It's Time to Add Human Voice to OERs

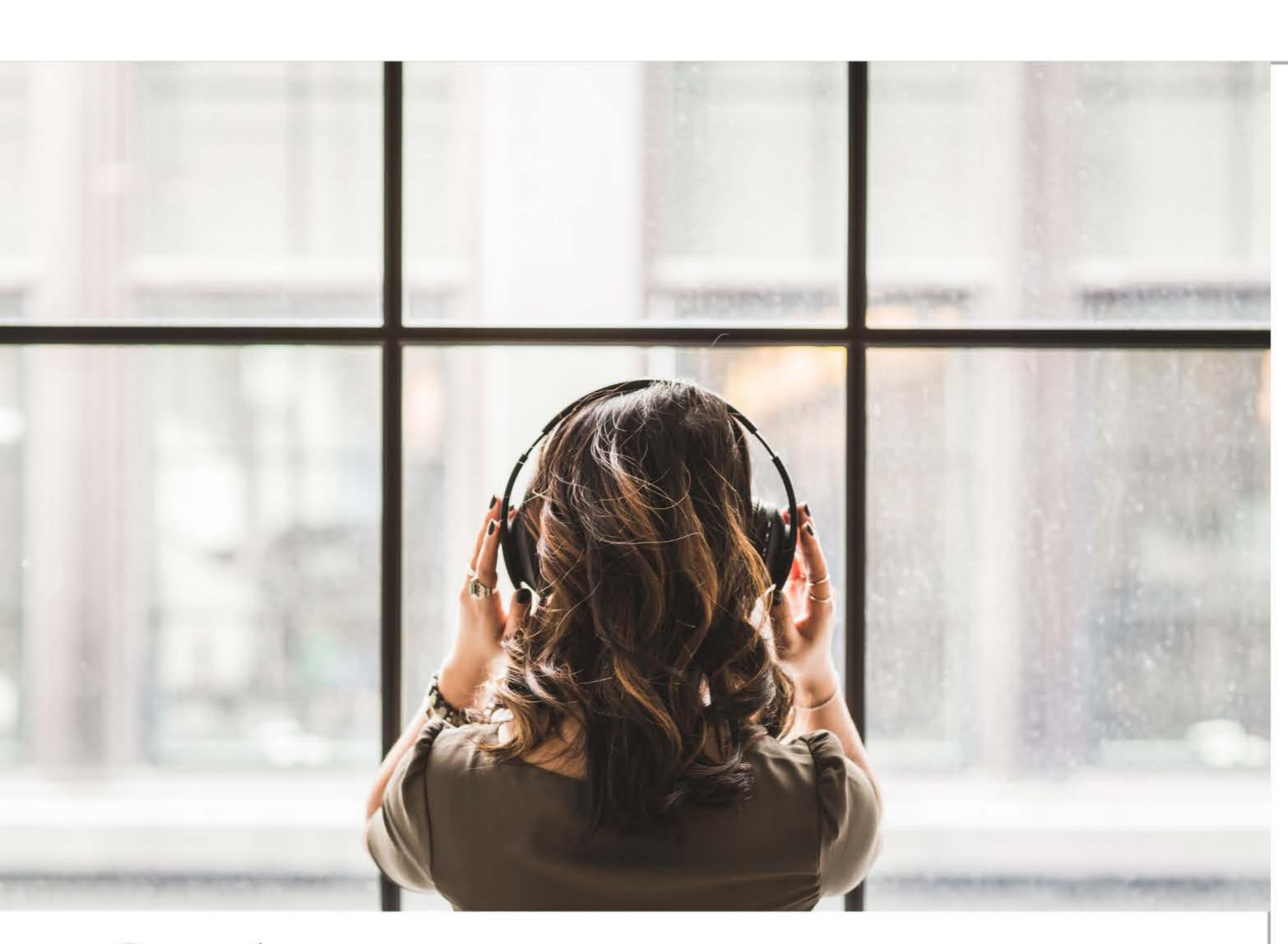Molly Wiant Cummins, Ph.D.
Melanie A. Mason, MS

A justification and feasibility study.
Exploring UDL rationale to initialize funding for human voice audio components to new OERs, sample budget, and creative ways to add post publication.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARLINGTON

Audio Poster Presentation

01. Overview

Dr. Cummins has spearheaded the adoption of an OER text (*Exploring Public Speaking*, Fourth Edition, Tucker et al., 2020) in the University of Texas Arlington's COMS 1301: Fundamentals of Public Speaking multi-section course in the Communication Department. As both Professors Cummins and Mason share a background in speech performance and oral interpretation, we intend to explore the feasibility of adding a human audio (voice) exponent to accompany this OER text, specifically, and the importance of this addition to OERs in general.

02. Current Practices

Current OER providers, such as *OpenStax,* encourage readers to use AI driven text-to-speech programs. While these are becoming more common place (even Google has a Chrome extension), this ultimately puts the burden of accessibility on the user - i.e., to find an appropriate program that is compatible, and then to download and implement.

