

Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants Final Report

General Information

Date: June 13, 2020
Grant Round: 14
Grant Number: 450
Institution Name(s): Georgia State University
Project Lead: Cyntoria Johnson, Clinical Assistant Professor
Team Members (Name, Title, Department, Institutions if different, and email address for each):
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Course Name(s) and Course Numbers: CRJU 2700, American Criminal Court
Semester Project Began: Fall 2019
Final Semester of Implementation: Spring 2020
Total Number of Students Affected During Project: 259

1. Narrative

Transformation Experience – Challenges and Accomplishments

Our proposal set out to transform CRJU 2700 American Criminal Courts from a face-to-face to an online course, to increase enrollment caps to meet high student demand, and to eliminate expensive textbook costs for students at Georgia State University. The textbook transformation project was a very positive experience for both instructors and resulted in meaningful outcomes for students and our institution.

During this transformation period, we were unable to locate a specific OER textbook to use for this course or any suitable textbooks available free of charge through the USG library system. Therefore, the bulk of our preliminary work involved identifying open education resources that covered topics related to criminal court subject matter. We conducted a content analysis of existing criminal courts textbooks on the market, including the primary textbook that was

previously required for face-to-face sections of CRJU 2700. We also surveyed available syllabi from other criminal courts courses to identify major topic areas typically covered in this undergraduate level course. Based on our expertise in the subject matter and our experience teaching this course for numerous years prior to the transformation, we already had a good sense of the major topics to be covered and where to locate quality content. We outlined 11 subject matter topical areas and organized relevant OER materials into weekly modules within iCollege.

Additionally, we were able to secure a departmental subscription to the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) which has compiled over 1,000 interactive, web-based lessons, study aids, and resources covering topics related to CRJU 2700. Previously, CALI was only available to GSU Law students, but we were able to secure a membership to this valuable resource for our undergraduate criminal justice students. CALI now provides our students unlimited access to the learning tools, and they can get more practice with criminal court/law concepts even beyond this course. This is particularly helpful for students in our Legal Track concentration who are preparing for law school and/or careers in the legal profession.

During Fall 2019, Cyntoria Johnson taught the newly transformed online course with Thaddeus Johnson shadowing and serving as the GTA. We met weekly during the semester to discuss student performance, the organization of the course material into subject matter modules, the evaluation of assessments, and ideas for improving the course. During Spring Semester 2020, both instructors taught the course with Thaddeus Johnson in the online section and Cyntoria Johnson in the face-to-face section. The total number of students impacted during this transformation project was 259, saving students \$31,077.41 this year alone.

Transformative Impacts on Our Institution

This project has had meaningful impact on our institution. We learned that you can still deliver high quality course content and achieve course goals and objectives without a traditional textbook. We attended pedagogical workshops and professional development trainings throughout the year, which enhanced our knowledge of the subject matter and pushed us to discover and integrate innovative technology into the learning environment. We are proud that this transformation has encouraged other faculty members to adopt no-cost pedagogy as well. The Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology is now on its way to offering a no-cost degree pathway.

Transformative Impacts on Students and Their Performance

We received overwhelmingly positive feedback about this course, and records indicate that students performed well in the transformation. This project saved students from spending hundreds of out-of-pocket dollars on textbooks this year. The increased enrollment caps allowed twice as many students to enroll in this high demand, popular course without having to compete for limited classroom space. Students enjoyed the flexibility and convenience of the 100% online, asynchronous format. Students will have access to the open access materials beyond the completion of this course, which will help to prepare them for law school and careers in the law.

Lessons Learned

While this project was an overall success, we share a few concerns:

- Our primary challenge this year was the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed the University for half of the spring semester and interrupted the flow of instruction. While the pandemic was unforeseeable and very sudden, we learned that we must remain flexible and adapt to changes along the way.
- We doubled the enrollments for this course from 48 in the face-to-face section to 100 in the online section. The increased enrollments created additional workload for instructors, and we continue to work on improving the turnaround time for grading weekly assignments. We also plan to request GTA assistance from our department when the enrollments increase.
- Another challenge was locating and organizing readings from multiple sources, since there was no single OER textbook available for this course. In the future, we hope to centralize readings, cases, videos, etc. beyond iCollege to make them accessible to a broader audience than the enrolled GSU students.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to travel to present at conferences as planned. However, we look forward to sharing our experiences with other faculty members who are interested in transforming their courses as well.

