**Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants**

**Final Report**

*To submit your Final Report, go to the Final Report submission page on the ALG website:* [*http://affordablelearninggeorgia.org/site/final\_report\_submission*](http://affordablelearninggeorgia.org/site/final_report_submission)

*Final report submission requires four files:*

* *This completed narrative document*
* *Syllabus or syllabi* 
  + *(if multiple files, compress into one .zip folder)*
* *Qualitative/Quantitative Measures data files* 
  + *(if multiple files, compress into one .zip folder)*
* *Photo of your team or a class of your students w/ at least one team member, minimum resolution 800x600px* 
  + *(nearly all smartphones take photos larger than this size by default)*

*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:** December 20, 20219

**Grant Round:** G2C Pilot (Summer 2018)

**Grant Number:** 374D

**Institution Name(s):** Gordon State College

**Project Lead:** J. Franklin Williamson

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

* Dr. J. Franklin Williamson, Assistant Professor of History, Department of Business, History, and Social Sciences, Gordon State College, [fwilliamson@gordonstate.edu](mailto:fwilliamson@gordonstate.edu)
* Dr. Thomas Aiello, Department Chair and Professor of History, Department of Business, History, and Social Sciences, [taiello@gordonstate.edu](mailto:taiello@gordonstate.edu)

**Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:** HIST 2111 (American History to 1865)

**Semester Project Began:** Summer 2018 (Began teaching the course in Fall 2018)

**Final Semester of Implementation:** Fall 2019

**Total Number of Students Affected During Project:** 100

# 1. Narrative

A. Describe the key outcomes, whether positive, negative, or interesting, of your project. Include:

* Summary of your transformation experience, including challenges and accomplishments
  + A recent article[[1]](#footnote-1) found that OER materials could help lower DFW rates by about 2-3%, and improve a number of other measure of student performance. The students in that study were at the University of Georgia, one of the state’s flagship schools, and were therefore among those students in Georgia who were most likely to be well-prepared for college academically, financially, socially, and in other ways. Our results here found largely the opposite: that students attending access institutions like Gordon State College, who come from high schools and social environments that do not always prepare them well for college-level work, will not necessarily be helped by the introduction of OER materials.
  + While OER materials do reduce the financial cost of attending college, this change alone seems unable to predict higher rates of successfully completing college course and graduating on time. Instead, we were surprised to find that the impact of OER materials on student success, while undeniably providing a financial benefit to the students, hangs in turn on other variables. These include (but are not limited to), access to technology, students’ level of preparation for- and commitment to succeeding in college-level courses, and students’ preference for printed materials in addition to electronic-only materials.
* Transformative impacts on your instruction
  + Despite the disappointing results detailed below, interest is high among faculty at our institution to continue experimenting with developing and introducing OER materials in a variety of History and Political Science courses, both online and face-to-face.
* Transformative impacts on your students and their performance
  + After studying the results below, we intend to make a few adjustments to course policies, in the hopes of improving student success while still using OER materials but with the realization that OER along will not benefit our students very much.

B. Describe lessons learned, including any things you would do differently next time.

* Beyond the general trends introduced above, and detailed below, there are a number of technical or procedural lessons learned.
  + One, though self-evident, is that having all materials available to students from day one is helpful. That is, limiting students’ abilities to work ahead of the due dates syllabus might only affect a handful of students who do want to work ahead but it is logistically much easier to release everything on the first day of the semester.
  + Another lesson is that LMS technical glitches are always frustrating but they are especially frustrating when they occur during the waning days of the semester. In this case, students had to complete a proctored exam but did so for the final exam. Problems with the proctoring service might convince us to allow students the choice of having a proctored midterm, instead of a final exam, so that technical problems can still be addressed before grades are due.

# 2. Quotes

* Provide three quotes from students evaluating their experience with the no-cost learning materials.
  + Student 1: “The OER textbook allowed me to go to the exact chapter and content in which I needed (sic). It was convenient because I could pull the information up on my phone or school computer without carrying a textbook. I found it to be better than a textbook all the resources are there (sic) and we could click on any highlighted area of information needed.”
  + Student 2: “It [the OER textbook] provided most of the information I needed for my paper and helped be prepare for my quizzes.”
  + Student 3: “I actually liked it [the OER textbook], however I wish it was a hard copy to actually write and take notes in. I liked it because it got straight to the point with terms and background info needed.”

