

Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants

Final Report

Date:

19 May 2016

Grant Number:

128

Institution Name(s):

Dalton State College

Team Members:

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- Dr. Lydia Postell, Department of English, lpostell@daltonstate.edu
- Ms. Melissa Whitesell, Derrell C. Roberts Library, mwhitesell@daltonstate.edu

Project Lead:

- Dr. Jenny Crisp, Department of English, jcrisp@daltonstate.edu

Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:

- Learning Support English, ENGL 0098 (current)
- Foundations of English, ENGL 0998 (Fall 2017 and thereafter)
- Co-curricular Support for English, ENGL 0999 (Fall 2017 and thereafter)

Semester Project Began:

Summer 2015

Semester(s) of Implementation:

Spring 2016

Average Number of Students Per Course Section:

18

Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation:

4 (spring semesters), 10 (fall semesters)

Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation:

An estimated 252 annually, 63 actual in first semester of implementation

1. Narrative

A. Key Outcomes

The transformative impact of having an open-access textbook was easy to see: Students did not need to buy the textbook, so they had no excuses for not using it. They were able to see the book both in class, since all sections are taught in computer labs, and outside of class, and they took advantage of having easy access to the book. Students liked being able to have practice exercises that were easily accessible, along with explanations that were crafted specifically for them.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is that some students do not look at the book as much as they should because, as one student stated, it's more "out of sight, out of mind" since it is online and not an object they are carrying. While that student made a valid point, the majority of students enjoyed having a free textbook written just for them.

An additional challenge for us is that for the first time this academic year, we had a marked change in the population in this course as the college's admissions standards changed. In the spring term, the first semester of implementation, of our 63 students enrolled, 30, or 48%, would not have been admitted at all last year due to low placement test scores or to their need for remediation in three of three areas (mathematics, reading and English). While this group did not do as well as our students have done in previous semesters, still 64% of those who would not have been admitted last year (or previous years of this QEP) were successful in the course. When we compare this to the roughly 50% of students who succeeded in the course in the three years prior to the course redesign that constitutes our QEP, we are quite proud of our students and of the work we have done to help them be successful. Of the 33 students (52% of enrolled) who would have been admitted to the college last year, 30 students, or 90.9%, successfully exited the course, so we feel we are serving most of that group well.

One event that we believe increased student buy-in for using an open online textbook was a student contest we held to name the textbook, which the team had forgotten to do prior to full implementation. Students suggested names through Google forms and then voted for their favorites; the faculty team and the dean of the School of Liberal Arts donated gift cards as prizes for ten runners-up and the final winner. Students chose *The Roadrunner's Guide to English* in honor of Dalton State's Roadrunner mascot. Future plans include a student art contest to illustrate the book, partly in response to student comments requesting more illustrations. We are seeking funding or donations for prizes for such a contest, which we plan to open to the full campus in order to increase the pool of artists and to advertise the availability of open textbooks.

On the question of accomplishments, one member of the QEP Action TEAM wrote: "The book made my job as instructor much easier. Since it was designed specifically for our students, there were no chapters that were extraneous and no shortage of the exercises my students needed to improve their writing performance. Having the textbooks was a win-win for me as an instructor, and the results showed in the number of students who passed my class: Of 11 students, 9 passed the class. One of the 2 who did not pass stopped attending class just before the final essay. The other student worked very hard and will probably pass the next time she takes the class. Considering that over the majority of my students would not have been admitted last year, I was very pleased with the results and have to believe that having the textbook boosted their performance. Usually, spring term is a time when many students do not

pass because they are repeating the course, or they are just weaker students. Having so many pass was just amazing!”

B. Lessons learned and changes planned

One of our instructors writes: “The next time I teach English 0098, which will be in the fall, I plan to spend more time on punctuation and on pronouns, if these skills are needed. With English 0098, the same course is never taught twice because all depends on the skills of the students. If they need certain skills, then we cover them, but if not, we don’t; however, I would like to expand our review of punctuation and pronouns in general.”

In addition to these sorts of pedagogical decisions, we are actively seeking more accessible online practice games as a response to student comments. Also, some students expressed a preference for printed books, and a few lack Internet access at home. We are planning to make a version of the text available through either our campus auxiliary services or Amazon for a small fee to students who would prefer a printed reference. Such a reference cannot, of course, include the extensive interactive components of our online textbook, but it would provide a resource for those with limited access and those with a preference for print.

2. Quotes

Additional student quotes are included in the supplementary data

- I like how simple it is to look up what I'm searching for.
- One thing I like about the textbook is that it seems very helpful. I personally feel like textbooks help me more. I know it's online, but if you teach a point in the textbook online, you can quickly take notes from it.
- [In response to a question about what could be improved] Games, send you an email of what we need help on/ are working on.

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

3a. Overall Measurements

Student Opinion of Materials

Was the overall student opinion about the materials used in the course positive, neutral, or negative?

The overall response was positive, but ten percent of the respondents (survey and solicited comments) were overall dissatisfied. Separately, some students expressed a preference for printed materials, and some of this student population does not have Internet access at home, so one of the goals going forward is to make the text-only portions of the book available in printed form for a low cost.

