Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants

Final Report

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Grant Number: #61

Institution Name(s): Georgia State University

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

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Project Lead: Susan Willey

Course Name(s) and Course Numbers: BUSA 2106, The Legal and Ethical Environment of Business

Semester Project Began: Spring 2015

Semester(s) of Implementation: Fall 2015

Average Number of Students Per Course Section: 90

Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation: 2

Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation: 180

1. Narrative

This project saved 172 students a significant amount of money. Because we have so many students taking BUSA 2106 at Georgia State (17 sections offered in fall 2015 with a total of 1069 students), we have successfully negotiated with the publisher for lower textbook prices for our students. Currently, students in the other sections are paying between $75 and $250 for the course textbook, depending upon whether they rent a book for the term, buy an e-version, or purchase a hardcover copy. Thus, the savings just for the students in my sections piloting the free e-book could range from $12,900 to more than $40,000.

Students were very pleased at not having to purchase a textbook. Overall, they were also generally pleased with the content of the free e-book that we are developing, finding the more than 250 videos, websites and readings currently in the book's 12 content modules to be user-

friendly, engaging, and substantive. Because we deliberately piloted the book without assigning particular content in each module, students were also able to tailor their use of content to their individual needs, exploring the book much like they do the internet, allowing one topic to lead them to the next. We did not anticipate that some students would not appreciate this aspect of the book, but would ask for specific assignments and more guidance in selecting which materials to read and study. We plan to address this concern by adding tags such as featured, recommended, enrich your knowledge or topics of special interest in the spring.

In the comparison semesters, students using the e-book had a higher GPA and lower DFW rates than students using a traditional textbook. This was true in this semester, too – I piloted the free e-book book in two sections, while teaching a third section using a traditional textbook with typical reading assignments and end-of-chapter problems.

While using the e-book has not transformed my classroom teaching yet, it has demonstrated the power of video assignments in engaging and motivating millennial students who seem to be reluctant to read to learn course content. I had already incorporated more in-class exercises into my teaching to get students more engaged in the classroom and now plan to use short videos in future classes to stimulate discussion and problem-solving, similar to the manner in which we have embedded them into the e-book.

The project has definitely been challenging. I unexpectedly picked up a class of 120 BUSA 2106 students shortly before the start of the semester when a colleague took a medical leave. With more than 300 students this semester, I found that I did not have time to locate and add as much open-source content to the e-book as I had hoped. Nor did we have time to develop interactive exercises, self-assessments, infographics, and additional content for the book. I have a much lighter student load in the spring and hope to devote considerable time to expanding and refining the book.

2. Quotes

These anonymous student comments appeared in their end-of-course assessment for my sections of BUSA 2106 using the digital book we are creating for the ALG grant. The complete file of comments is included in the data attachment.

> "I liked the e-book because it helped me save money at the beginning of the semester and is always accessible. I think that being able to explore videos was more effective because I would only watch the videos in the subjects I was weak on."

> "I like the fact that the e-book is so simple and clean cut. I also loved the fact that it was free. In addition to that, the videos were really helpful, which is something we wouldn't be able to receive with a regular textbook."

"I think that our particular generation isn't too interested in reading; we are asked to do it for every class to review something we'll be lectured on anyway. The videos seem like a much more progressive way to capture our attention, and help us to grasp the concepts. It is often very helpful to hear the same idea discussed/presented by two or more people, to solidify our understanding."

"The e-book was awesome. I understand information better when there are visuals and activities, which mainly why I've done well in this course the second time around."

"I personally like the e-book. I normally am not a fan of e-books because I tend to not use them as much because it's not physically in front of me; that may just be a personal problem due to my memory. When I did access it, I found it helpful for the materials I was researching."

