

## Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants

### Final Report

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**Grant Number:** 104

**Institution Name(s):** Georgia State University Perimeter College/Georgia Perimeter College

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**Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:**

ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1101H; ENGL 1102 and ENGL 1102H

**Semester Project Began:** Spring 2015

**Semester(s) of Implementation:** Spring 2016

**Average Number of Students Per Course Section:** 24

**Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation:** 13: reported in initial Spring 2016 phase

**Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation:** 290: 160 student responses reported in initial Spring 2016 phase

#### 1. Narrative

**Meetings:** The ALG Grant Committee met a total of seven times in 2015: May 18, June 23, Aug. 3, Aug. 28, Sept. 29 (Faculty Development Day), Nov. 2, and Nov. 23. In addition, the team assigned to revise the grammar chapters (Kirk Swenson and Barbara Hall) met five times: Aug. 3, Aug. 18, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, and Oct 20. Finally, the entire committee was joined by five English faculty members for a focus group meeting on Aug. 12. This was an opportunity for all interested English faculty to discuss what they wanted in the revised text.

The priorities for revision voiced by faculty included: improve ease of navigation between sections and chapters; eliminate redundancies; include more samples of student writing; and improve accessibility to meet ADA compliancy standards. In the first meeting the committee divided the etext into five sections for purposes of revising to meet these goals. Committee members were assigned sections as follows:

- Lauren Curtright: **Introduction and Research**
- Kathryn Crowther: **Writing Modes**

- Tracienne Ravita and Nancy Gilbert: **Writing Process**
- Kirk Swenson and Barbara Hall: **Grammar**

### **Lauren Curtright – Challenges and Accomplishments:**

The greatest challenge was in making the Research chapter’s guidelines for writing research papers that were both specific enough to provide meaningful guidance to students and general enough that they would apply to composition courses focused on various topics, such as social issues, or literary analysis. The greatest accomplishments were incorporating into the chapter descriptions of, and links to, up-to-date multimedia resources for helping students to conduct research using online library databases.

### **Kathryn Crowther – Challenges and Accomplishments:**

The main challenge was to take two chapters from the original text book (“Rhetorical Modes” and “Readings: Examples of Essays”) and condense them into one chapter. The committee decided based on instructor feedback that the textbook needed more examples of student writing and that placing sample essays in the same chapter as the information on each rhetorical mode would be more helpful to students. The new chapter contains three more sample student essays (adding “description,” “definition,” and replacing the existing “narration”) to give a total of 6 sample student essays. The sample essays come at the end of each section on the respective mode to give students a sense of the writing process from start to finish. Similarly, the online sample essays were moved from the previous stand-alone chapter to the end of each section of the new chapter and were updated to include new selections and purge non-functioning external hyperlinks.

Another goal for the chapter was to provide more links to previous content in the book to allow students to move fluidly back and forth if they need to review earlier concepts such as pre-writing and drafting (and to facilitate more flexible integration of the book into different class structures). Additionally, the existing exercises were modified and the tips were integrated into the narrative where appropriate. Finally, all of the images were given “alt-text” to enable screen-readers, and the sample essays were converted to text for the same reason.

The main accomplishments of this chapter were updated content, the addition of new student sample papers, improved navigation between this chapter and earlier sections via internal links, and the transformation of all tables and images into ADA compliant text.

### **Tracienne Ravita and Nancy Gilbert -- Challenges and Accomplishments:**

The challenge for the Writing Process section was the same as for the text as a whole: to streamline the content by removing redundant information while retaining useful instructional materials, to improve navigation within and between sections, and to improve accessibility for those with disabilities. The 2014/2015 text presented five separate consecutive chapters on the writing process: Introduction to Writing, Prewriting Techniques, Writing Effective Paragraphs, Writing Effective Thesis Statements and Outlines, and Drafting and Revising the Essay. The 2016 version reduces the number of chapters to two: Introduction to Writing (with subchapters on audience and purpose, using sources, thesis statements, and paragraphs), and The Writing Process, (with subchapters on prewriting, outlining, drafting, and revising). Thus, the instruction is organized into the areas of foundations for essay writing, followed by the creation of an essay from the generation of ideas to the revision and formatting of a draft. Redundancies, such as the repetition of the transitions table in separate chapters, were eliminated, and hyperlinks were inserted to allow for quick migration to the appropriate materials.

