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**Peer-Reviewed Article**

# Making an Open Information Literacy Textbook: A Case Study in OER Collaborations Among Four Oklahoma Academic Librarians

Calantha Tillotson, *University of Tennessee Knoxville*

Adam Brennan, *Tulsa Community College*

Sarah Whittle, *Northeastern State University*

Jamie Holmes, *Tulsa Community College*

## ABSTRACT

Springboarding from a statewide initiative, four academic librarians from three different universities collaborated to create an openly licensed textbook on the Pressbooks platform that could be easily embedded into one-shots or general education research courses. The project developed over the span of a year, which included planning, exploring, creating, evaluating, sharing, and implementing. The first three steps taught the authors to set and agree upon shared expectations early, decide to either clone or create original content, and trust remixing material from other OER is firmly within the moral framework of sharing knowledge. In the final three stages the authors learned to recruit more reviewers/editors than needed, recognize when to turn off perfectionism and publish, and stay open to new collaborative opportunities. The authors experienced firsthand how OER transforms libraries from information gatekeepers to content owners. This transformation brings libraries closer to their missions of access for all.

## KEYWORDS

OER, Collaboration, PressBooks, Information Literacy, Oklahoma

## SUGGESTED CITATION

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## Introduction

Springboarding from an Online Consortium of Oklahoma (OCO) Press initiative, four academic librarians from three different institutions collaborated to create an openly licensed textbook on the Pressbooks platform that could be easily embedded into information literacy one-shots or general education research courses for undergraduates. The project began with a serendipitous meeting of three of the four eventual collaborators at a virtual Oklahoma Open Educational Resources (OER) Summit in November 2020. During a breakout Jamboard on which attendees were asked to answer, “What is your WHY for being here today to learn about OER?” Tillotson and Whittle discussed their desire to create an information literacy textbook that might be relevant to general education courses in particular. As one of the leaders at OCO and an advocate for Pressbooks adoption in Oklahoma, Holmes quickly took the lead and onboarded a fourth interested partner (Brennan) from her home institution to the project.

After being chosen as a pilot project by OCO Press, the authors were provided access to their chosen platform (Pressbooks) and collectively decided to focus their efforts on building an easily adaptable and interactive textbook specifically for fellow Oklahoma instruction librarians to use as an information literacy foundation for upper-level high school students or lower level undergraduates. The regional focus began with the title (*The Insiders: Information Literacy for Okies Everywhere*), which played off the classic book written by an Oklahoman author (*The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton) (Brennan, Holmes, Tillotson, & Whittle, 2021). While the material will remain useful to librarians/instructors worldwide, the authors took strides to embed local references throughout the text in an effort to make the text as approachable as possible to fellow “Okies” (informal regional slang for Oklahoma residents). For example, the Tiger King, The Oklahoman, and the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre all make an appearance to teach concepts such as recognizing cognitive biases, fact checking viral content, and citing sources.

## The Ripple Effect

This project is unique in many ways and allows for discussion of how such projects bring more to the participants and their institutions than the planned deliverable(s). For example, the project “grew” some OER and Pressbooks experts who can use their new skills and knowledge to bring additional resources to their institutions. E.M. Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovation theory, a social science theory from 1962, provides a model for how new ideas and tools might be successfully adopted within an organization or system (LaMorte, 2022). While not commonly applied in the education field, it can clearly be applied here. The idea is that early adopters bring others into a safe space to experience the innovation, learn it, and then see enough value in it to adopt it themselves. Using what is arguably one of the most important features of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the concept of peer networks, this project illustrates the process very well. Holmes was an early adopter of both OER and Pressbooks. With other OER leaders in the state, she helped design the summit where the project was first conceived. The group planned for the

last session of the day to bring together those working in similar positions to discuss ideas and ways they might collaborate on an OER project. When she learned of two other librarians discussing the feasibility of a collaborative open textbook covering information literacy topics, she capitalized on the peer network concept to build a team and work with them to carry out their idea.

While working on the project, the additional team members gained expertise in OER, as well as competence and confidence in using basic and intermediate features of Pressbooks. Also, all have a better understanding of Creative Commons (CC) licensing and other issues related to OER. One of the authors went on to formalize his understanding, enrolled in a Creative Commons for Librarians certificate course, and provided formal training in CC for his institution's faculty in the Spring of 2023. Another used the experience to inform her work on the OER Working Group at her former institution, and after she transitioned to her new university, she has applied her increased knowledge to individual research consultations with faculty and graduate students seeking to navigate the open source scholarly publication landscape, as well as advocating for the acquisition of an open book creation platform, like Pressbooks. A third author used this knowledge and incorporated it into an existing online information literacy course, taught by her and fellow research and instruction librarians at her institution.

Harkening back to the peer network, what makes this project unique is the way it incorporates collaboration between institutions. Librarians from various institutions get together somewhat regularly through formal statewide organizations and less formal interest groups to discuss strategies and issues surrounding information literacy, collection development, access, and public service. It is less common to see them take their interaction from mere conversations and information-sharing to formal collaborations to create resources that are truly shared.

