Affordable Learning Georgia Affordable Materials Grants  
Transformation Grants Final Report

*(or Textbook Transformation Grants, if R17 or earlier)*

Once you have completed this template, to submit your Final Report, go to the [Final Report submission](https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/xTCCvG) form.

The final report submission form allows you to submit the following:

* This completed narrative document (required)
* Syllabus or syllabi (required)

*If multiple files, compress into one .zip folder*

* Qualitative/Quantitative Measures data files (optional, as needed)

*If multiple files, compress into one .zip folder*

* Photo of your team or a class of your students for future ALG promotions (optional)
* Invoice for the second half of the grant’s award amount (optional)

Follow the instructions on the webpage for uploading your documents. Based on receipt of this report, ALG will process the final payment for your grant. ALG will follow up in the future with post-project grantee surveys and may also request your participation in a publication, presentation, or other event.

# General Information

**Date:** 12/17/25

**Grant Round:** 26

**Grant Number:** 729

**Institution Name(s):** University of West Georgia

**Project Lead:** Toni Franklin, Associate Professor, Department of Special Education

**Team Members (Name, Title, Department, Institutions if different, and email address for each):**

Trina Wood- Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, [twood@westga.edu](mailto:twood@westga.edu)

Rebeca Peacock, Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Technology and Foundations, [rpeacock@westga.edu](mailto:rpeacock@westga.edu)

Ashley Sutton- Lecturer, Department of Special Education, [alsutton@westga.edu](mailto:alsutton@westga.edu)

**Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:**

SPED 4709: Ethics Policies &Procedures in Special Education

SPED 6709: Regulations and Requirements in Special Education

**Semester Project Began:** Spring 2025

**Final Semester of Implementation:** Fall 2025

**Total Number of Students Affected During Project:** 83

# Narrative

**A. Key Outcomes and Transformative Impacts**

The courses selected for this project, SPED 4709 (undergraduate) and SPED 6709 (graduate), are taken early in the Special Education teacher preparation program and serve as foundational courses introducing students to the field of special education and the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. A central responsibility of special education teachers is ensuring compliance with federal and state special education laws while protecting the rights of students with disabilities and their families. However, this content can be challenging for students, as it is rule-heavy, terminology-dense, and often unfamiliar.

To address these challenges, we chose to replace traditional textbook-based instruction with open-access, interactive learning modules. Rather than passively reading a textbook, students engage with structured modules that integrate readings, embedded documents, and interactive elements. The modules are publicly housed in a LibGuide on the University of West Georgia Library website, allowing students to access the materials both during the course and later in their professional practice.

Initially, each module incorporated direct links to resources hosted on the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) websites. This design choice was intentional: we wanted students to understand the real-world relevance of course concepts and become familiar with navigating the agencies they will rely on as practicing special education teachers.

The learning materials and links were prepared prior to the start of Fall 2025, and we proceeded with piloting the modules even though some interactive elements were still under development. As the semester progressed, however, we encountered an unexpected and significant challenge. Many GaDOE and USDOE resources that were openly available at the time of collection were either moved behind password-protected systems or removed entirely. While we anticipated routine link updates, we did not anticipate the speed or extent of these changes.

As a result, we were required to pivot mid-semester. This involved locating relocated documents when possible, identifying alternative open-access sources when documents were no longer available, and redesigning several interactive elements to align with the revised materials. In many cases, we downloaded openly available documents and embedded them directly into the modules rather than linking to external sites, improving long-term access and stability.

Despite these challenges, the overall experience was highly positive. The project transformed my instruction by shifting course delivery from a textbook-dependent model to a practice-oriented, resource-based approach. Instructional time was no longer dominated by explaining dense legal terminology in isolation; instead, students learned concepts through direct interaction with authentic documents and tools.

For students, the impact was immediate and meaningful. Students consistently reported increased engagement with the content, appreciation for not having to purchase an expensive textbook, and greater confidence navigating special education resources. Many noted that the modules felt more relevant and applicable than traditional readings because they reflected the types of materials they will encounter in professional practice. Importantly, students now leave the course with a set of vetted, reusable resources they can return to during field placements and in their own classrooms.

