

Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants
Final Report

Date: 12 May 2016

Grant Number: 48

Institution Name(s): Gordon State College

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

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Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:

English Composition I (ENGL 1101)

Semester Project Began:

Fall 2014

Semester(s) of Implementation:

Fall 2015

Average Number of Students Per Course Section:

24

Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation:

56

Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation:

1,344

1. Narrative

By replacing a required \$90.00 textbook with the *Gordon State College Writing Handbook*, which was made available to all students enrolled in English 1101 and 1102 as an online, pdf text, Georgia students and their parents saved over \$120,000.00 in fall semester 2015. This annual savings expectation will continue onward with each upcoming fall semester. Further, the Handbook is designed to assist students in their writing for courses beyond English; therefore, its pedagogical value will increase with every core curriculum course students take, as they will have a practical guide to the very type of writing that their courses in the social sciences, physical sciences, and other academic areas.

Another significant outcome with regard to this project has been how it has facilitated conversation among our faculty members, both within the English department and without, on the needs of our students in the area of writing. Gordon does not administer our writing program in a centralized way like many other schools do, and as the school grows in scale and size, the shortcomings of such an approach have become increasingly apparent.

The improvements this has brought about for our teachers and the quality of their instruction are difficult to measure at this stage in a quantitative way just yet, but we do have anecdotal evidence that attests to their enthusiasm for it. For instance, there is ample interest in utilizing the book as a writing across the curriculum kind of resource. We have received feedback from the department head of Business and Public Services asking if a section on APA citation style can be added to the *Handbook* for students studying in the social science fields. Plans are underway to work with a faculty member from that department to add this information to a revised draft of the *Handbook* over summer.

The data on impact upon our students is also being gathered still, but the evidence is positive also. They seem most appreciative of the fact that we have been able to craft the textbook in ways that best suit their needs as Gordon students.

2. Quotes

The following are sample quotes from students in response to a standard survey on the handbook:

“If I am able to refer back to it, then I could use it if I get confused on writing assignments for other classes, or any class for that matter, since each section is written for specific subjects instead of just English in general.”

“The most unique feature about the handbook to me is that it is so short and had so much information.”

“I have more expensive books that are complicated and swamp-like – never being perused – than I have free texts that are clear, concise, and helpful. Guess which ones I value most?”

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

Limited initial data shows a neutral immediate impact in terms of student retention and progression. As will be seen below, DWF rates for fall/spring 2014-15, the semester before the *Handbook's* implementation, are directly aligned with those of the academic year 2015-16. Considering that any new resource change may be disruptive during the transition phase, the fact that there has been no change in student success for the Composition sequence is a good initial sign.

Anecdotal evidence, as well, demonstrates a positive transition to the online Handbook from the required text. Many instructors have noted that a problem they had encountered in previous semesters was the high percentage of students who did not purchase the major publisher handbook because of its cost, thereby denying themselves a valuable tool. The *GSC Writing Handbook* being available to all students promises to have a positive impact moving forward as it is normalized into the program.

3a. Overall Measurements

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: 1,344

- Positive: 58 % of respondents
- Neutral: 25 % of respondents
- Negative: 17% 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?

ABC rates for ENGL 1101 in fall semester 2014 was 70%; for fall semester 2015, utilizing the Handbook, the ABC rate was 69%. Similarly the ABC rate for ENGL 1102 for fall 2015 was 56% compared to 54% for fall 2015. At present there is no statistical difference observed between the last semester when a major publisher's handbook was used and the first semester of adoption of the free, online *Handbook*.

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?

Drop/Fail/Withdraw Rate:

___31___% of students, out of a total ___1,344___ 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)
- X 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. Narrative

The quantitative data on DFW rates is statistically neutral at present. The fall 2015 DFW rate was 31%, while the same number for fall 2014 was 30%. The official qualitative data, however, is from an admittedly small sample. Because this report is being given at the end of the first semester of implementation, we have not had the opportunity to compile or examine the quantitative data gathered through our school's standard program assessment methods.

We expect that these numbers should improve incrementally over time moving forward as instructors become more comfortable with the new text and integrate it more organically into their courses.

4. Sustainability Plan

The project team will continue in the form of the Gordon State College Composition Consortium (of which both ALG team members were a part), which is a body that was formed in 2012 (before this grant) for the purpose of producing the *Handbook*. Now that the *Handbook* has been created in its first form ("first edition"), the Consortium's purpose morphs into a body for the oversight, maintenance, and improvement of the *Handbook* from semester to semester.

In fulfillment of this purpose, first, the Consortium will oversee future collection methods of qualitative data related to the Handbook and work with the English department's assessment coordinator and the school's VPAA to analyze quantitative data gathered from the department and school's semester and annual course evaluations. These analyses will help us to understand which directions to take our revisions into.

5. Future Plans

Given the positive feedback we have received during the first semester of implementation, our plan is to continue revising the *Handbook* to suit the needs and desires of our students and faculty. The Composition Consortium is the perfect vehicle for this as we move forward because it is the organizing body we use to sponsor forums on topics like grammar instruction and MLA examples. In many ways, the book we have finished with this grant can be a practical and very visible focal point for discussions on pedagogy and reading content held here. Already we have used the *Handbook* for a couple of forums.

It also has proven to be the focal point for conversations we never anticipated having, but realized needed to be had. The *Handbook's* implementation fostered conversations about the school's policies going forward on digital textbooks, for example. Likewise, it has given us the opportunity to talk about accessibility in ways that we had not expected before.

We gave a presentation entitled "Creating an In-House English Handbook: or, the Presentation Cengage Learning Doesn't Want You to See" at the College English Association annual conference in Denver on April 1, 2016. The presentation was very well received by the over 100 people in attendance at the session.

6. Description of Photograph

- (left, right) Dr. Mark King, Dr. Wesley Venus.