*The Insiders: Information Literacy for Okies Everywhere* offers a roadmap for individuals seeking collaboration across institutional lines to create a textbook in a chosen field of study. The project refutes a common rebuttal when creating OER products: how is quality maintained and implemented? *The Insiders* addresses this crucial issue in a number of ways: first, the textbook was designed and content gathered through the use of trained experts; even sections that were adopted from the source material were generated by degreed experts in the field of information literacy. Second, *The Insiders* offers a rubric and case study for educators interested in cross-institutional collaboration. Third, the product meets the criteria for quality of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JICS), an OER-supporting UK-based non-profit (Creative Commons, 2022). See appendix A for the mapping of project qualities to JICS criteria.

This project demonstrates the changing nature of academic library work, or more specifically, the evolving role of the librarian from an information guide to an information

creator. Librarians have trod this path for some time: creating subject-specific research guides for students, designing interactive tutorials, and more. As such, these skills have become a source of value for institutions seeking to participate in the Open Access (OA) and Open Education movements and create OER content for their student populations.

### How the Pudding Was Made

At the end of the final session at the virtual Oklahoma OER summit in October 2020 the presenter shared a Google JamBoard and prompted attendees to list what they hoped to take away from the conference. Here, Tillotson posted a virtual sticky note that read, “As an instruction librarian, I want to see how I could create an information literacy textbook.” Whittle saw this and echoed her interest, which was the initial impetus for *The Insiders*. From there, all authors began developing the project over the following year, which included the following formalized steps: planning, exploring, creating, evaluating, sharing, and implementing.

Near the end of 2020, the authors met via Zoom and Whittle led a candid conversation where each member shared their individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as clarification of team expectations, which were used to create a project charter outlining expected time commitments, communication preferences, and shared responsibilities. This allowed each of the authors to know how to divide responsibilities and support one another in the process of aggregating information.

Whittle knew from previous experience that OCO had a subscription with Pressbooks, which allowed the authors to freely and easily select this as the platform for the book. They originally planned on building their own textbook. However, early in the process, they discovered it was easier to explore existing OER texts on the topic of information literacy, which would expedite the process by cloning or remixing existing content. A colleague of Whittle and Brennan was instrumental in finding the book upon which *The Insiders* was created, a textbook entitled *Introduction to College Research* by Butler, Sargent, & Smith (2021). Together, the authors gathered content into a new Pressbooks shell and created the textbook by reviewing/editing the existing material, as well as compiling and writing new content as needed. The authors applied a divide and conquer strategy by splitting the textbook into portions that each author was responsible for editing and creating new content.

Together, the authors took advantage of how Pressbooks included easy incorporation of H5P interactive elements into the book. Learning how to embed these review exercises was a creative experience for all the authors and presented an opportunity for readers to test their knowledge after reading through information. These components were added at the end of many chapters as “Concept Review Exercises” and were consistently featured in an orange box to visually separate the H5P from the other content. A few examples of H5P included a drag-and-drop exercise to construct a correct MLA citation and a multiple-choice quiz to test readers’ knowledge about avoiding confirmation bias.

As the authors collectively moved through the creation stage, negotiations on design, functionality, and content became more frequent, and the authors became increasingly grateful for their project charter, as it reminded them of the original goal for the textbook, i.e. create an interactive and user friendly foundational information literacy guide that would be adaptable by other academic librarians for their own undergraduate instruction. As she did the most mixing and matching of additional OER works (as well as writing original content), Tillotson especially appreciated the ability to refer back to the desired audience (i.e., undergraduates) when deciding what content was most appropriate to include in her assigned chapters. For example, while she kept much of the structure for the evaluation chapters of the cloned textbook (Butler, Sargent, & Smith, 2001), she wanted to increase their emphasis on information environmentalism (Caulfield, 2017), as activities based upon Caulfield's evaluation techniques were particularly popular amongst students in her undergraduate information literacy instruction sessions. To achieve this, she included sections on Caulfield's four evaluation "moves" and one "habit" for fact-checking viral information (Caulfield & Conlin, 2019), taking care to embed relevant examples and interactive activities throughout.

Given how important future adaptability of the text was to the authors, they specially made note of the following recommendations that would save anyone else seeking to create an OER some time and energy. First, if you are working with a team, start by creating shared attainable project goals and expectations, remembering to stay as flexible as possible with each other's changeable schedules and energy to commit to the project. As the authors were creating the book at the height of the COVID pandemic, they worked hard to create a space of trust and kindness, so each collaborator could speak openly when their capacity for the project was past their limit, and they needed time to refocus. Additional advice includes if one plans to clone from other OER texts, make decisions early about overarching design elements and maintain an awareness of licensing rights for all the cloned content, as having to work backwards with matching font style and correct citations across multiple sources was extremely tedious for the authors, to say the least. In addition, the authors recommend double-checking all links from adapted content before publication, as some internal links from the original material may redirect to the cloned book, rather than the new textbook.

The editing process for *The Insiders* occurred over four months, comprising multiple rounds of peer review (both within the team and through recruited reviewers from across the state) and revisions (iteratively based on reviewers' feedback). This step taught the authors to recruit more peer reviewers than needed to provide breathing space for collaborators' shifting schedules and to consider the necessary stakeholders when recruiting reviewers. In this case, the main audience for the finished product was academic librarians who worked with entry-level research courses, so the authors targeted recruitment of peer reviewers primarily from instruction librarians, as well as an Information Sciences faculty member, a writing center tutor, and a graphic designer.

