

## Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants

### Final Report

**Date: Tuesday, August 27, 2024**

**Grant Number: 30**

**Institution Name(s): Kennesaw State University**

**Team Members (Name, Title, Department, Institutions if different, and email address for each):** Seneca Vaught, Ph.D., team lead and instructor of record, Assistant Professor of History and Interdisciplinary Studies, [svaught3@kennesaw.edu](mailto:svaught3@kennesaw.edu); Griselda Thomas, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English, subject matter expert, [gthomas2@kennesaw.edu](mailto:gthomas2@kennesaw.edu); Nikki Hill, College of Humanities & Social Sciences Instructional Designer, [rhill23@kennesaw.edu](mailto:rhill23@kennesaw.edu)

**Project Lead: Seneca Vaught**

**Course Name(s) and Course Numbers: AADS 1102 Issues in African and African Diaspora Studies**

**Semester Project Began: Spring 2015**

**Semester of Implementation: Spring 2015**

**Average Number of Students Per Course Section: 28.9**

**Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation: 1**

**Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation: 37**

#### **1. List of Resources Used in the Textbook Transformation**

This project included a variety of course materials that were freely provided to the students. Many of these materials came from the Internet and were included in academic databases such as JSTOR. Others were available through Google Books or by authors who posted their own content on their personal websites. Listed below is the complete bibliography of course materials.

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## 2. Narrative

### *Challenges and Accomplishments*

With some reservations, we consider this to be a successful transformation process. The students were overwhelmingly pleased with the course materials, the delivery of the course, and assessed themselves at high-levels of mastery on the learning outcomes. Importantly, these self-assessments were consistent with the final grade distribution of the course. We did encounter some challenges in reformatting some texts and redirecting broken links but these were easily overcome. Perhaps, the most troubling insight was that the use of OERs did not significantly impact DFW rates as we had hoped. While some students preferred the option and appreciated the reduced costs, this was no clear impact on the DFW rate.

Digital textbook technologies have not evolved to the level of instantaneous capture and responsiveness that physical paper provides. Although digital natives are quite comfortable with using electronic resources, there are limits. In reading and writing intensive courses like this one, students are encouraged to make use of extensive notations in the margins of the text and to raise questions in dialogue with the written word. Numerous digital platforms have attempted to simulate this experience but none of them are as effective and efficient as pen on paper. A significant insight from this intervention is that students like the option of being able to access material for free and online but they also relish and perhaps need the ability to revert to print when they deem it necessary.

### *Impacts on Instruction*

Critical pedagogy provided the framework for this particular course. We found that the OER model complemented with our philosophy of teaching and approach to the course. For example, a key aspect of critical pedagogy is getting students to understand the role of power in the educational process. Critical pedagogues urge students to work within a co-intentional relationship with their professors, exchanging ideas and knowledge as equals in status though not in levels of expertise. When the textbook is provided free of charge, it contributes to a more democratic experience for all students because it eliminates economic advantages that

some students may have over others in procuring the course materials. While free textbooks do little to address the broader challenge of rising tuition costs and their impact on student learning, it does contribute to building a greater sense of community between the students and the professors by showing the students the professors care about their personal finances.

In developing this course, we wanted the students to have access to this material for the questions and learning outcomes of this course but also we envisioned using these OERs in a more holistic manner. We divided the readings of the course into two groups: 1) foundational readings and 2) contemporary readings. We hoped that by providing a small digital library of foundational documents that the students would save these resources and continue to use them as they matriculated through the major in African and African Diaspora Studies or in other related academic programs. Many of these texts are somewhat important as historical and cultural documents and many have a broad interdisciplinary relevance regardless of the discipline and the major.

As a result of this textbook transformation, we have seen students embrace learning course content beyond this course and think about how these ideas relate across the college curriculum regardless of their chosen career paths. Far too often students make a dash to the bookstore for financial reasons to resell books that could be very useful for them in their future classes, contributing to the lifetime goal of metacognition. We emphasized that we wanted students to collect these foundational documents and to preserve them as worthwhile material to continue to grow and expand upon during the rest of their lives and from the feedback we received many of them did.

