**Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants**

**Final Report for Mini-Grants**

# General Information

**Date**: December 21, 2018

**Grant Round**: 11

**Grant Number**: 240

**Institution Name(s)**: Georgia Gwinnett College

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

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**Project Lead**: Michael Lewkowicz

**Course Name(s) and Course Numbers**: POLS 1101: American Government

**Final Semester of Project**: Fall 2018

***If applicable to your project:***

**Average Number of Students Per Course Section**:

Overall: 21.9

Summer 2018: 17.8

Fall 2018: 24.5

**Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources**:

Total #: 14

Summer 2018: 6

Fall 2018: 8

**Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources**

Total #: 285

Summer 2018: 196

Fall 2018: 89

# 1. Project Narrative

*Describe the course of your revision or ancillary creation project, including*

* *A summary of your project’s purpose, plan, and timeline.*
* *The original works which were revised or added to, with links.*
  + *For example, if you revised an open textbook, give the title, author, and link.*
* *A narrative description of how the project’s plan was carried out.*
* *Lessons learned, including anything you would do differently next time.*

1. **Review of 2017 Project**

During the spring, summer and fall 2017 semesters, our team developed and implemented a different approach to teaching the introductory American Government course; one that eschewed the traditional textbook in favor of open educational resources and classroom activities.

Throughout the duration of this study, our team members used the same free Open Stax textbook (Glen Krutz and Sylvie Waskiewicz, **American Government**, OpenStax, ISBN-10 1938168178). We also developed a collection of classroom activities to facilitate student interaction. These activities were organized around the chapters of the online text.

To measure the effectiveness of our approach, we conducted baseline and final assessment quizzes designed to assess student knowledge of key course concepts. Through these multiple-choice quizzes, we sought to measure improvement in student performance amongst students using OER materials and classroom activities, especially as compared to those who use the traditional textbook.

In addition to the assessment quizzes, we incorporated focus groups in which we asked the students to try to come to a consensus as to course materials and activities they saw as most and least useful. We also included a question exploring the extent to which the activities helped to engage our diverse student body: “Based on what you’ve learned this semester, briefly describe three ways in which the U.S. political system performs in accommodating an increasingly diverse society.”

1. **2018 Updated Project**

After examining the assessment results and the focus group data from the initial project, we concluded that a few changes needed to be made for future iterations of the project:

1. During the 2017 project, we sought to protect student anonymity in the assessment quizzes. Thus, we did not track individual student performance on those quizzes, relying upon overall section average scores for our analysis. Although this approach highlighted general trends, there were too few sections to conduct a statistical analysis. Thus, during the 2018 update, we tracked individual student performance, retaining confidentiality by only using student identification numbers and ensuring that the instructor of record did not see any data until the end of the semester.
2. In evaluating the questions used in the 2017 assessment quizzes, we sought to ensure that the content being assessed in each quiz was central to the course itself, and that the questions were phrased in a clear and unambiguous manner. Following this review, we replaced four of the ten questions, either because multiple questions covered similar conceptual grounds or because the knowledge sought was too specific and/or unrelate to key course concepts. We also reworded two additional assessment quiz questions for the sake of clarity and precision.
3. Although the information we got from the focus group data was interesting, it did not tell us everything we needed to know. By asking students at the end of the semester about which online materials and activities they saw as most and least useful, we likely got a response as to the materials that were more memorable, without any additional details as to why students responded positively or negatively to any of the online materials. In addition, the online textbook received the highest number of responses as most and least useful, which might be attributable to potential bias via the inclusion of that material in the question itself.

Thus, in the 2018 update to our project, we conducted end-of semester surveys, rather than focus groups. By using surveys, we allow for individual student response (rather than group consensus) which provides the opportunity for more detailed responses to the online textbooks. The surveys asked students to rate the online textbook among four categories: very useful, somewhat useful, not particularly useful, not useful at all. Students also had the option of saying they did not use the online textbook. Students were asked to explain their rating, as well as why they may not have used the online text. During the fall 2018 semester, we provided a similar survey for non-OER sections, to compare student attitudes towards online and traditional texts.

1. For those in our OER-based sections, we attempted to obtain student reflections towards three specific activities that we agreed would be common to each of our sections (see below). To be specific, we asked students to come up with two words or phrases that best described each of the three activities.
2. At the outset of the updated project, we also agreed to share new activities we developed during the summer and fall semesters.
3. **2018 Project Timeline**

Spring 2018:

Preceding the summer 2018 semester, our team developed the revised assessment quizzes, as well as the individual surveys. We also made our final decision as to which three activities would be common to all project members. In making our selection, we sought to ensure diversity, not only in terms of content covered but also the type of activity. Our team ultimately came to a consensus on the following three activities:

Voter Participation: This is a two-stage activity in which students are initially asked to guess where the United States ranks in voter participation, as compared to 195 other countries. After hearing responses from each student, the instructor reveals the answer. From there, the class breaks into groupsand discuss why the U.S. ranking is so low.

Federalism: After sharing details of case studies on legalization of medical marijuana, students engage in group discussions to talk about the implications of those case studies on the conflicts between federal and state government, as well as to consider other issues in which those two levels of government might be in dispute.

