

**Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grants
Proposal Form**

Please complete per inline instructions; completed form not to exceed four pages.

Institution Name	Middle Georgia State College		
Team Members (Name, Title, Department and email address for each)	<p>Dr. Julie A. Lester, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of History and Political Science; julie.lester@mga.edu</p> <p>Dr. Christopher N. Lawrence, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Department of History and Political Science; christopher.lawrence@mga.edu</p>		
Sponsor, Title, Department	Dr. Marti Venn, Provost, Office of the Provost		
Course Name, Course Number and Semester Offered (Spring 2015 Required)	POLS 1101 American Government; Fall 2014 and Spring 2015.		
Average Number of Students in the Course	35 per section	Number Course sessions per Academic year	12 (8 Lester, 4 Lawrence)
Award Category (pick one)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No-Cost-to-Students Learning Materials <input type="checkbox"/> OpenStax Textbooks <input type="checkbox"/> Course Pack Pilots		
List the original course materials for students (including title, whether optional or required, & cost for each item)	<p>Lester: <i>We The People</i>, essentials edition, required.</p> <p>Lawrence: <i>Cause and Consequence in American Politics</i>, required.</p>	<p>\$80.00 (Lester)</p> <p>\$89.00 (Lawrence)</p> <p>\$80-89 total, depending on professor</p>	
Projected Per Student Cost	\$0 (ebook), \$49.50 (print copy)	Projected Per Student Savings (%)	38-100%

1. PROJECT GOALS

The primary goal of the project is to improve student learning outcomes and student progression through the American Government course (POLS 1101) at Middle Georgia State College (MGA) by investigating whether the use of an open content textbook, used in lieu of a traditional textbook, will improve these outcomes.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

POLS 1101 is part of the University System of Georgia's core curriculum, which fulfills the Area E Social Science requirement in part and meets the state U.S. and Georgia constitutions requirement (O.C.G.A. § 20-3-68). It is a key gateway course for entering and returning students; given its lack of formal prerequisites other than learning support clearance in English and Reading, POLS 1101 is commonly taken by first-year students. Many students at MGA do not complete the course on their first attempt, leading to problems with student progression and retention due to being placed on academic probation or suspension, or a general failure to remain on track for timely degree completion. Increasingly these issues lead to financial aid consequences for students, and if not corrected they will adversely affect state funding to the institution.

One obstacle that has been identified to student progression and retention is the high cost of required course materials, beyond basic tuition and mandatory fees. Particularly at MGA, which is an institution with very low in-state tuition and fees by both state and national standards, textbook costs make up a relatively large share of student expenses and may be the only part of their educational expenses with an obvious out-of-pocket cost to students. Although our institution has explored ways to improve access to traditional textbooks, nonetheless many students still do not obtain the required materials for class and—unsurprisingly—perform poorly in their courses as a result.

In our proposal we seek to investigate whether providing students with an open content textbook, *American Government* by Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman (currently used by eCore for POLS 1101), will improve the rate of students obtaining the textbook and using it in the course, as well as improving student learning outcomes such as meeting class objectives and progression to completion of the course with a passing grade. We also will consider more qualitative measures of success, to investigate whether students are satisfied with the open content textbook and perceive it to be of equal or greater quality than the traditional texts that are currently used.

To improve the generalizability of our research, we propose investigating these questions by comparing the baseline course offered in Fall 2014 with a treatment course (using the open content textbook instead of the traditional texts currently used) in Spring 2015, in three formats: traditional face-to-face classes, hybrid classes meeting typically once per week, and fully-online classes. By including multiple professors we also hope to increase generalizability by demonstrating that our results are not tied to one particular faculty member's approach to the course or teaching style.

The major benefits of this research are expected to be twofold: first, if successful, the research may pave the way for lowering the total cost of students for completing their degrees, which should improve student retention, progression, and graduation rates if the lower economic cost of the textbook delivers coursework of similar quality. The second major benefit of this research would be to expand knowledge within political science and the higher education community, by providing evidence to support faculty decision-making in deciding whether to adopt open content course materials such as textbooks in their courses. Although open content appears to be a promising area for reducing the costs of education, in this era of data-driven decision-making we need to demonstrate empirically whether or not these hopes are borne out in practice.