An additional positive outcome was the broader departmental impact. After seeing the completed modules, several faculty members expressed renewed excitement about their own courses and sought guidance from members of the grant team on transitioning to textbook-free or low-cost course designs, extending the impact of this project beyond the two funded courses.

**B. Lessons Learned**

One of the primary reasons we chose to transform SPED 4709 and SPED 6709 into open-access courses was our recognition that special education policy, guidance, and implementation practices change frequently. Traditional textbooks often take years to update, making it difficult for course materials to remain current. In contrast, an open-access, modular design allows instructors to update links and resources quickly, ensuring students engage with the most current information available.

While we anticipated that state and federal resources would be reorganized, archived, or relocated over time, we did not anticipate the complete removal of key documents from publicly accessible websites. The speed and extent with which information from the Georgia Department of Education and U.S. Department of Education websites disappeared fundamentally changed how we had to approach course design and resource management. Rather than simply updating links, we were required to locate alternative open-access sources, recover relocated materials when possible, and, in some cases, redesign interactive elements entirely to align with newly identified resources.

This experience highlighted that open access alone does not guarantee long-term availability. As a result, our approach shifted from relying primarily on external links to prioritizing the local hosting of openly licensed documents whenever possible. Moving forward, we would build sustainability into the design process from the outset by downloading, archiving, and embedding open-access materials and by creating interactive elements that can be easily adapted if source content changes or disappears.

**C. Materials Created and Open Licensing**

Through this project, we developed a series of open-access, interactive learning modules for SPED 4709 and SPED 6709 focused on foundational topics in special education, including legal frameworks, roles and responsibilities, and compliance-related practices.

It is important to note that the only original materials created specifically for this project were the instructional scenarios used within the interactive elements. All other course materials were compiled, curated, and remixed from existing open-access sources, including openly licensed textbooks, special education technical assistance websites, and publicly available resources from the GaDOE and the USDOE. These materials were intentionally selected to provide students with authentic, practice-relevant resources they will encounter as professional educators.

The modules include curated readings, embedded documents, and interactive learning activities designed to promote active engagement and applied understanding rather than passive consumption of content. All materials are publicly available through a LibGuide hosted on the University of West Georgia Library website.

All original content created as part of this project, including the instructional scenarios and accompanying module structure, is shared under a Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA) license, consistent with the licensing requirements of the platform on which the materials are hosted and in alignment with Affordable Learning Georgia grant guidelines.

# Quotes

*“The online system is extremely user-friendly and I was able to navigate and find materials and resources easily.”*

*“There were a variety of source materials in this class, but they were all relevant.”*

*“The course readings, especially those aligned with IDEA and Section 504, provided a strong legal foundation.”*

# Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

## Uniform Measurements Questions

*The following are uniform questions asked to all grant teams. Please answer these to the best of your knowledge.*

**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: **83**

* Positive: **86%** % of **71** of respondents
* Neutral: of **71** respondents
* Negative: **0%** % of **71** number of 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?**

*Student outcomes should be described in detail in Section 3b.*

Choose One:

* **\_\_\_ Positive: Higher performance outcomes measured over previous semester(s)**
* \_\_\_ Neutral: Same performance outcomes over previous semester(s)
* \_\_\_ Negative: Lower 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?**

*Depending on what you and your institution can measure, this may also be known as a drop/failure rate or a withdraw/failure rate.*

**2.4%** of students, out of a total **83** students affected, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the final semester of implementation.

Choose One:

* \_\_\_ Positive: This is a lower percentage of students with D/F/W than previous semester(s)
* **\_\_\_ Neutral: This is the same percentage of students with D/F/W than previous semester(s)**
* \_\_\_ Negative: This is a higher percentage of students with D/F/W than previous semester(s)

## Measures Narrative

The data used to evaluate the impact of the textbook transformation for SPED 4709 and SPED 6709 on student success and student experience were collected from student course evaluations, enrollment and completion records, and qualitative feedback from students and advisory board members. A total of 83 students were affected by this project across three sections of SPED 6709 and one section of SPED 4709.

**Student Satisfaction with Course Materials**

Student satisfaction data were drawn from end-of-course evaluations. In response to the item, *“Required course texts and/or materials helped me understand the subject matter,”* the mean score across all four sections was 4.7 out of 5.0, indicating a very high level of satisfaction with the open-access materials. Indicating a positive impact on students’ perceptions of course quality and usability.