Total number of students affected in this project: 63

- Positive: 75 % (15 of 20 respondents)
- Neutral: 15 % (3 of 20 respondents)

- Negative: 10 % (2 of 20 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)
- X 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:

Choose One:

- X 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 Learning Outcomes

Success on our Student Learning Outcomes, unlike our DFW rate, is down since the previous year's and the previous semester's data. This seeming discrepancy can be explained by the way the SLOs are measured in these courses, measurement methods that are set by our institution's Quality Enhancement Plan. DFW rates are based on overall enrollment, whereas three of the four SLOs are measured by an exit essay, blind graded by all faculty members who teach developmental writing. The SLO numbers reflect only those students who succeed in the course to a level that qualifies them to sit for the exit essay, and the DFW rates reflect all students enrolled. The difference this semester is that virtually all students stayed in the course and qualified to attempt the exit essay, something that has never happened in our program during the spring semester. Not everyone who qualified passed the exit essay or succeeded on the individual measures on the rubric. However, almost all students stayed with the course, and every student progressed between our diagnostic essay and the exit essay. Perhaps because of the removal of the economic barrier presented by the purchase of a textbook, almost all students persisted in the course and made the attempt, and this persistence made a difference for enough of them that our DFW rate dropped. This persistence also meant that some weaker writers attempted this exit essay than have in the past, and that change accounts for the reduction in SLO

success rates. Finally, because of the change in student population discussed above, many students came into our program less prepared for college-level writing than in previous years.

We tracked student success on our four student learning outcomes. The first three outcomes are measured by a baseline diagnostic essay and the holistically blind-graded exit essay; the final outcome is based on behavioral measures. We have baseline data from the three previous academic years. In Spring 2016, we measured student performance on the SLOs and tracked it against the baseline data; we will continue to track overall change in success rates over the 2016-2017 academic year. This tracking in all sections of the course is part of Dr. Crisp's responsibilities as QEP director; she assesses the program in WEAVE each term and writes an annual report each summer.

The student learning outcomes, measures, and results are as follows:

1. Students will be able to identify and to write complete, grammatically correct, appropriately punctuated sentences.
 - a. Measure: Benchmark 1 and Criterion 4 of the end-of-term essay rubric
 - i. **The success rate in Spring 2016, the semester of implementation of the open textbook in all sections, was 81.6%; this is down from 89.1% in Fall 2015 and 89.3% in spring 2015.**
2. Students will be able to write paragraphs with at least one appropriate, concrete example.
 - a. Measure: Criterion 3 of the end-of-term essay rubric.
 - i. **The success rate in Spring 2016, the semester of implementation of the open textbook in all sections, was 93.3%; this is up slightly from 92.5% in Fall 2015.**
3. Students will be able to write essays with clear theses, introductory paragraphs, body paragraphs, and conclusions.
 - a. Measure: Criteria 1 and 2 of the end-of-term rubric.
 - i. **The success rate in Spring 2016, the semester of implementation of the open textbook in all sections, was 91.7%; this is down from 97.3% in Fall 2015 and 96.4% in spring 2015.**
4. Students will exhibit the characteristics of self-directed learners.
 - a. Measures:
 - b. Students will use the services of the Writing Lab five or more times during the semester to focus on specific problems
 - c. Students will be enrolled in and will meet Outcome 1 of the First Year Experience Seminar. [The outcome indicates that students will apply self-directed academic 6 of 17 strategies to their courses and learning.]
 - d. Students will become self-directed learners by achieving four or more of the following, as determined by the instructor:
 - i. Regular class attendance
 - ii. Completion of all major assignments
 - iii. Participation in class work and/or discussions
 - iv. Completion of journal, blog, or wiki entries
 - v. Use of Writers Resource, My Writing Lab, or other software in the Writing Lab
 - vi. Others determined by instructor in consultation with QEP Action TEAM and the QEP director.

- 1. The success rate in Spring 2016, the semester of implementation of the open textbook in all sections, was 82.4%; this is down from 84.6% in Fall 2015 and 91.3% in spring 2015 but is up markedly from 63.2% in spring 2014, the semester in which we became aware that textbook costs were a real barrier for our students. During that term, students were required to purchase an access card for writing software bundled with a new textbook, and their self-direction was measured in part by their use of that software. The 36.8% of students who did not meet this measure during that term were students who did not purchase that textbook, or who purchased a used copy. We spent the 2014-2015 academic year implementing a no-cost-to-students software package (through an institutional account purchase), and in 2015-2016 we have taken this a step further by eliminating the textbook cost as well.**

DFW Rates

Despite the lower success rates on the SLOs, and even given our absolute-bar group graded exit essay, DFW rates improved markedly this term. 19.0% of students, 12 out of a total 63 students affected, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the final semester of implementation. By comparison, in Fall 2015, 30.9% of students dropped, failed, or withdrew from English 0098. This improvement in DFW rates in the first semester of implementation is truly remarkable and is a reversal of a multi-year trend in English 0098: students enrolled in the spring term are almost always repeating the course, and results in spring and have traditionally been much worse than results in the fall semester. For example, in the Fall of 2014, the DFW rate in all sections of this course across the college was 11.3%; whereas in Spring 2015, that rate was 17.9%. In Fall 2013, the DFW rate was 16.7%, while in Spring 2014, the DFW rate was 31.4%. The change in year-over-year student success most likely reflects the change in admissions standards for Dalton State – we are serving a different, less prepared, population of entering students this year than we have over the last several years, and while this has affected overall rates, still many of those less-prepared students are succeeding.