Related Literature & Sample Budget

It's time to add Human Voice to OERs's supporting literature

UT Arlington respectfully acknowledges the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes upon whose historical homelands this university is located. We recognize the historical presence of the Caddo Nation and other Tribal Nations in the region.

03. Adding Human Voice

Creators of Universal Design for Learning, Meyer et al. (2014), suggest, "Providing content in multiple media supports those who require it (essential for some) but also supplies a rich cognitive learning environment where varied options and interactivity create a more nuanced experience, enabling learners to explore the content from multiple points of view (good for all)" (p. 54). With this focus, we recommend adding audio versions of chapters of textbooks used in classes, especially OERs, which are often already more interactive. Studies indicate that synthetic voices require a higher cognitive load from listeners because it lacks what a human voice can encode: imagery and engagement (Rodero & Lucas, p. 5). As a result, OER texts with human voice audio components create a more effective learning experience.

04. Barriers

- Length of textbook for recording
- Time for production of audio recordings
- Cost for production
- Frequent OER updates where recordings cannot change as quickly
- Continually developing AI capabilities overshadowing current need

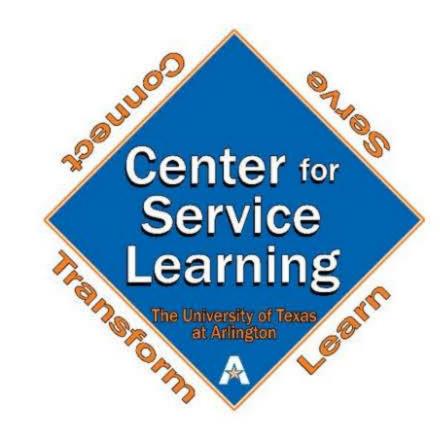## 05. Creative Solutions

Start Small

Summarize chapter for foundational concepts rather than a word-for-word recording.

Service Learning

Center for Service Learning — Connect Serve Transform Learn — The University of Texas at Arlington

Work with students to record chapters (e.g., Theatre or Broadcasting students). Use alternative platforms like YouTube or Spotify to host audio.
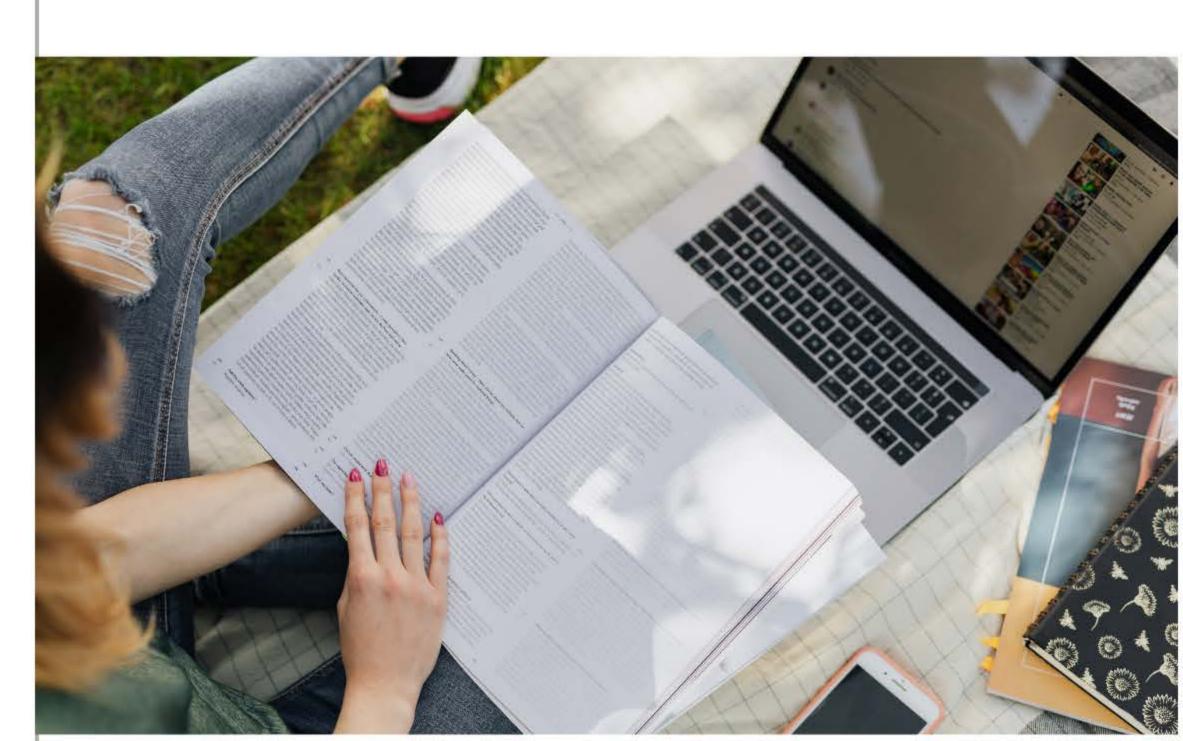
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Consider brevity in length of textbook chapters (as author or adopter).

06. Conclusion

Based on the benefits of human audio and a UDL approach to the classroom, we encourage those developing OERs to build audio components into their budgets and for those utilizing OERs to creatively work to add human audio.