1.2 TRANSFORMATION ACTION PLAN

The major activities associated with the project are expected to be the development of measures to assess the impact of the intervention and adapting existing teaching materials (course syllabi, lectures, and student assessments) to the organization and content of the open content textbook. This process of adaptation is unusually challenging in this course, as unlike in some other fields, there is no consensus within the political science discipline regarding the precise substantive content that should be presented within the introductory American government course, which means that textbooks vary widely in their coverage of particular topics and their points of emphasis within those topics. These activities will be supported by salary supplements for Dr. Lawrence and Dr. Lester funded 100% by the grant. The use of release time is infeasible given the high student demand for POLS 1101 and the low number of qualified faculty available to teach the course in their stead. The alternative of offering fewer class sections would be counterproductive to the purpose of this proposal, which is to provide generalizable data across as many sections as is feasible, taught by the same individuals in both the baseline and treatment conditions.

The following quantitative data will be used for comparisons between the baseline and treatment classes: objective performance on established student learning outcomes (SLOs) on the final examination; student retention and progression (DFW rates); and self-reported textbook purchase, rental, or use by other means.

The following qualitative data will be used for comparisons between the baseline and treatment classes: student self-reported satisfaction with the course overall and student self-reported satisfaction with the textbook on multiple dimensions (ease of understanding; readability; organization; overall quality). Specific Likert scale items to measure these data will be developed based on established practices in the field and administered to students as part of the final exam period to maximize responses.

1.3 TIMELINE

- August-December 2014: Teach baseline sections with traditional textbooks in face-to-face, hybrid, and fully-online formats during the fall 2014 semester.

- By October 31, 2014: Develop qualitative and quantitative measures of student behavior and attitudes (other than those collected via institutional processes; see section 1.2) to be administered to Fall 2014 sections of POLS 1101 for baseline and treatment data collection and submit instrument for approval by MGA Institutional Review Board.
- November 1-December 19, 2014: Redesign course syllabi and course materials to fit structure of the open content textbook.
- December 9-13, 2014: Administer baseline data collection during final exam session for each Fall 2014 section taught by Dr. Lawrence and Dr. Lester.
- By December 19, 2014: Complete and submit first status report.
- January-May 2015: Teach treatment sections with open content textbook in face-to-face, hybrid, and fully-online formats during spring 2015 semester.
- May 2015 exam period: Administer treatment data collection during final exam session for each Spring 2015 section taught by Dr. Lawrence and Dr. Lester.
- By June 1: complete and submit final report.

1.4 BUDGET

Salary support for Dr. Lester’s work on the project (including benefits)	\$5,000
Salary support for Dr. Lawrence’s work on the project (including benefits)	\$5,000
Travel support for Dr. Lester and/or Dr. Lawrence to attend meetings on project	<u>\$800</u>
TOTAL	\$10,800

1.5 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

If the intervention is successful, we plan to continue to use the existing open content textbook in future semesters of the course until it requires revisions due to substantive changes in political circumstances (for example, the campaign and outcome of the 2016 presidential election is likely to require substantial revisions to the text in 2017). We will also share our experiences with full-time and part-time faculty teaching POLS 1101 at MGA and other USG institutions, and other faculty at MGA adopting the open content book in the future would have access to internal mini-grants from the Provost’s office.

Unfortunately the open content textbook we plan to adopt in the grant is currently licensed under a “no derivatives” license, which means that either the original copyright holders must revise the text themselves or we will need to seek out or write an alternative text at that time. However, we have similar issues with the sustainability of traditional American government textbooks as well.

1.6 REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

- Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman (2013). *American Government*. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida.
- Official Georgia Code, Annotated. Retrieved August 21, 2014.
- Attachment: Letter of support from Dr. Marti Venn, Provost, Middle Georgia State College.