Summary of supporting data

- Spreadsheet with chart of pre- and post-tested SLO data this term and previous years (the SLOs and measures are listed in the narrative above)
- Holistic rubric used to measure the diagnostic essay and the blind-graded exit essay. To pass this essay and exit the class, a student must receive two passing votes from three faculty readers; no faculty member knows the identities of the student authors, and class sections are mixed to limit guessing.
- Spreadsheet with chart of exit (student success) data for this term and previous terms
- The full text of our Learning Support English survey conducted each semester, including the new section on the open textbook
- Student responses to the open textbook section of the Learning Support English survey
- Student comments on the textbook, solicited separately from the survey (prior to the early exit)
- Student title contest screenshots
- Slide deck from presentation at the Georgia Association for Developmental Education annual conference in February 2016

- Not included but available upon request once measurement is possible (December 2016 for the initial ALG cohort): cohort success in English 1101 for the semester of implementation, later semesters of open textbook use, and prior semesters as a baseline

4. Sustainability Plan

Because Dalton State's Quality Enhancement Plan focuses on Learning Support English, through the end of this QEP cycle at the end of spring 2017, the course and its transformation enjoy considerable institutional support. In her role as QEP director, Dr. Crisp, the primary investigator, will take responsibility for keeping materials up-to-date through that time. However, the nine instructors who teach this course, the QEP Action TEAM, have all demonstrated an abiding commitment to our students who come to college not yet ready for college-level English. This commitment and the bonding as a team that we have developed over the last five years as we designed and implemented the QEP have created a local culture emphasizing student success in Learning Support English and will carry forward. In fact, one of the SACS requirements for a QEP is to demonstrate that the Plan has become a part of the institutional culture and will be sustained beyond the five-year review cycle.

Furthermore, the dean of the School of Liberal Arts and the chair of the English department have indicated that they value activities in support of the redesign of Learning Support English and students in that program, and they will be considering them as high achievements in the annual review process. Also, our collaborating librarian, Melissa Whitesell, has been promoted to interim director of our library during this year and has indicated she, too, is committed to the ongoing success of this project. Finally, Dalton State has a college-wide commitment to assessment and evaluation of courses and of ongoing projects such as this one. We will continue to collect data on our students' success using these transformed materials and to reevaluate as needed.

Within the USG, we are designing this textbook transformation to support the system-wide transformation of Learning Support that began rollout in Fall 2015. In that system-wide transformation, Learning Support reading and writing are combined into a single course rather than the two separate courses that have been offered in the past. Because we are near completion of what is proving to be a very successful QEP, Dalton State will make this shift once we have completed our plan review with SACS, in Fall 2017. However, we do not wish to abandon the transformed textbook at that time, and we do not want to create something that other USG institutions could not use. So, drawing on Dr. Postell's expertise as professor of both English and reading, we have designed a set of materials that can be used for writing alone or for an integrated reading and writing course. This also makes the textbook useful for other institutions outside as well as inside the USG.

5. Future Plans

- We plan to use this text for all sections of ENGL 0098, and the text is the basis for next year's course design of the two new developmental reading/writing courses we will offer in Fall 2017 and thereafter. The QEP Action TEAM will be designing these courses in Fall 2016 and early Spring 2017. The primary investigator, at least, also uses an open textbook available through MERLOT for English 1101 and hopes to be able to adopt open textbooks for more courses in the future. Upper-division literature courses in particular pose a difficulty as the more modern works are still under copyright, but the PI does seek low-cost options whenever possible.

- The PI included information about the open textbook in her presentation on Dalton State's QEP at the 2015 SACSCOC annual meeting in December 2015, and she distributed business cards with book information and the URL to attendees.
- In February 2016, Dr. Crisp and Dr. Postell presented on the textbook at the Georgia Association for Developmental Education annual meeting; they distributed information, demonstrated the book, and provided business cards with the URL to attendees.
- Finally, Dr. Crisp has just had a new proposal accepted for a presentation at the 2016 annual meeting of SACSCOC; this presentation is to focus on the importance of tailoring a QEP topic to demonstrated student needs. One part of those student needs is financial, and she plans to devote a portion of that presentation to the idea of open textbooks in general and to *The Roadrunner's Guide to English* in particular. As the previous set of business cards was printed before the student textbook title contest, she plans to have new cards printed.

6. Description of Photograph

- (left-right) Dr. Jenny Crisp, team lead and subject matter expert in writing; Ms. Melissa Whitesell, interim library director; Dr. Lydia Postell, subject matter expert in writing and reading.