Once multiple rounds of editing were complete, the authors learned how to turn off perfectionism and publish, so that marketing could begin, mainly through professional contacts both individually and organizationally. At this stage, the authors learned the importance of diversifying their market streams to reach as many members of the target audience as possible, as well as being prepared to self-promote, which did not come naturally to all the authors. Given that this product was built mainly for regional academic librarians to embed within their learning management systems, the targeted market streams were listservs for the Oklahoma Library Association (OLA), Online Consortium of Oklahoma (OCO), the Oklahoma chapter of ACRL (OK-ARCL), Oklahoma's Community of Instruction Librarians (COIL), the University of Tennessee (UT) Libraries, and Oklahoma Council of Academic Library Directors (OCALD). In addition, *The Insiders* has been published in the following catalogs: Online Consortium of Oklahoma and Pressbooks Directory.

Throughout the writing process, the team's goal was to have the book published in a year to allow for it to be piloted within a 1-credit hour online information literacy course Whittle taught at her institution. As the class is completely online and no textbook is required, she was able to easily incorporate links from *The Insiders* within learning modules on the information cycle, types of information sources, finding materials in your library, and disinformation.

Prior to the conclusion of the Fall 2021 semester, librarians at Whittle's institution applied for and were granted IRB approval to craft a survey to ascertain students' perspectives in using *The Insiders* textbook throughout the information literacy course. The survey was created in LibWizard and consisted of 15 yes/no, fill-in-the-blank, Likert scale, and short answer questions (see Appendix C for survey and results). In summary, the 11 students who completed the survey shared how the OER textbook saved them anywhere from \$40-\$300 in textbook costs. One student was somewhat comfortable with the navigation of the book, while the rest were very or extremely comfortable with using an OER in a future class. All students would recommend the use of an OER to future students, did not feel overwhelmed by the navigation of the book, and agreed there was enough information to understand the topic but not so much as to be overwhelming. All but one student thought the content was clear and easy to understand, and they all agreed the explanations and definitions in the book were clear and helpful.

When giving students an opportunity to comment on what features were most helpful or easiest to understand, the responses included "the quizzes at the end of chapters, especially with follow up written explanations to clarify on why an answer was wrong or why it was right," and "I liked that the contents dropdown was on the side and I could click any topic I wanted to read over again and it would directly take me there. It was extremely easy to navigate and provided just the right amount of information." Inversely, when giving the students an opportunity to comment on what features were least helpful or hardest to understand, no comments were submitted. The students were also asked to comment on a Likert Scale (1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) to rate the helpfulness of the Concept Review Exercises that are

found at the end of many chapters in *The Insiders*. The average score for the class was 4.5. Last, two students provided excellent feedback for improving the book in the future providing the comments: “It felt annoying to press forward through short sections of chapters [and] would have preferred some chapter sections to be grouped together to prevent interrupt[ing] my reading by loading a new page,” as well as “Maybe provide a little more information on some of the topics or videos for those who are visual learners.” These constructive comments were greatly appreciated and will inform future adjustments made to *The Insiders*.

### Conclusion

The project offers a blueprint for libraries looking to engage in silo-busting and form collaborative relationships with other departments via liaison work or work across institutional borders with librarians from external institutions. The workflows, strategies, and tools from this case study can be replicated or altered to fit future OER projects. There were, however, many lessons learned and emergent findings to consider. For example, the team learned that if there is no need for a course-specific textbook, the openly licensed materials contained in this project’s textbook are perfect for piecemeal adaptation. Library videos, tutorials, and even a slide deck can be adapted in one-shot information literacy lectures, new lesson plans or learning modules. If certain subjects are not needed or require more focus (keyword searching prioritization for new database users, for example), the work can be endlessly remixed and adapted to serve the needs of students.

Additional lessons revealed themselves to the team as the project continued. While the team chose one consistent, overarching research scenario to tie together disparate sections of the book with separate authors, adding unique and relevant search examples could be more successful. The authors chose to use examples stemming from regional events that they felt would have recognition at a national level: examples include the Tulsa Race Massacre and Tiger King, the documentary turned pop culture phenomenon. Choosing scenarios already happening at the national level could increase relevance to students by instructors looking to adapt the work. The group also recognizes the need to revisit and update material regularly if pop culture references are used and as new developments occur in information literacy (a good example would be the replacement of Caufield’s earlier models that help students identify and label misinformation with his newer, simplified SIFT model (Caufield, 2019)). The process of designing an OER textbook also offers fertile ground for backwards-design lessons that can be added to an internal repository to share with students and faculty.

*The Insiders* provided all four team members a rich learning environment in which to gain expertise in Open Educational Resources, Pressbooks, and cross-institutional collaboration. The value of such collaborations was a major lesson learned by the authors, as it allowed them to grow their professional networks and diversify the ideas being formulated. Another important takeaway lay in promoting frank conversations about group strengths and

weaknesses at the beginning of establishing new partnerships. This delivered the benefits of building a foundation of trust for future team endeavors, setting a precedent for potentially challenging but vital communications, and setting group expectations. In addition, given the geographic distance and pandemic safety considerations, *The Insiders* taught the authors the value of online collaboration forums and digital tools necessary to create a complex OER product.

