

**Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants  
Final Report**

**Date:** May 15, 2016

**Grant number #** 139

**Institution name:** Kennesaw State University

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**Project Lead:** Carlton A. Usher

**Semester Program Began:** Fall 2015

**Semester of Implementation:** Spring 2015 – Spring 2016

**Average Number of Students Per Course:** 22

**Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation:** 7

**Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation:** 154

## **Project summary and key finding**

For over 10 years, KSU's First-Year and Transition Studies have been recognized nationally as one of the best at promoting college success. When we initially started this pilot in 2014, our hope was to contribute positively to the first-year student's financial bottom line. We knew the content of our courses were meeting Learning Objectives but believed impacting student learning using innovative pedagogy could be achieved via open resources. Open resources contributed to high-level engagement and learning according to both Professor and student.

As professors we learned that a minimum of 10 extra hours a week was necessary for the first few months of the pilot. This extra time is needed for delivering the surveys, the course content, providing a platform for engagement, and assessing the outcomes. The second semester, preparation time for structure and content was cut in half. Overall, we believed that this process gives flexibility to a topical course where emphasis is on knowledge acquisition. Some of the data bears out the student's ideas about saving money. When asked

*How did you collect the readings for this course?*

A whopping 74 of 76 (fall 2015 and spring 2016, n=76) used the links as opposed to hardcopy printouts. Fifty six percent collected the materials and saved on flash drives. Both of these activities demonstrate we achieved our goal of paperless, low cost, high quality content while saving our students some money. An overwhelming majority, 97%, (fall 2015) found retrieving the resources to be easy and accessible. Thus we met the challenge to provide clear, electronic content to replace outdated photocopied.

We did not expect that students would find minimal difference between a course using social media and a course without it. We were surprised that the participants believed social media did not significantly impact peer relationships. The end of semester survey (ALG, n=76), less than half believed no real impact occurred though when asked again in a different survey, 90% believed social media aided in developing peer relationships. However more than 80% (fall 2015, spring 2016) believed that Facebook made managing time and work more efficient. When asked about developing critical thinking skills and global awareness, an overwhelming amount believed that this process increased both. When asked to rate the tools connected to the learning experience, respondents chose smart phones, info graphics and video with narrative were much more preferred than reading with or without maps. Apparently, the traditional method of textbook use had little favor here, according to the data. We wanted to know if using social media extended the conversation outside of class. Sixty six respondents believed that using this method help extend the conversation around a topic discussed earlier. We were pleased with that result. To our surprise 46% (35 of 76) suggested they would share their work and course content with parents as opposed to peers at 33%. A clear indication that is somewhat proud of their achievement. Overall we believed this experience to be transformative for us because it offers us new opportunity reach our learning objectives. Our

course evaluations are always suburb but the chair of the department recognized that the comments were powerful, direct and demonstrates the students' love for the course.

### **Students Quotes**

Generally speaking respondents will leave open ended questions blank or write only a few words. All responses to the open ended question were deliberately clear; an indication that they wanted us to know that this course did in fact have a transformative impact on learning, attitudes toward learning, and innovative use of data. A few remarks are worthy of repetition here.

*This course was very effective in teaching us about global issues through online materials. By using videos and websites instead of a textbook, it makes learning and engaging in class discussion much better.*

*I enjoyed this course. It was very helpful that we did not have to purchase any books, and I loved being able to do everything online!*

*The Facebook page was much better than the book. Students may spend hundreds of dollars on a book and never open it, however they always have access to Facebook and clicking a link is much easier than fumbling through pages.*

*The course was good. Dr. Usher makes learning enjoyable and interesting. I believe the non-textbook approach was a great idea. It not only saved us students money, but also allowed us to discuss current issues and look up the information either ourselves or through the syllabus.*

*Overall I believe every student should take this course. It expands the way we see the world and other's helping us make a smoother transition in to the "adult world".*

*This was a great course I didn't believe I needed at first, but turned out to be a great experience. The global learning you have in this course is amazing and the conversations that are sparked are well needed for our generation*

The KSU 1111 seminar encompasses the Global Strategies Institute's research-based twenty five year projections of seven pivotal challenges impacting a global world. These seven are: population, resource management, technology, knowledge flow, economic integration, conflict/security, and governance. Consequently we designed assignments, media projects, tests, and in-class work to coincide with the 7 challenges. We also designed several survey instruments to assess which of the assignments were least values and which was most valued. The number of students impacted by this project over 2 semesters was ninety five<sup>1</sup>. The spring semester saw enrollment in courses drop so we taught other courses not connected to this project in the spring semester. Overall, after assessing all the data which included two Qualtrics