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

3a. Overall Measurements

Student Opinion of Materials

Total number of students affected in this project: 171

Was the overall student opinion about the materials used in the course positive, neutral, or negative? We did not explicitly ask students this question. Instead, I created five survey items that I included in the Course Assessment I posted on D2L. These items asked students to assess the structure and format of the e-book, the quality of the content (videos, readings and websites), and accessibility of the e-book on a variety of platforms. In addition, there was an open-ended question that invited students to comment on the book and their experience in using it. Of the 171 students enrolled in the two sections using the free digital textbook, 137 submitted the Course Assessment.

The five items and student responses are being submitted separately as supporting data. The comments are generally quite positive, with many students stating that they "loved" the e-book because it was free, more convenient than a large textbook, and accessible on a variety of devices as long as they had an internet connection. A few called the book "awesome," one called it a "fantastic idea" and one even labeled it "perfect."

The primary concern that emerged from student comments related to their need for more guidance in determining which items to read or watch; one student even recommended that the content be ranked in terms of helpfulness. A few noted that there are currently too many placeholders awaiting content and one student commented that the book "will take a lot of refining" as we continue to add content and exercises.

Here are some of the key quantitative findings from the survey items:

- Positive:
    - 76.6% of the students reported that the e-book was easy to find in D2L, with students accessing it on desktop and laptop computers, tablets or iPads, and Smartphones. Slightly more than 70% indicated that they preferred accessing the digital book via a laptop computer.
    - 63.5% of the students reported that the book is user-friendly and that it was easy to find the posted materials.
    - 60% indicated that they liked being able to select their own content from the array of available materials, based on their particular individual needs.
    - 59.1% found the videos informative and helpful in understanding content, with only 39.4% finding the readings and websites informative and helpful.
    - 36.5% reported that they also found the videos engaging and fun to watch.
    - 28.4% reported that after they assessed the content of a module for extra-credit (see instructions attached to the syllabus), they became more aware of the variety and value of the posted course materials and started using the digital text more regularly.
    - Slightly more than a third of the respondents (34.3%) indicated that they used the Module Overview, Objectives and Questions to Consider as a Study Guide to determine what they didn't understand as they prepared for tests and quizzes.

- Negative:
    - 35.8% of the students responding to the survey would have preferred more guidance in deciding which readings and videos to view to reinforce their understanding of basic concepts in each module.
    - 12.4 % of the 137 respondents indicated that they prefer courses with a textbook and wish that they had had a traditional text for BUSA 2106 and 10.9% reported that they never even opened the e-book or any of the posted materials.

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?

Choose One:
- <u>XXX</u>   Positive: Higher performance outcomes measured over previous semester(s) and the same semester
- ___   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:

8.1 % of students, out of a total 180 students affected at the start of the fall semester, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the final semester of implementation.

Choose One:

- **XXX**   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. Narrative

Student Performance and Grades: Fall 2015 students in the two sections using the free e-book outperformed students in the section using a traditional textbook. Of the 172 students using the e-book, the class average was a 2.97 compared to a 2.66 for the 115 students in the section using a traditional textbook, where all students took the same quizzes and tests, completed the same in-class exercises and had the same extra-credit opportunities.

These students also outperformed students from a BUSA 2106 section taught in Fall 2014 that used a traditional textbook. The Fall 2014 class average for the 115 students who completed the course was 2.4 on a 4 point scale.

DFW Rates: I chose a similar BUSA 2106 class from Fall 2014 to compare DFW rates. That semester I had 118 students enrolled in a late afternoon class, as I did this semester, with students in Fall 2014 using a traditional textbook and students in Fall 2015 piloting the free e-book.

In Fall 2014, I had 3 withdrawals, and of the 115 students completing the course, there were 12 Ds and 8 Fs (17.4% of the class). Combined with the withdrawals, the DFW rate was 19.5%. The class average was a 2.4 on the traditional 4 point grading scale.