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### Appendix A: JICS Criteria and Corresponding Project Qualities

JICS Criteria	Mapping to <i>The Insiders</i>
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple authors</li> <li>● Divvied responsibility for editing, usage of a team dedicated editors not on authorship team</li> <li>● Testing through student workers for readability</li> </ul>
Reputation of author/institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Degree-holding authors in the field of information literacy</li> <li>● Adapted from material created by degree-holding authors in the field of information literacy</li> </ul>
Standard of Technical Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Usage of a professional-grade platform, Pressbooks</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adherence to WGAG 2.1 Web Accessibility Guidelines</li> <li>● Webaim usage to test accessibility</li> </ul>
Fitness for Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Created as a regional information literacy textbook, addresses local information literacy needs</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: The NSU IRB Informed Consent Document

Dear LIBM 4611 Student:

We are conducting a research study to evaluate LIBM 4611 Introduction to Online Research students' feedback on the accessibility, design, content, and usefulness of the Open information literacy textbook, *The Insiders: Information Literacy for Okies Everywhere*.

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/okinfolit/>. Your response to the online survey will help in determining the use and practicality of this Open textbook as a supplement to the LIBM 4611 curriculum in Blackboard.

In order for this study to be accurate, we ask current LIBM 4611 students to complete and submit this survey. The survey is comprised of 15 yes/no, fill-in-the-blank, Likert scale, and short answer questions and should only take about 10 minutes of your time. Please complete and submit the survey by 5:00 p.m. Friday, May 6, 2022.

There are no repercussions for not participating in this study and your participation is completely voluntary. You have the option to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide not to participate after starting the questionnaire, simply close the survey window. The instructor will be the only one to identify those who participate by their NSU email address and only for the purpose of awarding 20 extra credit points to those who have not yet earned the maximum number of extra credit points (40). The cost to participate is 10 minutes of your time. The risks to you of participating in this research likely do not exceed the risk of participating in your daily life.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Whittle's institution has approved this study. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, feel free to contact the IRB. The IRB contact information is

<https://offices.nsuok.edu/irb/default.aspx>, [irb@nsuok.edu](mailto:irb@nsuok.edu), 918-449-6509.

You are welcome to contact the principal investigators of this study by telephone or email for any questions you have.

Thank you for your time,

I consent to participate in this study to earn 20 extra credit points, if I have not yet earned the maximum number of extra credit points (40).

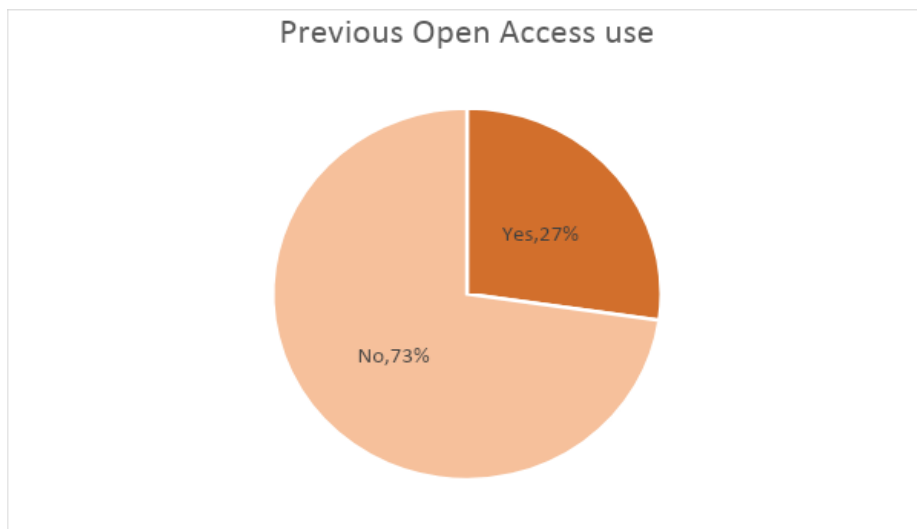
I do not consent to participate in this study, but I wish to earn 20 extra credit points, if I have not yet earned the maximum number of extra credit points (40).

I consent to participate in this study and wish to not receive 20 extra credit points.

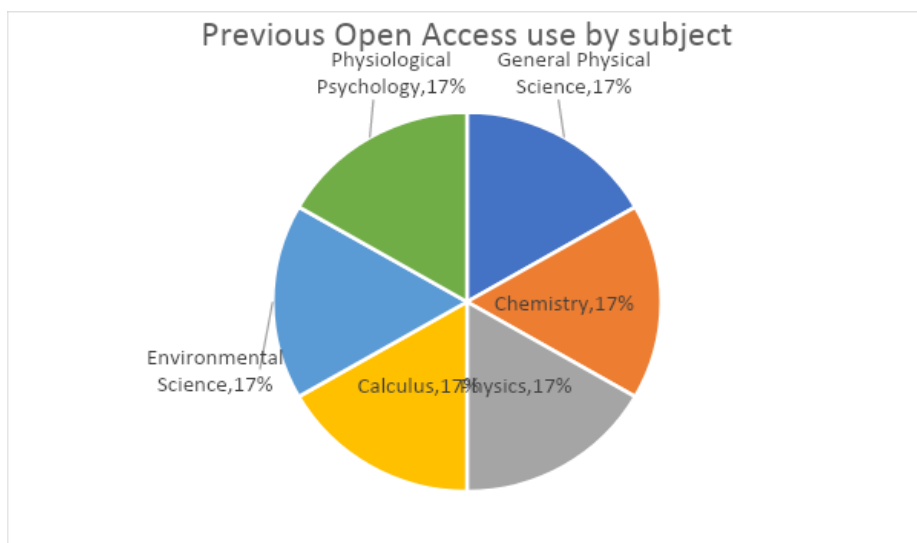
If you have consented to participate in this study to earn 20 extra credit points, please provide your NSU email address in the box below. Then click “Next” to begin the survey.