The second group of OER readings we used in this course were contemporary readings. These readings were gleaned from popular media sources and blogs. Differing from the foundational readings, many of these resources were ephemeral in significance and presented aspects of selected course topics that were driven by contemporary interests. While these readings were selected before the semester began, many of them were changed mid-semester to embrace contemporary developments in the news or student questions raised during the course. This flexible learner-centered strategy of teaching framed our readings around the needs and interests of the students and not a 'canned' pre-determined reading list.

### *Impacts on Students and Performance*

Students appreciated the benefits that digital access provides. Many students balance full-time responsibilities as parents, full-time workers, and other demanding roles. The image of the college student sitting in the library with a stack of books does not match how many students of the millennial and homeland generation access course content. Today's students study on breaks between jobs, in transit, and often use phones, tablets, and computers as a primary mode of educational interaction. While many students certainly prospered from engaging free texts via technology, its impacts are not universal. Some students, particularly those who are not digital natives, feel much more comfortable working with printed materials. Some went so far as to print out all of the provided materials. While the cost of printing everything personally is less than buying each of those resources at cost from the bookseller, actions like these

underscore the fact that the digital aspect of OERs impact student learning approaches in different ways and it is not for everybody.

### *Lessons Learned*

We have learned several important lessons as a result of this textbook transformation project. If we were to repeat this process, we would like to test newer e-publication software that converts readily to printable documents. We also would like to explore next-generation e-book readers that allow for greater interaction with written text than current limitations of hardware and software permit. We posted all the required readings for the semester as hyperlinks in the syllabus and as PDF documents on Softchalk. While Softchalk is great for integrating online assessments and is very user-friendly, it is not designed for in-depth reading and interacting with long documents.

When we decided to use links to materials, to provide option for printing, it became difficult to maintain two separate lists with the readings in different formats. In the future, we would create a single page where all readings could be posted and downloaded. Currently, the library and our instructional designer are continuing to help us to identify the best digital format for these resources.

While it is certainly cost-effective to provide online instruction to larger numbers of students than the physical limitations of the classroom may allow, in the future we would try to reduce the number of students in the online version of this class. Lower division courses like this one that are particularly reading and writing intensive, require more instructor to student interaction and encouragement. If we were to teach this course again using OERs, we would recommend that the number of students in this course be capped at around 25 students or less to ensure the interpersonal interaction and feedback that are so important in ensuring student success.

Finally, one of the most interesting points that we gleaned is that regardless of how they feel about the absence of a physical text, students have particularly positive feelings towards courses like these that do not have out-of-pocket costs for course materials. Based on survey data, textbook costs do impact their decision on what classes to take going forward. We must adjust our offerings accordingly to address this need.

### **3. Quotes**

"I really enjoyed the course. It was nice to not have to pay high prices for books, however, I did end up printing most of the material out. I needed to underline and highlight for discussions and quizzes. I also like to keep the readings to go back to what I highlighted when studying for tests. Not having the books was good, but it was a pain to have to print everything. I guess neither way is perfect. However, I learned a lot and thought the class was great."

"I like to look at the books and write highlight and have the material in my hands. I do not like reading online and some of the material you had to read online and couldn't print."

"It has opened my eyes to so many issues and learning a lot of background on issues was great. This was my first AAD class and I definitely plan on taking another. It was great to see different videos, articles etc instead of just reading from the text book, it kept my attention the whole semester."

#### 4. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

We collected information about the course using an [online survey](#). Out of the 30 respondents to the survey, only 8 said that the considered no-cost materials as a rationale for taking the course. However, overall they responded positively to the intervention with only 4 responding that it significantly diminished the learning experience and the vast majority responding that the format improved or significantly improved their learning experiences. While the data are less clear on reasons why, the majority of respondents stated that zero additional cost courses would play a decidedly positive role in selecting future courses in African & African Diaspora Studies.

On the other hand, while we expected zero-costs for texts to help bring down DFW rates, we found the opposite. The preliminary data collected for this textbook transformation project suggest that DFW rates are not positively impacted by the use of OERs.