In contrast, in Fall 2015, two sections with a total enrollment of 179 students used the free e-book. There were 7 withdrawals, with 172 students completing the course. Of those, there were 2 Ds and 5 Fs (3.8% of the class). Combined with the withdrawals, the DFW rate was considerably lower, at 7.7% of those who had initially enrolled, and the class average was 2.97 on a 4 point scale.

Despite this seemingly drastic drop in the DFW rate and substantial increase in GPA, it is unclear whether the e-book is the primary explanation. Given the high numbers of Ds and Fs in Fall 2014, I also added a number of graded in-class exercises this fall, to provide students with more grades to offset lower scores on tests and quizzes. This change may have been more responsible for the change in DFW than the e-book.

Perhaps a better comparison is looking at performance and DFW rates in these two Fall 2015 sections against another large section of BUSA 2106 that I taught this fall with a traditional textbook. All three sections had identical quizzes, tests, in-class exercises, and extra-credit opportunities, though the students using the e-book could earn some of the EC points by reviewing and evaluating content in designated e-book modules. Once again, students using the free e-book outperformed students using a textbook and had lower DFW rates. Of the 117 students enrolled who used a textbook in Fall 2015, there were 3 withdrawals, 6 Ds and 8 Fs, which results in a 14% DFW rate. Of the 114 students who completed the course, 12.1% earned Ds or Fs, in contrast to the 7.7% in the two sections using the e-book. The average course grade in the section using a textbook was 2.66, compared to the 2.97 in the sections using the e-book.

4. Sustainability Plan

Materials will be placed on a Georgia State University website that will require no username or password to access. The book contents can be used there or by using the link to a downloadable zip file of the content. The introductory page of the website will also have a contact e-mail for issues and suggestions.

Links will be checked and updated before each semester by a member of the Center for Instructional Innovation. Other content and activities will be updated as needed.

5. Future Plans

After researching student learning styles more than 25 years ago, I began providing my classes with an array of supplemental course materials, assignments, in-class activities and assessments purposefully designed to enable students with different ways of learning to succeed in my classes, though the textbook and lecture still provided students with essential content. In the past decade, it has become increasingly evident that more students are not purchasing a textbook (typically between 12 and 17% percent in many classes), and larger numbers of those who purchase a book don't read it before class to prepare for that day's content.

I decided to apply for this grant to create an e-textbook from open-source materials that would be free to students and that I hoped would encourage more of them to prepare for class. Even though it was free to students in two of my classes this semester, 10.9% still didn't use it. I also recognized that more students do not want to *read* a textbook or article, and prefer to learn content through video and interactive exercises. Creating this digital textbook allowed me to select substantive, relevant and engaging content materials that I hoped would motivate, engage and inspire today's learners. We also designed the book to allow students to personalize their learning experiences by selecting those materials they believed would best help them understand the content of that module.

Using the e-book this semester has convinced me that replacing a traditional textbook has succeeded in engaging more of my students, even though the book is still "under construction" and needs both more content (particularly short readings) and interactive exercises for students to assess their understanding of the material. Going forward, I plan to expand multi-media content and create more exercises and infographics that effectively summarize material for visual learners. In addition, to provide students with more guidance on which materials to select, our team will work at developing a way to classify items more clearly (e.g., recommended, featured, enrich your knowledge, special interest topics).

We have already submitted a proposal to the USG Teaching and Learning Conference in Athens in April. I also plan to write and submit a paper to present at regional and/or national professional meetings of the Academy of Legal Studies in Business in the pedagogy and curriculum track to encourage other faculty to develop such works and/or to invite them to contribute to or use this e-book. Zoe Salloom and I will also investigate other teaching and learning conferences with the goal of also presenting this project and our conclusions to faculty and instructional designers. Ultimately, we would like to also submit at least one paper for publication in scholarly teaching journals or other higher education outlets.

6. Description of Photograph

Left to right: Susan Willey, Zoe Salloom and Emerson Stewart, an undergraduate student seated at the computer who has been a technical assistant on the project.