### Appendix C: LIBM 4611 Survey

In Spring 2022 there were 20 enrolled students in LIBM 4611. The survey questions were as follows, with 11 participants providing consent to participate in the survey.



*Figure C1:* Have you ever used an Open (access) textbook before? (Y/N)



*Figure C2:* If so, what was the subject matter of the class and textbook (e.g., Chemistry, Literature)?

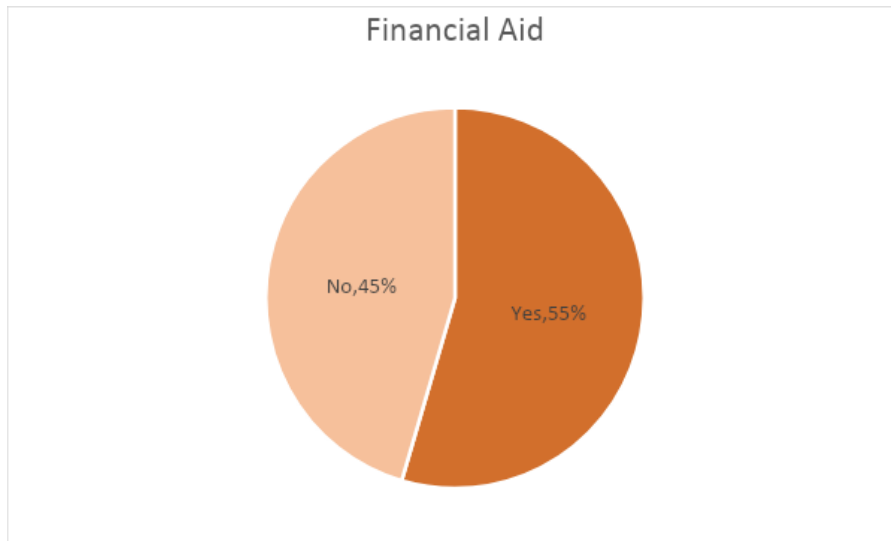


Figure C3: Do you receive any financial aid to assist with your tuition? (Y/N)

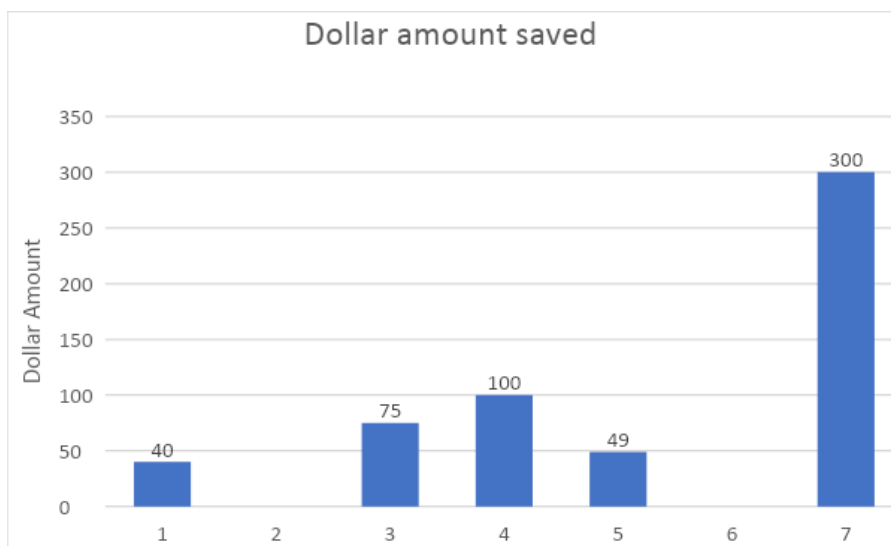
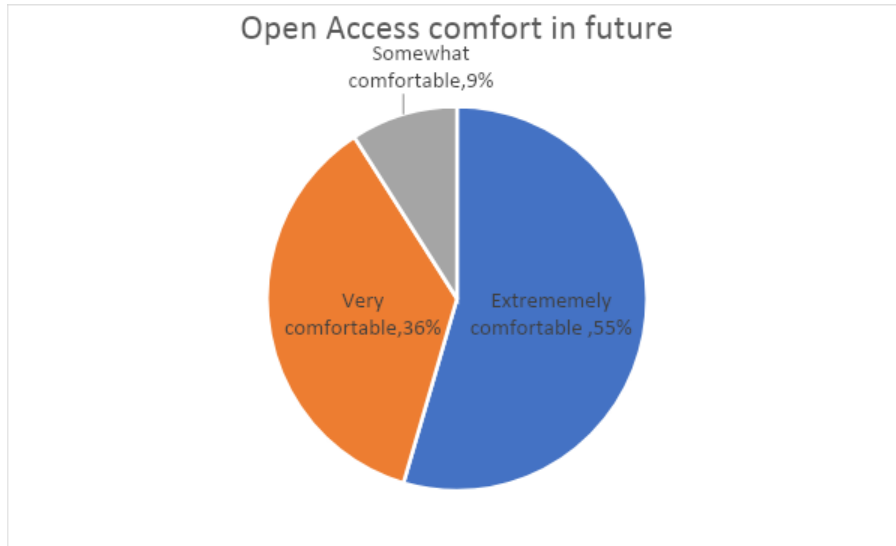
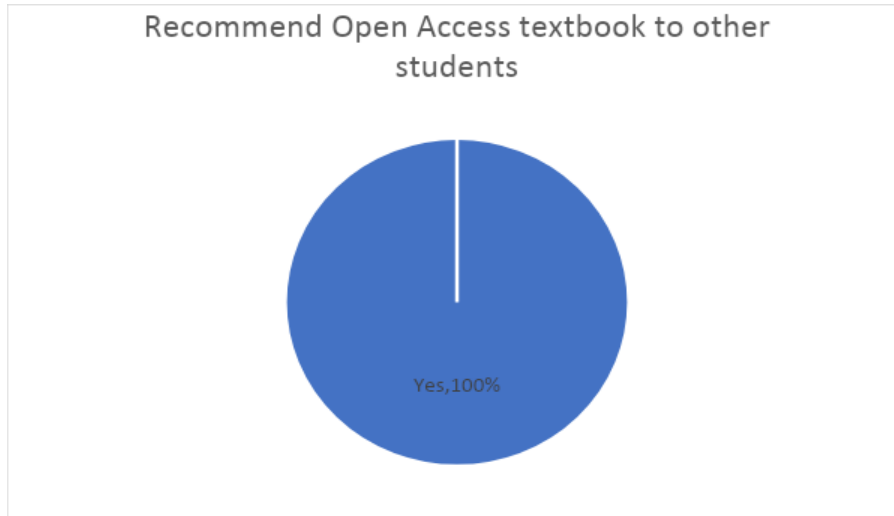