#### AADS Evaluation Spring 2013 – Spring 2015

Semester	Delivery	# Registered	# Dropped	# Withdrew	# Failed
Spring 2013	F-2-F	28	0	1	1
Summer 2013	F-2-F	11	0	3	0
Spring 2014	F-2-F	21	0	3	1
Spring 2014	F-2-F	40	1	3	4
Summer 2014	ONLINE	29	0	3	2
Fall 2014	F-2-F	35	0	5	1
Fall 2014	F-2-F	15	2	1	0
Fall 2014	Community	24	1	1	0
Fall 2014	ONLINE	40	1	9	6
Spring 2015	F-2-F	40	2	1	0
Spring 2015	F-2-F	35	0	4	2
<b>Spring 2015</b>	<b>OER - ONL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
Summer 2015	ONLINE	39			
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>394</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>22</b>

Out of 12 classes included in the survey (and one course in progress this summer), this particular section initially had 37 registered students, which is well above the average 28.9 students who are enrolled in typical sections of the course.

From data collected in these 12 courses since the spring semester of 2013, the average number of students who dropped this course in recorded sections is 0.53. No students dropped this transformation section of the course.



The average number of students who withdrew from this OER section of the course while passing is 3.09 students per section. The number of students who withdrew from this particular section of the course was 8.

Five students failed this OER augmented course compared to 1.5 students on average who failed previous sections of the course without the transformation.

Collectively, these numbers are higher than the baseline averages and suggest in part, though not conclusively, that the use of OERs in online sections of this course does not significantly reduce DFW rates.

Semester	Enrollment	W (withdraw)	F (fail)	Combined	
Summer 2013	11	3=27%	0= 0%	<b>3=27%</b>	
Fall 2013	28	1=3%	1=3.5%	<b>2=7.1%</b>	
Spring 2014	21	3=14%	1=4.7%	<b>4=19%</b>	
	40	3=7.5%	4=10%	<b>7=17.5%</b>	
Summer 2014	29	3=10%	2=6.8%	<b>5=17.2%</b>	
Average		12.3%	5%	<b>17.56%</b>	

## 5. Sustainability Plan

Partners at the KSU Sturgis Library (Aajay Murphy) have agreed to provide these sources in a digital format for students who will be participating in future classes. This digital repository will be important for sustaining this approach in the long term. Since this course is regularly offered in the general education distribution at Kennesaw State University, we expect that it will be consistently offered at least once a year for the foreseeable future. The team members involved have agreed to offer it on an ongoing basis but also designed the course so that part-time instructors and other full-time faculty members can teach it also. Due to copyright restrictions, some of these resources will be pursued for inclusion in the second phase of this plan by requesting permission from the copyright holders for inclusion in future iterations of this course.

## 6. Future Plans

Moving forward, we would like to explore other opportunities to implement OERs in other courses, considering new possibilities for this particular strategy. This process has definitely impacted the way members of this team have approached their other courses. For example, one member has already adopted an online textbook for a history course he is currently teaching. Students appreciate the flexibility and purchasing options for course materials. We have learned that giving students the power to decide which course materials to purchase and

how would they use them is a powerful pedagogical tool to getting students to truly "invest" in their own educational experience.

This project has also afforded the opportunity to conduct academic research in the scholarship of teaching and learning. All of the team members presented our transformation of the course at the National Council of Black Studies, which is the professional organization for Africana, African American, and African Diaspora Studies. Our model was presented at a workshop roundtable, where our framework was warmly received. Several of the participants were interested in getting more information about this process and developing their own text book transformations at their respective institutions. Currently we are developing a full-length academic article examining the impacts of this study. We hope to submit this article for publication in the flagstaff publication of the field, *Black Scholar* next month. If accepted, this would be a major accomplishment that could refocus the scholarship of teaching and learning in Black Studies.

## **7. Description of Photographs**

The team members appear in the photograph from left to right: Griselda Thomas, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English, subject matter expert, [gthomas2@kennesaw.edu](mailto:gthomas2@kennesaw.edu); Nikki Hill, College of Humanities & Social Sciences Instructional Designer, [rhill23@kennesaw.edu](mailto:rhill23@kennesaw.edu); Seneca Vaught, Ph.D., team lead and instructor of record, Assistant Professor of History and Interdisciplinary Studies, [svaught3@kennesaw.edu](mailto:svaught3@kennesaw.edu);