant expertise in OER and copyright signaled serious administrative commitment. This addition supplied the necessary, specialized knowledge to guide implementation of the innovation.

Staff: Integrate adoption of innovations with existing systems and processes.

By developing tools that integrated OER with library-purchased materials and licensed content, Texas A&M staff created flexible solutions that faculty could adopt regardless of their readiness level. In addition, clear, consistent standards for course marking and definitions of "low-cost" and "no-cost" labels in plain language removed barriers to faculty adoption of the innovation.

Faculty: Use your institution's resources to innovate and improve student success.

The automated reserves program at Texas A&M identified eligible OER textbooks without requiring faculty requests, ultimately reducing their workload and improving student access to instructional materials from the first day of class. Texas A&M's coordinated response to marketing by commercial publishers (e.g., inclusive access programs) helped faculty resist aggressive pressures that might otherwise have undermined OER adoption.

The centralized model to instructional materials at Texas A&M demonstrates how the Agility Framework's three dimensions can work together: strong administrative leadership restructured the organization and provided resources; operational staff built scalable systems and standardized processes; and faculty were empowered with streamlined adoption pathways and automated support tools.

Core Principles and Opportunities in Accelerated Courses

Challenges and Strategies for Success