Affordable Learning Georgia Affordable Materials Grants  
Transformation Grants Final Report

**Date:** 6 January 2026

**Grant Round:** 26

**Grant Number:** 739

**Institution Name**: University of Georgia

**Project Lead:**

Teena Wilhelm, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, [twilhelm@uga.edu](mailto:twilhelm@uga.edu)

**Team Members:**

Garrett VandeKamp, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, [garrettvandekamp@uga.edu](mailto:garrettvandekamp@uga.edu)

Elizabeth White, Humanities and Social Science Librarian, [elizabethwhite@uga.edu](mailto:elizabethwhite@uga.edu)

**Course Name/ Number:**

POLS 4710 Constitutional Law: Civil Liberties

**Semester Project Began:** Spring 2025

**Final Semester of Implementation:** Fall 2025

**Total Number of Students Affected During Project:** 44 enrolled students, 36 completed the course

# Narrative

The main goal for this project was to reduce student expenditures without reducing the quality of information and material delivered in the course. In terms of outcomes:

* We replaced an expensive legal textbook with high quality, open access resources.
* We created an integrated platform of accessible legal material for enrolled students.
* Students became acquainted with reputable sources of legal and historical information in the course curriculum.
* Students developed better discernment for high-quality information.

Overall, we accomplished the goals for this project and have developed a replacement information source for course material. As a textbook will no longer be required in this course, students will not incur additional educational expenses upon enrollment. In terms of challenges, moving away from a legal textbook required some instructional accommodation for the learning curve that students experienced while becoming acquainted with primary legal source material.

Overall, course instruction was positively shaped by the course transition. Prior to the implementation of the course transformation, we did not know whether students were up to the task of using primary source materials. We also did not know if they would consistently go to linked websites for required reading assignments. Overall, there was uncertainty as to whether students could succeed without being “spoon fed” information from a carefully edited legal textbook. We were pleasantly surprised that students not only rose to the task but performed as well as students who took the course prior to transformation.

* 1. *Lessons Learned*

One of the main lessons we learned is that students do benefit from a singular source for assigned reading material, and that there is a participation cost associated with assigning multiple sources of information. While the course transformation did create a single online source for assigned reading material, it consisted of a compilation of linked websites. This meant that students were ultimately required to take an extra step (after logging into the online platform) of clicking on linked materials. This may seem like a small thing, but this is one additional step beyond opening a textbook and some students were deterred by the extra step. While we will not do anything different next time, it will be important to incorporate a consistent message throughout the semester related to ongoing expectations for assigned reading.

Another lesson we learned is that students (especially pre-law undergraduates) are eager to learn how to do legal research with online databases, since they know it will benefit them in a law school setting. However, their understanding of case law develops slower using this method as a direct consequence of differences between the two types of information sources. Online legal databases contain more unedited case information, while textbooks contain “edited-for-clarity” case information. The takeaway is that students this semester learned about the course subject matter (constitutional law) as they *simultaneously* learned how to discern information from primary sources. Ultimately, students who participated in the transformed course curriculum developed an analytical skillset that previous students may not have.

* 1. *Materials created/ revised to be shared*

In the course redesign, we used UGA’s eLC online platform to integrate OER resources for course curriculum. The course map on eLC includes links to OER resources specific to designated topics and designated assignments. Rather than follow a syllabus for a general semester plan, students follow the eLC integrated course experience. The links provide access to reputable information repositories related to U.S. constitutional law, and American history and politics. Some examples of these include:

* Justia U.S. Supreme Court center (supreme.justia.com)
* Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University (firstamendment.mtsu.edu)
* National Constitution Center (constitutioncenter.org)
* ACLU (aclu.org)
* History Channel (history.com)
* Pew Research Center (pewresearch.org)
* Annenberg Classroom (annenbergclassroom.org)
* SCOTUSblog (scotusblog.com)
* Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute (law.cornell.edu)

A compilation of more specific information links is included at the end of this report. This material will be shared by Affordable Learning Georgia on its website and licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

# Quotes

Student quotes are from end of semester (anonymous) course evaluations in a section that allows open-ended comments.

* Dr. Wilhelm is a remarkable professor and made an interesting topic into an incredibly interesting course. Her lectures were varied in style and content, and included discussions to encourage individual critical thinking. All of the readings were made available on eLC so students did not have to pay for external course materials. The outside reading assignments required us to think critically about the reasoning and history behind modern-day political issues. Overall, this was very engaging, and I appreciated the presentation of course material.
* I really enjoyed the resources provided (the websites on eLC) as opposed to a textbook; I think it was a lot of the same information, but in a more accessible and digestible way. I think all of the assignments in the course were tailored to what we were learning and furthered our understanding, and I think the course was organized very well.
* This course and Professor Wilhelm have been one of my favorites from my time at UGA. As an individual who wants to pursue law after undergrad, this course provided vital information in a way that will be taught at the law school level. I am happy to get an upper hand is developing this skillset.

# Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

## Uniform Measurements Questions

**Student Opinion of Materials**

**Was the overall student opinion about the materials used in the course positive, neutral, or negative?**

Total number of students affected in this project: 44 (39 responded to survey)

* Positive: 95 % of 39 respondents
* Neutral: 5 % of 39 respondents
* Negative: 0 % of 39 respondents

**Student Learning Outcomes and Grades**

**Was the overall comparative impact on student performance in terms of learning outcomes and grades in the semester(s) of implementation over previous semesters positive, neutral, or negative?**

Neutral: Same performance outcomes over previous semester(s)

**Student Drop/Fail/Withdraw (DFW) Rates**

**Was the overall comparative impact on Drop/Fail/Withdraw (DFW) rates in the semester(s) of implementation over previous semesters positive, neutral, or negative?**

18 % of students, out of a total 44 students affected, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the final semester of implementation.

Neutral: This is the same percentage of students with D/F/W than previous semester(s)

## Measures Narrative

* *Course level retention (pre- and post-transformation DFW comparison)*

The student withdrawal rate for Wihelm’s POLS 4710 since 2021 is as follows:

2025- 8 of 44 enrolled students withdrew (18 %)

2024- 4 of 44 enrolled students withdrew (9 %)

2023- 7 of 40 enrolled students withdrew (18 %)

2021- 8 of 45 enrolled students withdrew (18 %)

Based on this historical trend, the withdrawal rate seems relatively unimpacted by the course transformation. Supporting data for these calculations are included as a separate file.

* *Average GPA*

The average course GPA of students in Wilhelm’s POLS 4710 since 2021 is as follows:

2025- 89%

2024- 89%

2023- 86%

2021- 89%

The figures below show final calculated grade statistics for each semester, as well as the grade distribution for each semester. Supporting data for these calculations are included as a separate file.

A screenshot of a graph

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Figure 1: Final grade statistics for POLS 4710, Fall 2025**

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Figure 2: Final grade statistics for POLS 4710, Fall 2024**

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Figure 3: Final grade statistics for POLS 4710, Fall 2023**

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**Figure 4: Final grade statistics for POLS 4710, Fall 2021**

Based on this historical trend, the course GPA seems virtually unimpacted by the course transformation.

* *Surveys, interviews, and other qualitative measures*

Students were administered an end-of-semester course evaluation that posed the following question:

“Course materials were useful for helping me learn.”

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided/ Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

The figure shown below illustrates the distribution of responses from this survey question. Supporting data for these calculations are included as a separate file.

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Figure 5: End-of-semester course evaluation results for “course material” question**

Results from this survey indicate that 95% of students strongly agree or agree that course materials were useful for learning, while 5% are undecided/ neutral. No students thought that course materials were unhelpful for learning.

While the original proposal outlined a pre/ post test on information literacy that would be administered to students enrolled in the course, we were unable to conduct these and thus have no results to report.

# Sustainability Plan

Given that this course is taught every semester at UGA by instructors in our department, the maintenance and updating of course materials will be an ongoing process. Our commitment to choosing high-quality resources for legal information makes this intuitive, as we will select only sources that are committed to maintaining the integrity of their information. Moreover, course material will be updated yearly to account for the new U.S. Supreme Court cases heard every year. Finally, the changing nature of U.S. politics and current events necessitates a yearly evaluation of content in these courses.

The School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) and the Department of Political Science provide broad discretion to its instructors in choosing course materials that fit curriculum needs. As long as materials support the chosen pedagogy of the instructors, both will support the continued use of affordable materials in this course. The University of Georgia has a commitment to affordable course materials, as it emphasizes the connection between affordable materials and improved student performance, as well as reduced costs. The redesigned course has been identified as a low-cost/ no-cost course and given this designation. For more information, see <https://provost.uga.edu/academic-excellence/initiatives/affordable-course-materials-grant/> and <https://reg.uga.edu/faculty-and-staff/course-scheduling/no_cost_low_cost_courses/>.

# Future Affordable Materials Plans

We have several thoughts about the selection of learning materials in this and other courses we plan on teaching, based on the results of this course transformation experience.

First, we have concluded that courses in the pre-law curriculum in the UGA Political Science Department are well-suited for this kind of course transformation. As such, at least one team member will consider converting POLS 4700 Constitutional Law: Institutional Powers, POLS 4720: Criminal Procedure, and POLS 4800: Institutional Power in Historical Perspective.

Second, we have concluded that the transformed course is well-suited to share with instructors who teach this course who are not on the original grant team. At least one other instructor in the department, who was hired after the original transformation project began, is enthusiastic about using these newly compiled resources to transform their own version of the course.

# Future Scholarship Plans

At this time, we have no plans to analyze the results of the course transformation beyond the scope of this report.

# Description of Photograph (optional)

N/A