Free Speech: This is a role-playing scenario in which the class is divided into three factions, each with different preferences as to forms of speech it approves and disapproves. From there, each group must reach a consensus as to the governing rule regarding speech.

Summer & Fall 2018

This period marked the implementation of our project. During the summer semester, we utilized eight sections of POLS 1101: American Government. Six of those sections were taught by our project team, and thus utilized OER materials and activities while two other sections were taught by non-project members with more traditional texts and thus served as control groups.

During the fall semester, we utilized fifteen sections of American Government: eight OER/Activity-based sections taught by our team and seven “control” sections. It should be noted that five of the eight sections were taught by Yohannes Gedamu, who was brought into the project in part due to circumstances reducing the number of American Government sections taught by the core team members.

At the beginning of each semester, we conducted a baseline assessment in both the OER and the “control” sections. As per institutional requirements, we ensured that students signed a consent form before their participation. Due to the challenge of getting parental consent for minors in a timely fashion, minors were not allowed to participate.

At the end of the semester, we followed up with a final assessment as well as a survey for all sections. Our OER-based sections were asked about the online textbook, as well as the three aforementioned activities.

Over the course of this year, we also sought to make improvements to the various activities we developed earlier. In most cases, the changes were relatively minor, such as providing additional clarification to the instructions (Electoral College, Chapter 7) or linking activities to relevant readings (Free Speech Exercise, Chapter 4). For other activities, we added additional content to the activities, such as video links (Ideology Videos, Chapter 1) or discussion questions (Constitution—Video, Chapter 2). We also added an activity involving the presidential cabinet.

1. **Preliminary Analysis**

We are still processing and analyzing the data gathered from the fall semester assessments, but we can offer some preliminary analyses based on the data we did analyze.

For Summer 2018, there did not seem to be a systematic difference in improvement between American Government sections using OER materials and those using a traditional text. For OER-based sections, improvement in assessment scores had a wider range, from around 9% to around 24%. The range was not as large for traditional sections, but we only collected assessment data from two sections over the summer (Table 1).

**Table 1: Summary of Assessment Scores--Summer 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average Baseline Score  (Out of 10) | | Average Final Score  (Out of 10) | | Average Improvement | |
| Section | **Score** | **Perc** | **Score** | **Perc** | **Score** | **Perc** |
| *OER Sections* | | | | | | |
| OER-1 | 6.21 | 62.14% | 8.42 | 84.17% | 1.92 | 19.17% |
| OER-2 | 4.58 | 45.79% | 6.06 | 60.59% | 1.50 | 15.00% |
| OER-3 | 5.38 | 53.75% | 8.56 | 85.56% | 2.43 | 24.29% |
| OER-4 | 6.26 | 62.63% | 7.47 | 74.67% | 0.92 | 9.23% |
| OER-5 | 5.80 | 58.00% | 7.71 | 77.14% | 1.50 | 15.00% |
| *Traditional Sections* | | | | | | |
| Trad-1 | 5.61 | 56.11% | 7.70 | 77.00% | 2.22 | 22.22% |
| Trad-2 | 6.15 | 61.54% | 7.11 | 71.11% | 1.50 | 15.00% |

In the future, our analyses will incorporate assessment data from the fall semester, including regression analyses to determine the impact of the inclusion OER materials on the levels of improvement in student assessment scores.

Survey questions about the online textbook produced some intriguing comparisons, both between the summer and spring semesters, and with those courses that used more traditional texts.

On the one hand, during both summer and fall semesters, about a third of the respondents found the online textbook to be “very useful.” However, the percentage of students finding the online text to be “somewhat useful” was much lower during the summer semester (15%, compared to 29% in the fall) while the percentage of students who did not use the text during the summer semester was a bit higher (33%, compared to 25% in the fall). Perhaps the relatively condensed summer courses (4 to 8 weeks) provided fewer opportunities for many students to utilize the readings.

Comparisons between OER and traditional texts during the fall semester showed that both semesters had about a fifth to a quarter of the respondents not using the texts, no matter the format. Furthermore, both text formats were rated as “Very Useful” or “Somewhat Useful” by about 61% of the respondents. The main difference between student reaction to the two formats, is that a substantially greater percentage of the respondents viewed the OER texts as “Very Useful” (32%), compared to the traditional texts (13%).

In looking at explanations for positive ratings of the online texts, several respondents commented on the ease of navigation, clarity of explanations and accessibility. Several also expressed their appreciation for the lack of costs for the online text. When respondents were asked why they did not use the online texts, an overwhelming number of respondents said that the text was not needed, insofar as the lecture material, notes and PowerPoint slides sufficiently covered the material. This was also a common response for those students who did not use traditional texts, although some pointed out that they could not afford the traditional text.

Regarding student responses to the three classroom activities conducted by our team members, there are a wide variety of responses. Many respondents used words such as “informative,” “eye-opening,” and “educational” while others noted that the activities were “engaging,” “Interesting” and/or “fun.” Very few of the comments were negative towards the activity, although some students found the activity on free speech “boring” or “confusing.” Still other students noted that they were absent from the activity or that they did not remember the activity, while others left that portion of the survey empty.