Many exercises were revised, relocated, or removed, and some of the Writing at Work sections – originally highlighted in shaded boxes – were integrated into the main text or removed.

New to the 2016 version is a brief introduction to using sources in the opening chapter, links to YouTube videos on brainstorming techniques in the prewriting section, and additional examples of student paragraphs to demonstrate organization and development. Throughout these chapters, approximately thirty examples of paragraphs and outline sections from the example essay in process, as well as the sample essay and outline on aquaponics, were changed to text to allow text-to-audio programs to translate these items.

### **Kirk Swenson and Barbara Hall – Challenges and Accomplishments:**

One major challenge in revising the grammar sections of the e-text was determining how to coordinate the standard grammar instruction with the ESL grammar instruction. In the original text, these two components were allocated to separate chapters. After consultation, Swenson and Hall decided to integrate the two. One reason for doing so was the fact that, for the students of Perimeter College, the distinction between ESL students (or English language learners) and native speakers is increasingly difficult to make. Many students function in an intermediary zone: many of their earliest years and home life have required speaking a language other than English, but their use of English also extends back into their childhood, practiced in a variety of English-speaking communities. Furthermore, many of the grammar difficulties that both native speakers and ESL students face overlap. And, since another major goal was to reduce the excessive length of the original text's grammar instruction, Swenson and Hall were pleased that integrating these two sections eliminated redundancy and made all the grammar material more manageable and concise.

Swenson and Hall also needed to compose original material to add to the text. For example, despite its excessive length, the original text lacked a useful explanation of subordination, in particular the formation of adjective and adverb clauses, the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses, and the function of relative pronouns. It also neglected adequate explanations of the complex and numerous verb tenses used in English, which can be especially confusing for ESL students. Swenson and Hall divided these tasks between them, with Swenson composing the former material and Hall the latter. Other sections of the grammar portions of the text were also extensively revised and expanded, for example, the section on syntax and sentence patterns.

The result of Swenson's and Hall's efforts is a grammar component (Chapter 5) that is better organized, clearer, more concise, and more substantive than the original. Swenson reports that the examples and explanations of sentence structure and verb forms, in particular, were helpful in class instruction during the spring 2016 semester.

## **2. Quotes**

- Provide three quotes from students evaluating their experience with the no-cost learning materials.
  1. "I found the online textbook was very convenient and helpful. I like that I didn't have to carry a heavy textbook and that I could fit it on my phone if I needed to. This textbook also saved me a lot of money, which is a plus."
  2. "*Successful College Composition* is a good book because it explains everything very clearly and is easy to access."
  3. "The book *really* helped me out this semester. Everything was simple. I learned more from that one book than I have from all my English teachers. I will definitely be using it in the future."

4. "What I liked about the e-book was that I can access it through the iPad we received this semester; I can use it on a regular PC, and also I did not have to shell out more money for a 3<sup>rd</sup> book. It was smart to put it online. Very easy to move around in it as well."

### 3. Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

#### 3a. Overall Measurements

##### Qualitative

##### 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 the Spring 2016 semester: **290**

Total number of students **surveyed**: **160**

- Positive: **68 %** of 160 number of respondents
- Neutral: **31 %** of 160 number of respondents
- Negative: **1 %** of 160 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)
- X Neutral: Same performance outcomes over previous semester(s)
- Negative: Lower performance outcomes over previous semester(s)

##### Instructors: 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?*

- Positive
- X Neutral
- Negative

##### Quantitative

##### Drop/Fail/Withdraw Rates

**34%** of students, out of a total **1610** students who registered for ENGL 1101, dropped/failed/withdrew from the course in the first semester of implementation.

