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

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

# General Information

Date: June 16, 2025.

Grant Round: 24

Grant Number: 49257

Institution Name(s): University of North Georgia

Team Members:

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Course Name(s) and Course Numbers: World History 1, HIST 1111

Final Semester of Project: Spring 2025

# Project Narrative

## Project Overview

## This project remediated the widely-adopted OER textbook *World History: Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500* (UNG Press, 2016) into a freely available, accessible audiobook. The goals were to enhance accessibility for students with visual and print-processing disabilities, promote multimodal engagement, and expand the reach and pedagogical utility of an already top-performing OER in the OpenALG Learning Materials repository.

The original open textbook (edited by Eugene Berger et al.) is available at: https://ung.edu/university-press/books/world-history.php.

## Project Purpose, Plan, and Timeline

## The project aimed to convert the textbook into a high-quality, CC-BY licensed audiobook using human narration. By the end of the project, however, it developed into an audiobook using a blend of human narration, artificial voice replication (AVR), and AI-generated speech synthesis. Development followed a structured timeline from Summer 2024 through Spring 2025, including planning, script conversion, narration, editing, mastering, and repository upload.

The team first developed narration-ready scripts by removing visual references or replacing them with image descriptions, highlighting difficult or non-English terms, creating phonetic guides for human narrators, and preparing clean script formats suitable for AI narration tools.

Narration was completed using both human and AI-generated methods. The editing team then used Speechify Voiceover Studio and Audacity to fine-tune pronunciation, pacing, pauses, and sound quality. The final deliverables included complete audio files for Chapters 1 through 12, each formatted and edited for upload into the OpenALG repository.

## Process and Implementation

### Human vs. AI Narration

### Chapters 1 and 2 were produced using only human narration. While this method offered the most natural and engaging listening experience, it was also the most time-intensive. For instance, Chapter 1 required approximately 24 hours of production time to generate just 71 minutes of audio. To improve efficiency, subsequent chapters were created using a combination of human narration and AI-generated voice tools, including AVR. This hybrid approach significantly accelerated production while maintaining clarity and listener engagement. All chapters were ultimately finalized using Speechify’s AVR and integrated AI narration features.

### The most effective workflow used AI narration paired with advanced editing features, which enabled real-time adjustments to pronunciation, pacing, and tone. However, challenges arose, including periodic audio corruption in Speechify and inconsistent pronunciation accuracy, both of which necessitated manual review and correction to ensure quality.

### Editing and Post-Production

Audacity was used for trimming silences and addressing pacing issues throughout the audiobook files. It was also employed to correct audio distortions, ensuring the narration maintained clarity and consistency. Mastering effects were applied within Audacity to meet the technical benchmarks outlined in ACX standards, even though current ACX policy does not accept AI-narrated content. Additionally, noise floor levels were raised by integrating a standardized room tone track across all chapters, addressing ACX compliance concerns and enhancing listener comfort.

### Key Lessons Learned

## AI tools significantly reduced production time compared to human narration, making future OER audiobook development more sustainable. Careful formatting and consistent script preparation—particularly the inclusion of image descriptions and pronunciation guides—proved essential in minimizing downstream editing. However, audio mastering required deliberate planning, as ACX compliance remains a valuable quality benchmark even for non-commercial audiobooks.

## The team encountered instability within Speechify, including file corruption and unexpected crashes, which highlighted the importance of regular exports and a modular workflow. Segmenting AI-generated audio into smaller sections helped prevent corruption and preserved production progress.

## Throughout, human oversight remained essential to ensure the final product was both listenable and accessible.

# 2. Materials Description

The *World History I* audiobook comprises 12 chapter-length MP3 files, each aligned with the corresponding textbook section. These materials were created from the original textbook content, refined for narration, and embedded with phonetic and accessibility markup.

Each file features:

* Accurate, accessible narration via a combination of human, AVR, and AI narration
* Image description placeholders or embedded narrations
* Pacing and pauses reflecting sentence and paragraph structures
* Consistent pronunciation through integrated phonetic guides

All files are available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

# 3. 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.*

# 4. Future Plans

The team plans to:

* Give a presentation at OpenEd2025, as Joshua Lann submitted a successful presentation proposal
* Submit presentations on the project to the USG Teaching & Learning Conference
* Publish an article tracking the professional skills acquired by the student assistant during the project, exemplifying open pedagogical principles and effects
* Expand this model to additional OER titles published by UNG Press, with consideration for accessibility updates, narrator enhancements, and metadata refinements
* Continue refining our AI prompts and editing tools to streamline production workflows
* Create reusable intern training modules focused on accessible digital publishing and AI narration tools

# ***Acknowledgments***

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