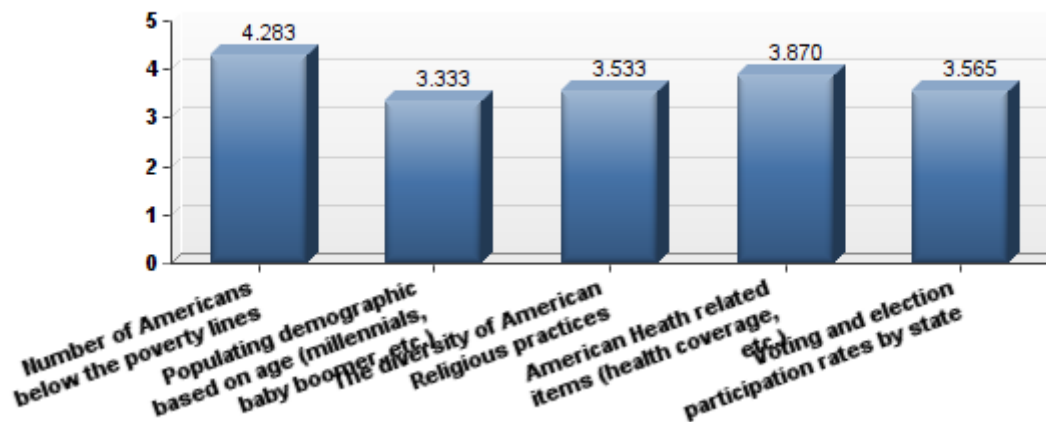
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<sup>1</sup> This project began in 2014, we have only included data once the proposal was accepted in 2015, thus 50 more students benefited from this project who are not listed as part of the project.

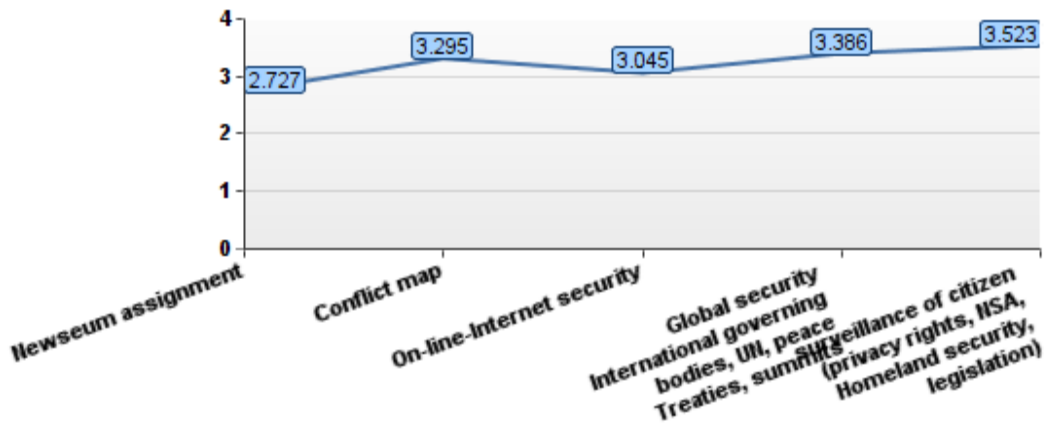
surveys, three end of semester surveys using Turning Point Technology, and pre and post surveys, it is a fair to suggest based on the data that :

- Approximately 90% of 76 respondents perceived the experience as excellent and positive
- Approximately 3% appear neutral and the remaining 2% or about 3 learners expressed a few negative feelings. Generally we believe those attitudes to be connected to overall experience of college