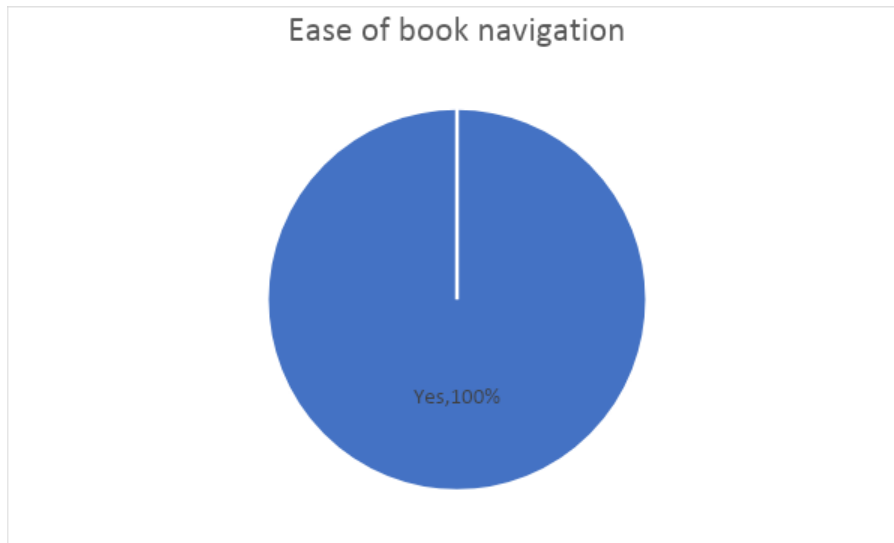
Figure C4: Approximately how much money do you think you have saved by utilizing *The Insiders: Information Literacy for Okies Everywhere* as an Open textbook? (fill in the blank)



*Figure C5:* After having used *The Insiders* in LIBM 4611, how comfortable would you be using an Open Access textbook in another college class? (Likert scale)



*Figure C6:* Would you recommend Open Access textbooks to other students? (Y/N)



*Figure C7:* Navigating within the book was easy. (Y/N)