2. Quotes

- “I have really appreciated this course being an OER course as it has saved me a lot of money and the resources provided have effectively supported the lectures and aided my studying in the course.”
- “I appreciate that learning this way allows me, and many others, to save money while still being able to grasp the concepts we're being taught just as well as we would with a traditional textbook.”
- “I love the fact that we have open access material instead of a traditional text book in this course. Personally, I would rather watch an hour long video about a certain topic compared to reading a full chapter about it. As a matter of fact, in this generation students would rather watch assigned videos or listen to assigned podcasts that they can access easily on their cellphones than sit for hours reading a text book. Also, not using a traditional textbooks allows us to study from a wider range of material. For example, if we were to use a traditional textbook we might have not had the opportunity to watch the PBS video about plea bargaining. Of course the textbook would provide examples but trust me the examples hit differently when you're actually seeing the parties involved talk and express their feelings.”
- “I actually like not having to buy a text book I feel like it makes the course easier because you have given us alternative resources in each module including videos it makes the course more interactive and not so old fashioned, it makes me want to go through the information and is way cheaper.”

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

A. Uniform Measurements Questions

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: 259

- Positive: 82% of 166 number of respondents
- Neutral: 18% of 166 number of respondents
- Negative: 0 % of 166 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?

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:

10% of students, out of a total 159 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)
- ☒ 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)

B. Measures Narrative

Supporting Impact Data

To determine the effectiveness of this transformation, we analyzed student performance, student satisfaction, and course-level retention data. Unfortunately, we do not have access to all of the measures that we outlined in our initial proposal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but quantitative and qualitative data still indicate this project was an overall success.

We collected data from IPORT, a web-based application that provides access to student data in the University Data Warehouse. We report the enrollments, grade distribution, and retention/completion data for both face-to-face and online sections during the pre-transformation period and the fall/spring implementation semesters. We also administered a midterm feedback survey on iCollege in which participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. We received 22 responses, which informed several improvements to the course. The overall consensus of the qualitative feedback is that students appreciated not having to purchase an expensive textbook, and they enjoyed the flexibility of the online course format.

Co-Factors

During Spring Semester 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States, resulting in nationwide school closings. Due to mandatory statewide stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements, students were required to make drastic changes in the middle of the semester (e.g., moving out of dorms, interruption of classes for two weeks, transitioning to virtual learning for all classes, lack of Internet and other resources to access course materials and complete work remotely, etc.). Currently as we draft this final report, we are still amid the pandemic, and the University remains closed. University administrators cancelled all student evaluations of instructors during Spring Semester 2020, and thus that valuable information is not available for us to report as we had anticipated. We are unsure of the immediate and long-term impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on our students, but we offer this co-factor for context.

4. Sustainability Plan

We plan to continue teaching this course in the no-cost format using OER materials. We will continue to look for updated OER materials, relevant criminal cases, etc. to incorporate into our subject matter modules. Since the course is taught every semester, we plan to update the course regularly and pay close attention to student feedback in order to improve the learning experience in the future.

5. Future Affordable Materials Plans

This project helped us to realize the power and impact of our own pedagogical decisions on students and our institution. We believe that decision-making *power* also requires the *responsibility* for instructors to reconsider our attitudes about textbook selections and critically examine the impact of our own choices on the students we serve. We look forward to adopting the no-cost pedagogy in other courses that we teach in the future as time and resources permit.

6. Future Scholarship Plans

We were planning to present our findings at pedagogical conferences such as The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and/or American Society of Criminology. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many conferences were cancelled. Nonetheless, we still look forward to sharing our experiences and the impact of this transformation project once the University reopens and travel resumes.