**Affordable Learning Georgia Affordable Materials Grants  
Continuous Improvement Grants Final Report**

*(or Mini-Grants, for R17 and earlier)*

# General Information

Date: 12/15/2024

Grant Round: 24

Grant Number: M253

Institution Name(s): University of West Georgia

Team Members (Name, Title, Department, Institutions if different, and email address for each): Maggiano, Isabel, PhD ([imaggian@westa.edu](mailto:imaggian@westa.edu)), Senior Lecturer, and Maggiano, Corey, PhD ([cmaggian@westga.edu](mailto:cmaggian@westga.edu)), Associate Professor, Anthropology Program, School of Social Sciences, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

Project Lead: Isabel Maggiano

Course Name(s) and Course Numbers: Anth 1105 Introduction to Biological Anthropology

Final Semester of Project: Fall 2024

***If applicable to your project:***

Average Number of Students Per Course Section: 35

Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources: 6

Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources: ~150

# Project Narrative

*Describe the course of your revision or ancillary creation project, including*

* *A summary of your project’s purpose, plan, and timeline.*

This improvement grant was received to revise Anth 1105 Intro to Physical Anthropology (renamed to Anth 1105 Intro to Biological Anthropology in Spring 2024) and to implement the second edition of the previously used OER textbook *Explorations: An open invitation to Biological Anthropology*. This OER was first published in 2019 and implemented by us through the support of a Georgia Affordable Textbook Grant in 2020. The second edition was published in 2023, with a new much-needed emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, accessibility, as well as primate conservation and welfare.

Our implementation plan included the following elements:

* Create new student assignments, update test banks and exams, quizzes, reading responses, discussion assignments and activity assignments with the 2nd edition.
* Increase student success through reading accountability and provide land-marks for student progress that incorporate the text.
* Create a lab section for Anth 1105 Intro to Biological Anthropology using the growing number of ancillary labs attached to the OER.
* Use both the OER book and the labs for activities during lab meetings and for outreach purposes.
* Assess the effectiveness of our Transformation Plan through Qualitative and Quantitative means (textbook survey, GEAC Core Assessment data).
* Further increase the class’s enrollment and retention by easing students’ financial burden.

Implementation began in Spring 2024 during which one of us (Dr. Corey Maggiano) was unexpectedly granted a research leave semester, slightly impacting our progress and our student numbers (his Spring semester sections were taught by adjunct faculty with a different course design and textbook choice). Implementation was nevertheless successfully completed in a timely manner. Our goal was to complete the revision of all course materials first which continued through the summer and fall 2024 and then add additional assessment tools, such as the textbook satisfaction survey.

* *The original works which were revised or added to, with links. For example, if you revised an open textbook, give the title, author, and link.*

*n/a*

* *A narrative description of how the project’s plan was carried out.*

Between the first and second edition the textbook had undergone significantly changes. ***Aligning our course materials with the new textbook edition*** was therefore a considerable effort and greater time investment than anticipated. We are excited though to have made these changes successfully, as we think it was a considerable improvement. Our course lecture notes are now much more consistent, concise, and designed more learner-friendly. Alignment is improved of all elements of the course, including textbook, lectures, and assignments. One major aspect of this transition was also a complete redo of our test bank and a redesign of all associated quizzes and exams, a considerable effort.

The 2nd edition of the OER also includes many ideas for hands-on activity/lab assignments. During the last year, we were able to make ample use of those, in several different ways:

1. We used OER activities to re-designed Activity Assignments for the class. These now include reading landmarks to actively support student’s engagement with the text.
2. We used the OER activities to support the development of ***two new Cornerstone/First Year Seminar-classes***. One was taught in Fall 2023 (“Life and Death of Primates (and YOU)”) and another in Fall 2024 (“Monkeying Around”), a course centered around primatology. Students find in-class activities engaging and enjoy these experiential learning experiences. Cornerstone course preps were also used as a path for the development of a 1-credit hour ***lab section for Anth 1105***. A proposal for this lab section (Anth 1105L Introduction to Biological Anthropology Lab) to be included in the Core/IMPACTS was submitted and approved.
3. Numerous activities offered through the OER were used during bi-weekly lab meetings to ***support lab outreach and student engagement***. One of the OER lab activities, the Paleofeast, was particularly a success. We cooked pre-agricultural food on an open fire on campus with students and faculty. This event is now part of our lab’s yearly events list. The menu this year included frog legs, quail, acorn pancakes, ostrich egg, water bugs, and more.

Of the list above, our most impactful achievement was the ***submission and approval of Anth 1105L as a STEM Impacts course***, a 1-credit hour lab course that not only moves this course from a non-science major STEM Impacts course to one eligible for both, non-science and science majors, but also elevates our student’s learning experience to an experiential hands-on approach. This new lab course perfectly aligns with our institution’s QEP Career Readiness through Experiential Learning trajectory and will help transform learning experiences and student success at our institution. Our proposal took slightly longer than expected for final approval, but, as of December 2024, the course is fully implemented and is scheduled at our institution for the first time in summer 2025. Course design will heavily lean on the activities offered through the OER and are planned to be offered as both, online and face-to-face lab options, to accommodate as many students as possible.