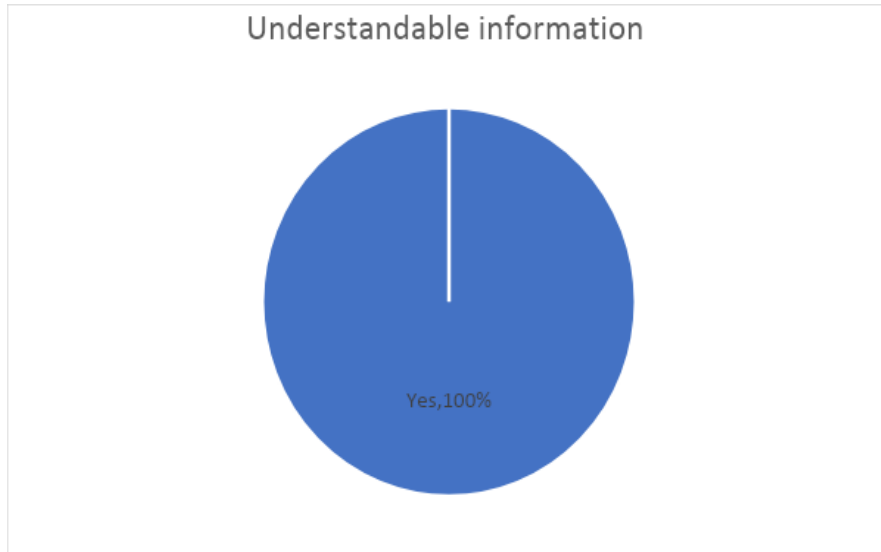


Figure C8: There was enough information to understand the topic, but not so much as to be overwhelming. (Y/N)

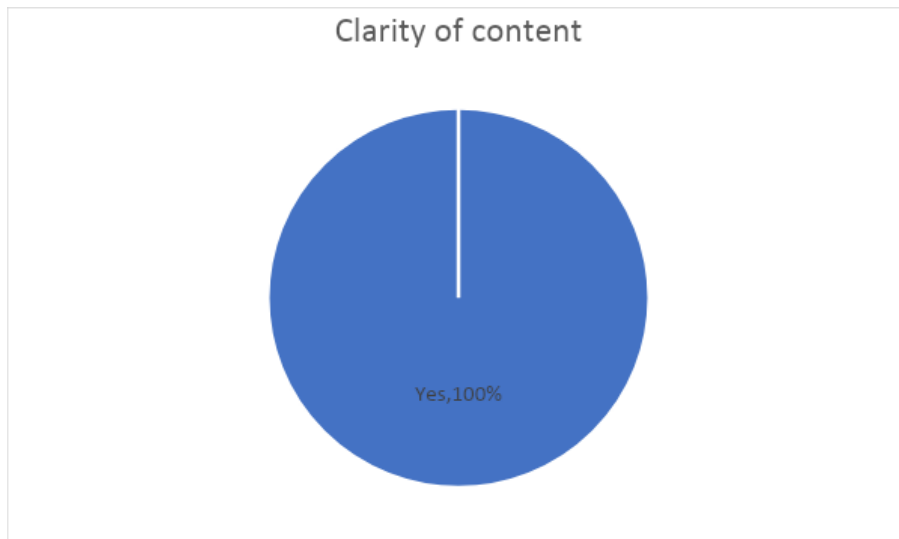
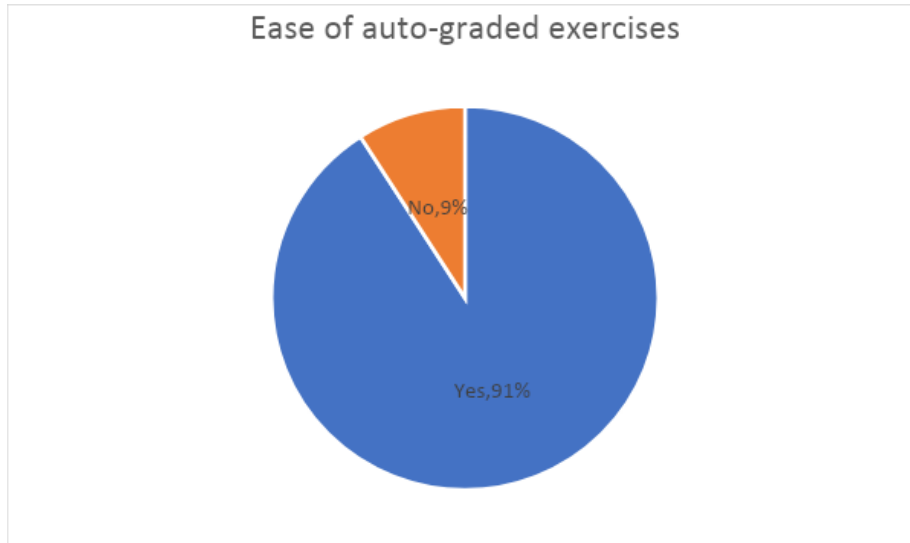
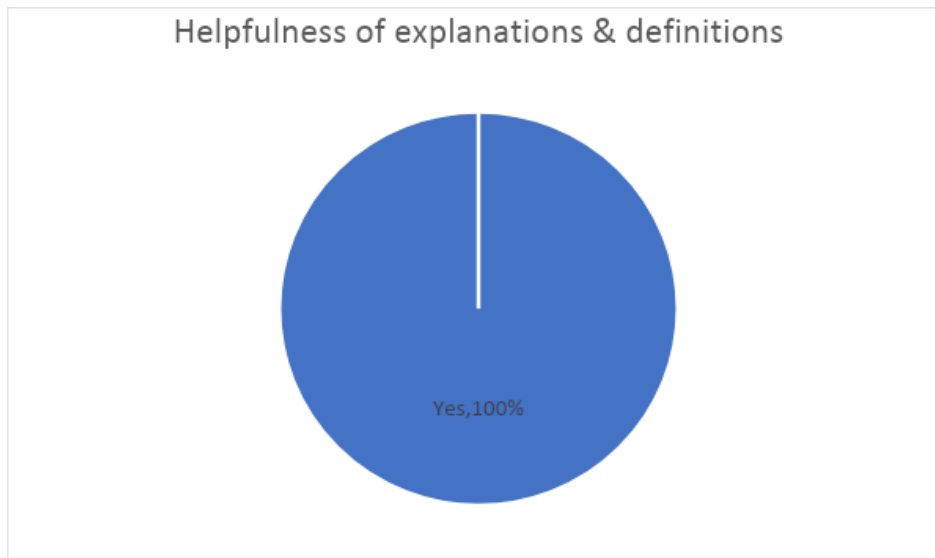