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

The DFW rate was neutral when compared to previous semesters, indicating that while the textbook transformation did not reduce DFW rates, it also did not negatively impact student retention or completion during the semester that involved significant mid-course material revisions.

**Student Feedback on Materials and Learning Experience**

Students consistently emphasized the accessibility, relevance, and usability of the open-access materials. Students valued both the breadth of resources and their direct alignment with professional practice, particularly legal and compliance-related content.

Representative comments include:

* *“I like that it was all available electronically.”*
* *“The online system is extremely user-friendly and I was able to navigate and find materials and resources easily.”*
* *“There were a variety of source materials in this class, but they were all relevant.”*
* *“There was not one resource provided that was not helpful. I am amazed at the amount of information available.”*
* *“The course readings, especially those aligned with IDEA and Section 504, provided a strong legal foundation.”*

**Faculty and Advisory Board Feedback**

Qualitative feedback was also gathered from members of the Special Education Advisory Board. Due to last-minute changes required to repair broken links in the LibGuide, only two modules were fully functional at the time of the advisory board meeting. As a result, formal survey data collection was limited; however, an unstructured focus group discussion occurred during the meeting.

Advisory board members provided the following feedback:

* *“I’m going to share the link with the teachers at my school because this information and the resources are helpful for more than just new teachers.”*
* *“I love the idea of using information from the GaDOE because that is exactly what they are going to have to do when they become teachers.”*
* *“Every district does not use GoIEP, so you should include examples of what other IEP forms can look like.”*
* *“The cost of intro to SPED textbooks is ridiculous… the information from the GaDOE in these modules goes beyond just helping them pass the GACE test. It’s preparing them for real life in the classroom”*

**Co-Factors Influencing Outcomes**

Several co-factors may have influenced the outcomes reported above. Most notably, the unexpected removal of state and federal resources during the semester requiring extensive mid-course revisions to the LibGuide and interactive modules. These changes limited the ability to collect more robust pre/post comparison data and constrained formal advisory board survey completion. Despite these challenges, student satisfaction and performance outcomes remained positive, suggesting that the open-access, modular design helped buffer against instructional disruption.

# Sustainability Plan

The open-access materials developed through this project will continue to be used as core instructional resources in SPED 4709 and SPED 6709 and will be maintained through a publicly accessible LibGuide hosted by the University of West Georgia Library. Ongoing review and updates will be coordinated by the course instructor in collaboration with the library and special education faculty, with materials reviewed annually for alignment with current federal and state guidance. Based on lessons learned, sustainability efforts will prioritize local hosting of openly licensed documents rather than reliance on external links, reducing the risk of content loss as policies and websites change. The modular design and CC BY-NC-SA license support efficient updates, reuse, and adaptation by other faculty, ensuring the materials remain current, accessible, and sustainable over time.

# Future Affordable Materials Plans

This project has significantly influenced how I evaluate and select learning materials for both current and future courses. A broader goal of the UWG College of Education is to reduce the financial cost of teacher certification, and this project aligns directly with that priority. I plan to continue expanding textbook-free and no-cost course designs across additional special education courses, with the long-term goal of making as many required courses as possible accessible at no cost to students. Moving forward, affordability, adaptability, and sustainability will be central considerations in material selection, both in my own courses and in collaborative efforts with other faculty interested in transitioning to low- or no-cost instructional models.

# Future Scholarship Plans

The work completed through this project will inform several ongoing and planned scholarly and professional dissemination activities. The project team plans to present the course transformation process and outcomes at the Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), with a focus on open-access course design in special education teacher preparation.

In addition, the project will be shared with other Georgia institutions through participation in the CEEDAR Center Georgia State Leadership Team, providing an opportunity to disseminate effective strategies for developing sustainable, textbook-free courses aligned with state and federal expectations. At the institutional level, the process and lessons learned from this project will be shared with faculty within the College of Education who are interested in transitioning their courses to textbook-free or low-cost instructional models.

# Description of Photograph (optional)

*This is where a team can list the names of the people shown in this separately uploaded photograph, along with their roles, if applicable.*