Not only are we hoping for increased enrollment in courses, but also ***more student interest and exposure to our BAFAL lab*** (Biological and Forensic Anthropology Lab). This is especially important as we have a growing interdisciplinary student body participating in our meetings and lab activities due to an increased interest in our Undergraduate Certificate in Forensic Science and a more recently developed Interdisciplinary Pathway in Forensic Science and Investigation. Greater exposure to Biological and Forensic Anthropology topics at the entry level is expected to bring students to us as freshmen or sophomores rather than during their more advanced years, and to better serve student success through exposure to useful scientific methodology, practical skills, and themes of adaptive diversity and common origins for humanity.

To quantitively assess the influence of this new, more concise textbook edition on ***student success***, we used the ***GEAC assessment tool*** for this course. Scores were compared from before and after the implementation of the new textbook edition and the redesign of the course materials. This assessment tool is a cumulative quiz (11 multiple choice questions) that students take at the end of the semester as a graded online assignment. We are happy to report that between 2023 and 2024 student assessment scores significantly increased (see table 1 below) with an overall improvement of scores of 25%. This data clearly suggests that the implementation of the second edition of the textbook and the revision of our course materials have had a significant positive impact on our student’s learning experience and their success in this class. That said, we are cautious not to overinterpret this data as some improvement of student scores may also results from the introduction of AI tools within the same time frame. Since students take this assessment quiz online, it is not impossible that they may have found ways to consult AI tools to increase their scores.

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| TABLE 1: GEAC Assessment Quiz Scores for 1105 Introduction to Biological Anthropology | | |
| Year | 2023 | 2024 |
| N | 204 | 139 |
| Mean Student Score | 66% | 85% |
| % Difference |  | **25%** |

In addition to assessing students learning success, we also reinstated a **Textbook Satisfaction Survey** that was implemented first during our initial Textbook Transformation Grant in 2020. From this textbook survey, we learned once again how valuable OERs are to the students. Students reported their familiarity with online textbooks (96%) as well as their continued concern with increased textbook costs, both making OERs an attractive option. 64% reported they often don’t buy a textbook if purchasing is required. We are especially happy to note that 67% of our students rated this textbook better than other online textbooks they have used before, 35% of them were neutral about it and no student disagreed, many of them made ample use of the text throughout the course and took their own notes while reading, used the online ancillary materials offered through the book as well as the many links each chapter offers students to deepen their interest. The majority of them (79%) also noticed that in-class lecture notes provided by instructors and textbook chapters were well-aligned resulting in an overall positive learning experience.

Selected quotes from students also sum up the overall positive experience with this OER, both from a student and instructor perspective:

*“I actually really liked the textbook for your class. I thought it went in to just enough extra detail on the topics where it helped the information stick better in my memory. I also enjoyed the resources they had at the end of chapters that led to other sources like videos or websites. That helped for sure with the topics I felt like I was struggling with when I could follow those links and find either more information or even just the same information but worded differently. There were a few chapters that seemed a lot longer than the others and were harder to get through, but a majority of them were not an issue for me. The only thing that bothered me about the book is that it would sometimes not let me click on the highlighted terms to see their definitions. That feature only worked about half the time for me, and It had issues on both my laptop and my tablet, so I have no clue what was causing the issue.”*

*“I, personally, felt that it was a phenomenal work! I can't say I have much in the way of criticism or feedback; I simply felt that it reinforced my own understanding of the material. I did, in fact, make ample use of the text over the course of the semester. I was incredibly grateful for it being free and, with regards to accessibility, found that the format was easily read and parsed. A digital textbook which costs as little as possible is ideal in the minds of the majority of college students.”*

* *Lessons learned, including anything you would do differently next time.*

Several lessons were learned during this textbook transformation, one of them simply that it is a considerable effort to revise a course, even shifting from one edition to another. This being said, we are incredibly thankful for the support we have received twice now from Georgia Affordable Learning. We are clearly seeing the multifold positive change this transformation has brought to our students and to us as instructors and are especially thankful for the different ways we were able to take advantage of this OER. It has, multifold, transformed the way we introduce and expose students to topics in Biological Anthropology.

# Materials Description

*Describe all the materials you have created or revised as part of this project. These descriptions may be used in the* [OpenALG](https://alg.manifoldapp.org/) *repository description field. Include the* [*open license your materials will be shared under*](https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/)*—for most materials, this will be an Attribution 4.0 License (CC BY) as required in the Grants Request for Proposals.*

# Materials Links

*If you are hosting your materials in places other than OpenALG, please provide these links in this section. Otherwise, leave blank. Note: we cannot access D2L or Canvas links.*

# Future Plans

* *Describe any planned or actual papers, presentations, publications, or other professional activities that you expect to produce that reflect your work on this project.*
* *Describe any plans to revise or add to these materials in the future.*

Despite the struggles of the last years due to a pandemic and enrollment drop, this course has had a stable number of students and sections. Since the introduction of the OER, some of our students have stated that an OER is a reason for them to pick a course, which is great. Others have shared that the accessibility of the text is almost as important to them as the cost savings. We are excited about the diverse approaches we have taken since the first implementation of this OER, including curricular changes with several Cornerstone courses and the development of a new course (Anth 1105L), and the numerous ways activities have been incorporated into student outreach activities. Overall, the positive impact this OER has had on our students, program, and lab cannot be overstated. It is an important part of the reason we see an increased interest and excitement about Biological Anthropology at our institution. The diverse impact also aligns with the current UWG QEP plan and a focus on career readiness through experiential learning at our institution, and will support our efforts towards building hands-on learning experiences and increasing student success. We are now in full swing preparing our newly approved Lab section for this course for which we will again heavily lean on this OER.