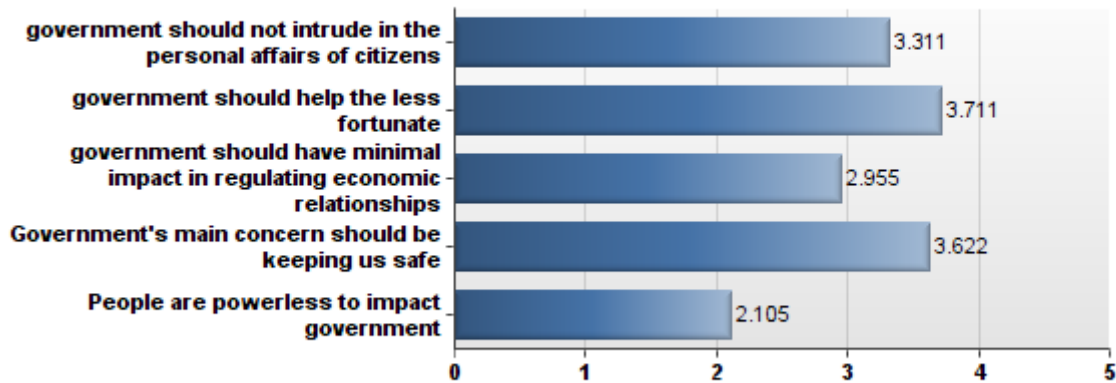
While we cannot present all facets of the data collected we can focus on the salient features from a few surveys. Our questionnaire was developed based on topics discussed in class. Students were asked to rate their most favorite and least favorite subject from a list of lesson plans delivered topic discussed throughout the semester. This is important to us for it will inform us how to scale topics, choose appropriate readings, and update the resources based on these student preferences.



For example Q1 asks the participant to rank topics. In this case while discussing the populations, students were most interested in exploring poverty, they were least interested in population demographics, thus we have a choice to focus more on the preferred topic or the least preferred topic for the upcoming semester. (See above).



When asked about “Conflict and Security” respondents choose surveillance of American citizens as the subject they would want peers to focus on in the future, (n=44). Thus we will add content accordingly. Additionally the observation that the differential of these average values are mere fractions of percentages demonstrates that students had an appreciation for all of the content.

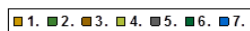
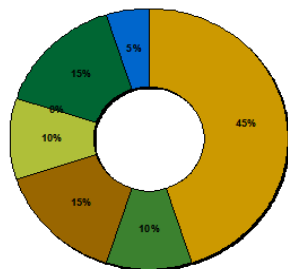


Previous surveys in previous years detail how little students know about government. When asked to rank the role of government all results were somewhat even and the belief that “People are powerless to impact government” is dwindling. Yet when asked in a different set of surveys about their least favorite topic for the previous 5 years government has ranked low on the list. These past two semesters were no different, thus, our future focus will include much more about governing. Notice in 2016 it actually increased after dropping a few points in 2014

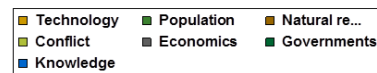
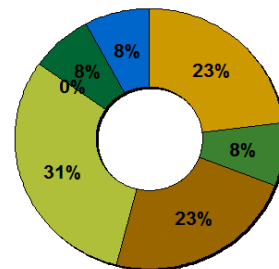
and 2015. We are not clear if the current political climate may have impacted their responses, but the data suggests we have work to do in this area.

Our pre and post semester survey for the last in all sections offers us valuable information on how to instruct in the future. The pre and post course questionnaire was a very useful tool. When asked “Which of these topics most interests you about the global issues?” notice technology weighted heavily by students in the pre score. By semester’s end the survey results depicted a more even distribution of interests. We can translate that to mean we were successful in presenting content and pedagogy.<sup>2</sup>

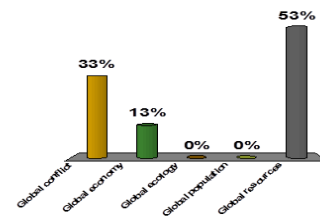
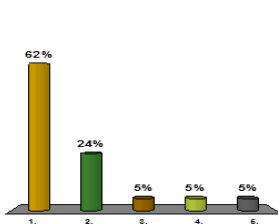
Pre course survey



Post course Survey



When asked to advise the next president on regarding the most pressing matter. Most believed in the pre course that global conflict was the most important, by semesters end global conflict was still a consideration but the global resources was viewed as most important. There is no conflict of engagement here, it is clear since it was discussed how global conflict at times is the result of quarrels over global resources.



While this survey summary offers but few example of the students perception it is a snapshot and not an exhaustive assessment. The data is rich with information valuable to be more effective in our delivery of this content.