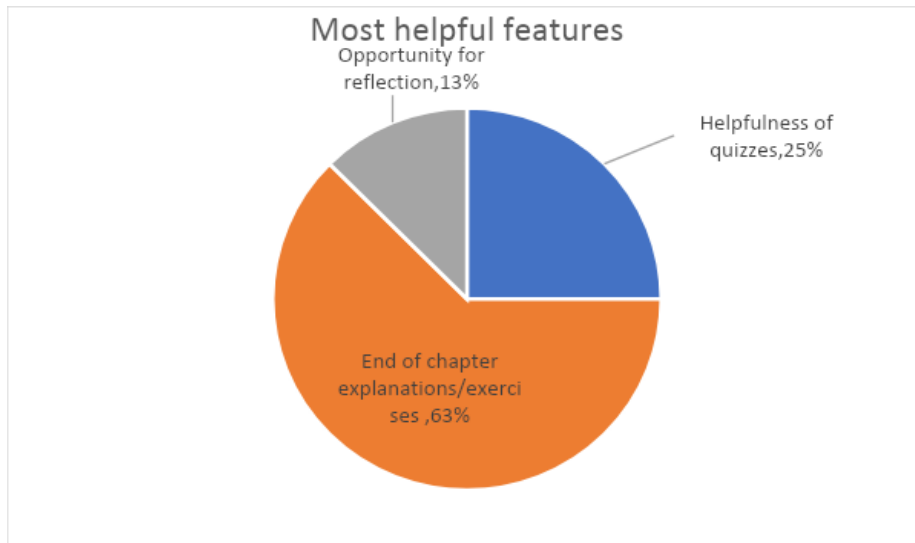
Figure C9: The content and information was clear and easy to understand. (Y/N)



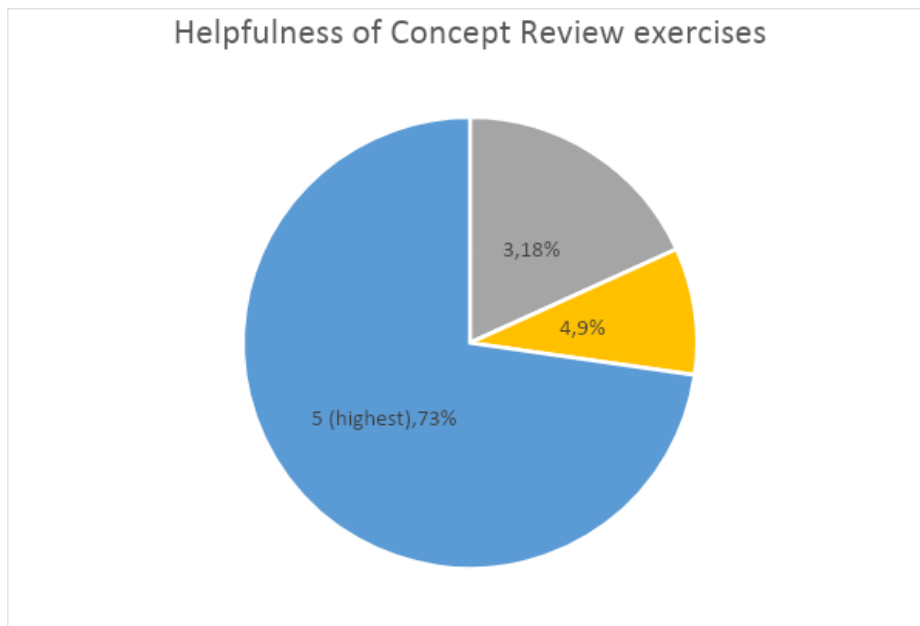
*Figure C10:* I found the auto-graded exercises at the end of many chapters easy to answer if I read/watched the material. (Y/N)



*Figure C11:* The explanations and definitions in the book were clear and helpful. (Y/N)



*Figure C12:* What features, if any, of *The Insiders* did you find the most helpful and/or easy to understand? (fill in the blank)



*Figure C13:* On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, please rate the helpfulness of the Concept Review Exercises, found at the end of many chapters in *The Insiders*. (Likert scale)

The two short answer questions to the survey can be found below:

1. What features, if any, of *The Insiders* did you find the least helpful and/or difficult to understand?
  - a. Eight students responded to this question.
  - b. None of them had any comments to share about what was least helpful.
2. What improvements, if any, could be made to *The Insiders*?
  - a. Two students responded to this question.
  - b. Comments included the consideration of grouping chapter sections together so as to not have to click through so many times to reload a new page, and to provide more information on some topics or videos for students who are visual learners.