1. **Lessons Learned**

There are still several important lessons to be applied to any continuation of the project, particularly regarding the surveys.

1. The surveys and the proctors could make it clearer that the questions regarding the textbook should focus exclusively on the book. Several respondents used the opportunity to register feedback on the course as a whole or the instructor.
2. The wording of the question asking for student feedback on course activities is too generic: *“Over the course of the semester, the instructor conducted numerous activities. For the activities listed below, please provide two words or phrases that best describe the activity.”*

We utilized the “two word” approach of obtaining feedback in order to minimize the amount of time used on the survey. However, many respondents incorporated words and phrases that describe the activity itself, such as “federal v. state” to describe the activity on federalism, or “voter participation” to describe the activity on U.S. voter participation levels. Any future iteration of this survey should be more specific, such as “…please provide two words or phrases that best describe your opinion of the activity.”

1. As mentioned earlier, many respondents either did not recall specific activities or did not respond to the survey questions on one or more activities. More accurate and timely opinions would occur if we were to ask about the activities shortly after they are conducted. An online platform such as *Poll Everywhere* or *Survey Monkey* could be used to conduct those surveys, which would avoid the logistical challenges of having someone other than the instructor of record being available to proctor each and every iteration of the survey.

# 2. Materials Description

* *Describe all the materials you have created or revised as part of this project. These descriptions may be used in the* [*GALILEO Open Learning Materials*](https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/) *repository in the official description field.*

We will include complete list of the activities developed and collected over the course of this project as part of a .zip file that also includes the activities themselves. Here, we will briefly summarize those activities in which we made changes, as well as the lone activity added to the collection. This list (as with the complete list) is organized by the online textbook chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

*Ideology Video Activity*: Reflection papers in which students link political speeches to liberalism, conservatism, libertarianism, etc. This activity can include comparative perspective that incorporates a discussion of different perspectives on UK’s Brexit.

* Added link to video of UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown opposing UK Brexit

Chapter 2: The Constitution and Its Origins

*Constitution Video*: “Crash Course” video serves as a springboard for class discussion of tensions addressed during the Constitutional Convention (examples: Big v. small states, federal v. state power).

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

Chapter 4: Civil Liberties

*Free Speech Exercise*: Through a role-playing exercise, students consider the extent to which societies can allow for free speech, even speech that many in a society might find offensive.

* Added links to reference material for activity

Chapter 7: Voting and Elections

*The Electoral College*: Through a role-playing exercise, students will consider the impact of regional influences upon support for the creation of the Electoral College.

* Provided additional clarity to instructions

*The Electoral College Explained:*A video serves to facilitate a classroom and/or group discussion on the Electoral College.

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

*The Electoral College Explained:*A video serves to facilitate a classroom and/or group discussion on critiques of the Electoral College.

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

*Electoral College Tied*: A video serves to facilitate a classroom and/or group discussion on the potential for a tie in the Electoral College.

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

Chapter 9: Political Parties

*Political Parties*: A pair of videos serve as a springboard for a classroom discussion on how the Democratic and Republican parties have changed over the years.

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

Chapter 10: Interest Groups and Lobbying

*Influence of Interest Groups*: “Corruption is Legal in America” presents a highly cynical (though perhaps accurate) look at the increased influence of interest groups in American politics and can serve to facilitate a classroom discussion addressing that influence.

* Added questions instructors could use to generate discussion

Chapter 13: The Courts

*Supreme Court Confirmation Hearing*: # A simulated confirmation hearing will present an opportunity for students to learn about the process (as well as the challenges) of confirming nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court.

* Rewrote instructions to be applicable to all SCOTUS confirmation hearings
* Incorporated elements of standardization including activity objective, materials needed, and time needed

In addition to making changes to pre-existing activities, we also created one additional activity over the course of the mini-grant project:

Chapter 12: The Presidency

*Presidential Cabinet*: Group discussions in which students attempt to come up with a list of the fifteen cabinet-level departments serve to facilitate a classroom discussion of the creation, division and merging of various cabinet departments, as well as a normative discussion as to what issues should rise to that level in the first place.

# 3. Materials Links

* *If you are hosting your materials in places other than GALILEO Open Learning Materials, please provide these links in this section. Otherwise, leave blank.*

# 4. Future Plans

* *Describe any planned or actual papers, presentations, publications, or other professional activities that you expect to produce that reflect your work on this project.*
* *Describe any plans to revise or add to these materials in the future.*

Members of our team have recently submitted a proposal to the University System of Georgia Teaching and Learning Conference, which will be held on April 10-12, 2019. If accepted, we will have the opportunity to describe our approach to teaching introductory American Government courses, as well as survey data supporting the utility of our approach.

Team members are also developing a proposal for a chapter in an edited volume *Open Educational Resources (OER): Pedagogy and Practices*. In addition to describing our approach to teaching American Government courses, we will also provide supporting data obtained throughout our two-year project, especially data from the 2018 mini-grant stage of the project.