# 3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

## 3a. 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: \_\_\_100\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Positive: \_\_\_3\_\_\_\_ % of \_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_ number of respondents[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Neutral: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ % of \_\_\_\_\_0\_\_ number of respondents
* Negative: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ % of \_\_\_\_0\_\_\_ 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)
* \_X\_\_ 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?**

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

\_\_\_42\_\_\_\_% of students, out of a total \_\_100\_\_\_\_\_ students affected, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the final semester of implementation.

Choose One:

* \_X\_\_ 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)

## 3b. Measures Narrative

*In this section, summarize the supporting impact data that you are submitting, including all quantitative and qualitative measures of impact on student success and experience. Include all measures as described in your proposal, along with any measures developed after the proposal submission.*

*[When submitting your final report, as noted above, you will also need to provide the separate file (or .zip with multiple files) of supporting data on the impact of your Textbook Transformation, such as surveys, analyzed data collected, etc.]*

* *Include measures such as:*
  + *Drop, fail, withdraw (DFW) delta rates*
    - We were surprised to see a less-than-impressive decline in DFW rates in our experimental sections of HIST 2111 (i.e. those using the OER text), compared to the control sections (i.e. historic data on the same course, when students used textbooks they had to purchase). Control DFW rates ranged from a high of 58.62% to a low of 24.24% with the average hovering in the 40% range. The first semester of our experiment brought DFWs to 38% but they subsequently rose back to around 50%.
    - When we compared the break-out results of first-generation students, under-represented-minority students, adult-learner students, and female students, we found similar patterns.
      * First-generation students appear to have lowered their DFW rates farther than the classes on the whole, but their performance on assignments and their course grades were about the same. The percentages of first-generation students was rather small, limiting the noteworthiness of these findings.
      * Under-represented minority students’ DFW rates were higher than the class as a whole most of the time, and their performance on assignments was worse. This finding was distressing but we hypothesize that the factors producing these results are similar to those producing the overall result in the entire student population.
      * Adult-learner students had dramatically lower DFW rates but only marginally-higher grade performance. There were also very few of these students, so we feel that this result does not reveal much.
      * Female students’ DFW rates were somewhat lower than the entire course numbers but their graded performance on assignments was about the same. Interestingly, female students made up the vast majority of students in each online section of HIST 2111, a finding that surprised us. Therefore, there must have been a disproportionately high number of male students who dropped the course, for reasons that are presently unclear.
  + *Course retention and completion rates*
  + *Average GPA*
    - We did not measure impacts of this course on students’ GPAs (though we considered it, and we might measure it in the future). However, we did measure average calculated course grades earned before- and after we introduced this OER textbook. (That is, we compared the control classes’ mathematical averages to those of the experimental groups.) We were surprised to find a decline nearly across the board in earned course grades. The control groups were averaging mostly in the high 60% range and the experimental groups were mostly in the mid-to-low 60% range.
  + *Pre-and post-transformation DFW comparison*
  + *Student success in learning objectives*
    - Similar to the measures of earned course grades above, we also measured two sets of assignments, designed to give insight into the impact of the OER materials. In this case, first we coupled the mathematical averages of individual students’ performance on quizzes and the final exam (designed to control for students’ use of OER, since they could google the names or dates of events in American history, and not have to use any textbook), then we coupled the mathematical averages of individual students’ performance on discussions and papers (designed to catch the students’ use of OER materials, since they would have had to read the primary sources and use them, as well as refer to the textbook, to do well on these assignments). Here, we found similarly-depressing results: students’ performance on both of these two measures dropped in the experimental groups, relative to the control groups. It is possible that students were already not reading the (purchased) textbook for reasons other than cost, but the introduction of a free textbook does not appear to have had an impact.
  + *Surveys, interviews, and other qualitative measures*
* *Indicate any co-factors that might have influenced the outcomes.* 
  + While this calls for speculation in the absence of data, we suspect that the observation of little measurable improvement in average course grades and performance on assignments specifically requiring the use of the textbook, as well as an underwhelming impact on DFW rates might be the result of factors beyond the textbook.
    - This OER textbook was piloted in an online classroom, and many of these students may have been ill-equipped or ill-suited for on-line classes. Presently any student can register for an online class, regardless of their GPA, class standing, or access to a computer and internet connection away from campus. As a result, we regularly see student perform poorly in online classes, either because they fall behind on deadlines, do not understand instructions, have problems accessing the LMS, or some combination of these and other problems.
    - Another factor beyond the textbook might be students’ unwillingness to invest the time and effort into performing well in the course.
      * Anecdotally, students who e-mailed Franklin Williamson or talked with him during office hours sometimes explained that they chose not to read the textbook but to simply watch the videos and take the quizzes, despite his instructions (in the LMS) that the textbook was required reading and the videos would not teach them everything they needed to do well on the quizzes.
      * Similarly, on their paper assignments, students had the freedom to select primary sources from those assigned in the syllabus or other available from a set of websites offering a curated collection of primary sources from American history and beyond. Students who struck out on their own sometimes selected the wrong combination of sources (they had to choose one from before 1776, one from 1776 to 1828, and one from 1828 to 1865), or they chose sources from European history or other geographic contexts, rather than American history. Consequently, such students who did not read the directions lost points on each assignment they improperly prepared.
      * Another similar factor was students’ inattentiveness to the deadlines posted in the LMS and published on the syllabus. By missing deadlines, students lost points.
    - A final factor might be institutional policies related to printing. As one of our three student survey respondents noted, the ability to read the OER materials from a screen is not always a substitute for printing them and annotating them by hand. The degree to which students could download and print the OER chapters was limited by the amount the College charges, and which students wanted to pay, to print from the on-campus printers. (Students could also print at home, at their own cost, of course.) Apart from a preference for printed reading materials, students may have struggled with toggling between the textbook in one window and the assignment they were trying to complete in another window. That is, OER materials available in electronic-only formats may be of only limited utility when the course itself is administered electronically.