*[Note: These numbers do not represent reported survey results from instructors and students using SCC Spring 2016. See 3b.]*

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)

### 3b. Narrative

#### Summary of Supporting Data:

Instructor survey questions for *Successful College Composition* were introduced to the ENGL 1101/1102 Curriculum Committee on Faculty Development Day in February 2016, with the understanding that the survey would be conducted in the final weeks of the Spring Semester by all faculty members using--or not using--the revised e-text, *SCC*. Included in the survey were questions regarding the instructor's evaluation of *SCC*'s effect on Learning Outcomes; of the changes (if any) in student DWF rates from the previous semester (Fall 2015); and of improvements in content and navigation from the original e-text. Student responses to *SCC* were also solicited in a separate survey at that time. Instructor and student surveys were sent out to all full and part-time faculty members in mid April 2016.

In total, 20 instructors responded to the *SCC* survey. Fourteen of the twenty instructors responding noted they did not use *SCC*. Six instructor responses, representing 13 out of the 114 sections of ENGL 1101 offered in the Spring 2016 semester (approximately 11% of ENGL 1101 sections), provided feedback on the usability of the e-text. Their collective class enrollments represent approximately 10% of students registered for ENGL 1101 in Spring 2016.

#### Instructors' responses on *SCC*:

Instructor responses to the survey reported an overall positive experience, citing ease of use, clarity of content, and the text's availability to students. Instructors universally reported, however, a neutral impact on the text's effect on learning outcomes and the DWF rate from the previous semester.

#### Students' responses:

Positive responses by students (approximately 67%) primarily cite the low/no cost of the text, clarity of content, and ease of access as a factor in their positive evaluations. The majority of the Neutral evaluations stem from students not using the text at all--either because the material was adequately covered in class, or because they felt confident in their understanding of the writing skills covered.

#### Quantitative Measures:

The raw data provided for all ENGL 1101 sections, comparing Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 results, indicates an increase in the DWF rate from 27% to 34%. However, the qualitative data gathered after the initial launch of *SCC* suggests otherwise. While positive, the qualitative data is still from a small sample. As a result, its impact on overall ENGL 1101 DWF rates cannot be measured with any certainty, nor can any conclusions be drawn.

Because the qualitative responses from students and instructors have been overwhelmingly positive, a longitudinal study measuring the impact of *SCC* on student learning outcomes and DWF rates over several semesters, not just one, would be more relevant. When instructors have time to become comfortable with using the e-text and integrating it into their course curricula, whether as a primary text or a backup resource, the DWF numbers are expected to improve.

## 4. Sustainability Plan

- The team may expect the leadership in the Department of English at Georgia State University, Perimeter College to continue to promote the availability and use of *Successful College Composition* in English 1101 and 1102 courses on all campuses, including online. Throughout the project, the team's department chairs consistently forwarded announcements to colleagues to give or receive information about this e-text. The faculty-led ENGL 1101/1102 Curriculum Committee at Perimeter College established a sub-committee for the electronic text, which various team members will continue to serve on or to advise. To make the e-text accessible to all faculty and students, the sub-committee will continue to work with GSU librarians to ensure that the latest version of the e-text is posted to the current online database of library research guides and/or to a future database of electronic materials produced by faculty at GSU. This sub-committee will also oversee future revisions of, and future data collections on, *Successful College Composition*. Revisions will likely require accommodating new types of assignments, as composition courses increasingly teach students communication skills in various media. The sub-committee may issue calls to faculty in order to collect, review, and add materials, including resources and examples of instructors' assignments and students' work, to keep the material relevant.

## 5. Future Plans

- This project has reinforced and broadened our understanding of the ways in which students benefit from easily accessible, up-to-date writing models and resources. It also brought to our attention the significance of visual design and navigation tools for making an e-text appealing to instructors and students alike.
- Because Perimeter College's Center for Teaching and Learning managed and supported this project, team members expect to present on it in the future at conferences or in publications coordinated or promoted by GSU's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

## 6. Description of Photograph

- Team members featured in the photo are (from left to right): Lauren Curtright (Project Lead), Kirk Swenson, Kathryn Crowther, and Tracienne Ravita. Not shown: Barbara Hall and Nancy Gilbert.