### Student Learning Outcomes and Grades

In Fall 2014 a few sections were taught using readings from the course packet. In spring 2015 the course packet was abandoned totally for the open sources format. Withdrawals from these

<sup>2</sup> See data labeled Global Issues Pre and Post Course Test

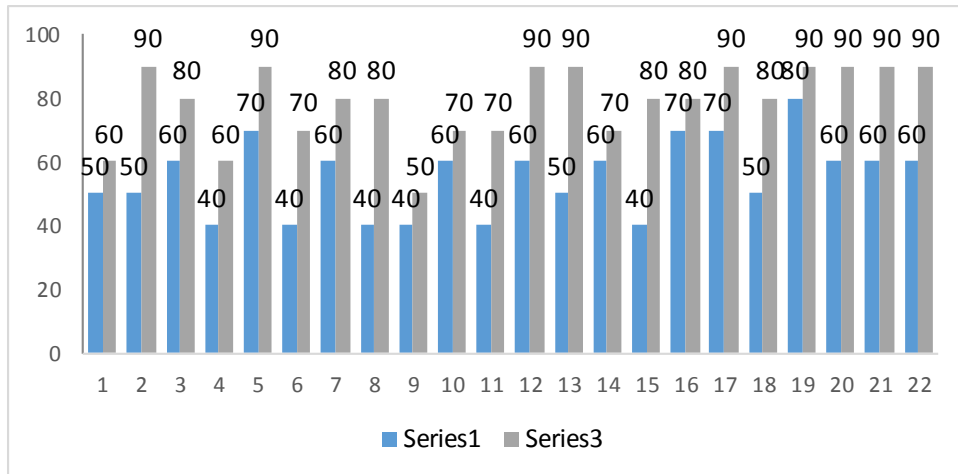
first-year seminar courses tend to be connected to personal issues and family, the post withdrawal interview of three students indicated they were experiencing financial hardships and personal challenges. The no cost option was important but not extended across all courses. The withdrawal(W) rates of all the KSU 1111 section was approximately 5 per course, this number appears higher than previous years because another instructor’s section had a 22% W rate, which was unusual high. The rate of withdrawals from the course we instructed was 2.3 per, well below the total courses average. According the data between AY 2014-2015, there were approximately 640 enrolled and 20 withdrew before semester’s end.

When examining the course grades, comparatively speaking, this cohort’s grades tended to be higher on average than the overall course total average. Additionally, when comparing semesters between traditional delivery and the open sources, it is clear that students did better, this may be attributed to a number of factors in addition to the course content, but it is worth repeating here. When comparing use and open stax , there is a visible difference between fall 2014 and fall 2015. In 2015 the grade A earned doubled those from the previous year in 2014 when the open sources were not used. Students earned less C grades (6) in 2015 than in fall 2014 (30) as well.

Open Stax vs. Traditional Text comparison AY 2014-2015

Grade	2014 (1)	F 2014 (2)	F 2014 (3)	Total Fall 2014	F 2015	F 2015	F2015	Total Fall 2015
A	5	3	2	10	1	10	12	23
B	7	19	13	39	10	10	10	30
C	10	5	9	24	1	3	2	6
D	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	4
F	1					1	1	2
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

To further test our supposition that no- cost textbook makes a difference beyond the cost saving, we compared sections using a traditional text and open stax. The exam was the same for all sections, the section that used open sources tended to score higher. As the graph below demonstrates, the sections using open stax results were almost double those in comparison. One of three graphs generated clearly show Series 3 (ALG) numbers as higher compared to Series 1 (Traditional Text).



### Sustainability Plan

It is our intent to offer several workshops on how to development a no textbook content. A web portal will also be developed for open access by May 30, 2016. The page will be divided into to 7 subsections; each corresponding to the seven challenges described in the course will be developed. Each of the consecutive sections will include web links to online content. This platform will also allow us to create host smart maps, videos and interactive data; a central content of the course a Additionally, it is also our intent to continue to teach these sections and increase the number of instructors to (10) using this model. We will meet with the coordinator of the course and discuss strategy to implement more sections of this course. Our sustainability plan includes a continuation of cost saving for the students and a concurrent focus of continuing to reach learning outcomes. It is our plan to review and amend as needed after each semester. By December of 2016, a training module will be designed to help faculty teach the course in this format. Ultimately we will attempt to solicit the larger grant to expand the no cost textbook innovative approach to learning.

### Future Plans

It is our intent to continue to collect data on this work beyond the end date. We believe this project will aid in developing other opportunities to impact learning and save students money. Prior to this grant proposal those of us who teach topical approaches in our courses are challenged to find text that is custom, the flexibility of open source fills that void, encourage students' saving but most important, it creates learning environment offering students independence to investigate and develop critical thinking skills from a variety of sources.

We have collected data from several electronic platforms. It is our duty to present this project at several first-year conferences, engagement conferences, and global learning conferences. Our hope is to publish a journal article as a way of professional development but also to advance a program that places students at the center financially and academically.