# 4. Sustainability Plan

* *Describe how your project team or department will offer the materials in the course(s) in the future, including the maintenance and updating of course materials.* 
  + Franklin Williamson will continue teaching HIST 2111 online for the foreseeable future, using this set of OER materials. In the event of broken links or associated loss of access to materials on the World Wide Web, he will update or substitute other resources into this body of materials.
  + As noted below, this ALG project was related to our institutions Gateways 2 Completion work. In that context, this OER product is being made available to other faculty who wish to adopt it in their HIST 2111 classrooms.

# 5. Future Plans

* *Describe any impacts or influences this project has had on your thinking about or selection of learning materials in this and other courses that you will teach in the future.*
  + We have applied for and secured a second ALG grant, for creating materials for a different history course (HIST 1122). Thus we plan to adapt more-or-less the same approach to that OER project, with the major exception that we will implement the final OER product in face-to-face classrooms. This will mean we have the capability to reach more students and transform face-to-face teaching practices, rather than simply substitute the content of online modules to save students money.
  + The OER textbook created here for HIST 2111 is being made available for adoption by other faculty in our department who teach this course (in face-to-face settings), an intervention that is part of our Gateways 2 Completion work on redesigning HIST 2111.
* *Describe any planned or actual papers, presentations, publications, or other professional activities that you expect to produce that reflect your work on this project.*
  + We have no plans to publish our findings but this might change with the addition of more data from future semesters.
  + We presented some initial findings at the Gordon State College Student Success Summit in August of 2019. This is a local day-long series of workshops and conversations centered on what faculty are or could do differently to improve teaching and learning.

# 6. Description of Photograph

* *On the Final Report Submission page, you will be submitting a photo. In this document, list the names of the people shown in this separately uploaded photograph, along with their roles.* 
  + Tom Aiello (right, wearing orange) provided most of the written text for the OER textbook, slides to provide maps and other illustrations in the textbook, and found the videos we assigned.
  + Franklin Williamson (left, wearing grey), provided the primary sources, assembled the materials into a textbook and created individual chapter-by-chapter modules for an online format, and taught the pilot course for three semesters.

1. Nicholas B. Colvard, et al., “The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Measures,” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in High Education,* 30 (2018) 2, 262-276. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These were each online classes. Thus we did not have the ability to compel the students to meet with us in a face-to-face format, where we could solicit feedback on the OER textbook and collect their written responses. Students in online classes tend to respond to solicitations to evaluate teaching at the end of the semester in similarly low numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)