

Affordable Learning Implementation Grant Report

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 OT 520: Advanced Occupational Performance I

Background

After my first semester teaching OT 520: Advanced Occupational Performance I in the Fall of 2024, I knew that I wanted to change both the readings for the course and how students accessed them. I felt limited by the use of just two textbooks that did not fully cover the diverse content of the course and cost a total of \$200 to purchase. I also struggled with students who came to class unprepared without having completed the readings.

With the support of the library staff and Affordable Learning Implementation Grant, I was able to offer all course readings at no cost to the 29 graduate occupational therapy students enrolled in my two sections of this course for Fall 2025. I emailed students prior to the start of the semester to explain my participation in the program and to let them know that they did not need to purchase a book for the course. Readings were primarily available as e-reserve book chapters, journal articles, or e-books. I set up a module in Brightspace with the library e-reserve link and password. In each daily Brightspace course module, I listed the required e-reserve readings and/or linked any additional open access internet sources including videos, podcasts, and webpages. Additionally, to engage students' personal interests and encourage them to find, assess, read, and critique current evidence (an essential professional skill for graduate students to master before becoming practitioners), students were often required to select their own readings from library journal holdings based on the course topic and come to class prepared to share what they had learned with the class.

In response to previous feedback that some daily readings were too long, small groups of students were often assigned different readings/resources and were responsible as a group to educate the rest of the class. This reduced individual student reading and gave students greater responsibility for their peer's learning while covering the same amount of content. See the screenshot below for a sample of a daily module from the first week of class listing e-reserve readings and linking a podcast for students to self-select an additional resource to engage with.

How to prepare for class:

1. Read one of the following articles about nature-based occupational therapy.
 1. Firby, H., & Raine, R. (2023). Engaging with nature and the outdoors: A scoping review of therapeutic applications in contemporary occupational therapy.
 2. Burke et al. (2024). Nature-based pediatric occupational therapy: A scoping review. (2024).
 3. Moula, Z., Palmer, K., & Walshe, N. (2022). A systematic review of arts-based interventions delivered to children and young people in nature or outdoors: Impact on nature connectedness, health and wellbeing.
 4. [Sign up for your article](#). (1/3 the class will do each article). All articles can be downloaded through the e-reserves link in the "Required Readings" folder.
2. Choose and listen to an episode from the podcast titled [Therapy in the Great Outdoors](#) hosted by Laura Figueroa, OTR/L, PhD. [Sign up for your episode](#) (all students in one section should select a different episode - there are more than 80 to choose from).
3. Come to class prepared to tell us what you learned in your article and podcast episode.

Summary of Student Feedback

At midsemester, I held a short in-class discussion with both sections of my course asking about their experience accessing the course readings. Overall, the students reported being

satisfied with the ease of accessing the readings through e-reserves as linked through Brightspace. I was concerned that they would find the process clunky or possibly confusing, but none reported that that was the case. They reported no complaints and said that no changes should be made at the time. I did learn that one student had purchased a book for the class. I had not realized that the bookstore would automatically roll-over book selections from previous years, so if students looked up the course through the bookstore, the books that students had been required to purchase the previous year were still listed.

At the end of the semester, I asked the students to complete an anonymous survey through Brightspace assessing the quality of the course readings, ease of access, percentage of readings they completed for this and for other courses, and preferred type of reading. As I am teaching a new-to-me course next semester, I also asked the students what their preferred type of reading for the future course is. I was not able to offer in-class time for the survey due to the snow day during the last week of classes, however, 25 out of 29 students completed the survey outside of class. See the [Appendix](#) for complete survey data.

All respondents rated the quality of readings as excellent (15) or good (10). When asked to explain their rating, responses fell into four themes: relevance to students and course content, affordability, ease of access, and depth of content covered. The majority of comments fell into the first theme with comments such as *“The course readings were relevant to the course material and clearly evidence based.”* Students liked reading research articles that support evidence-based practice and additionally commented on the length of readings as appropriate. While some appreciated reading historical and current articles, others preferred recent sources only. One student appreciated how e-reserves allowed for more kinds of readings and more content by writing *“there were lots of variety that [there] probably wouldn’t have been with just one book.”*

When asked which percentage of assigned readings they completed for this course and for their other courses, students reported reading more of the assigned readings for this course than they typically did. When rating the current course, 12 students reported they read 100% of assigned readings, 12 selected 75% or more, and 1 selected 50% or more. When asked to select which percentage of assigned readings they typically complete for OTHER courses, only 2 selected 100%, 11 selected 75% or more, 9 selected 50% or more, and 3 selected 25% or more.

When asked to explain why they read more or fewer of the assigned readings or “no difference” for our course, 6 students reported that there was “no difference” and the rest described that they read more giving explanations related to: ease of access/cost and class structure/relevance. When discussing cost and access, a student wrote, *“Accessing the readings for this course were easy, and I did not have to use my own funds to purchase a textbook. I feel I was more inclined to complete the readings as they were more accessible to me.”* When describing class structure as a factor, students made comments such as *“I read more because I wanted to be able to understand what was being discussed during the discussions and participate during group conversations,”* and *“I was required to have these readings done before class as we had discussions on the readings. During some [sessions of this] class, we had to go into groups and put together main ideas from the readings as well which having the readings done helped us further discuss in class.”* Two students reported that they did or did not complete readings for this and other courses depending on the amount of “free time” they had.

Readings for this course fell into three categories: e-reserve articles, student-selected articles, and e-book chapters. Students were asked to rank which type of reading was their preferred type. 16 students selected e-reserve articles as their preferred type, 6 selected student-selected journal articles, and 3 selected e-book chapters. I did not ask them to explain their

selection, but through other survey answers, it seems that they appreciated the journal articles because they like reading current evidence, found them more “digestible” than book chapters, appreciated their shorter length as compared with book chapters, and saw them as relevant.

When asked to describe the personal impact of not having to purchase a textbook for this course, students reported: reduced financial stress, appreciation for not having to purchase a textbook that was unused or underused as they feel they often do in other courses, ease of access, enhanced learning, and appreciation of faculty effort. Most student described the impact in terms of reduced financial stress or strain citing their status as graduate students in their 5th year of college with increased financial responsibilities and less support than when they were undergraduate students. They complained about a history of purchasing books for courses and then only reading part of them for the class. This felt like this was a waste of their resources and discouraged them from purchasing other books. They liked that they could access these readings anytime and anywhere without having to lug around a heavy textbook. Some reported that readings supplied as e-reserves enhanced their learning with accessible readings that were more current than textbooks. They also appreciated that I had considered the financial needs of students, and thanked me for the time and thought that I had put into collating the readings.

Finally, when asked to select their preferred reading type for an upcoming graduate theory course, they all selected “a combination of e-book chapters and articles available for free through the library e-reserves” over purchasing a traditional textbook.

Conclusion and Future Plans

Many things went more smoothly this semester when compared with the first time I taught this course. I believe that the outcome of the grant and use of e-reserves for course readings was instrumental in improving student engagement, learning, and satisfaction with the course and supported an improved student-faculty relationship. I had assumed that the reduced cost would benefit the students, but their survey responses helped me to understand that there were additional barriers to their ability and willingness to complete the readings. This process helped me to understand the students’ experience and they, in turn, felt seen by me. Through the end-of-semester survey, I also learned that the students valued the effort I put into preparing the course and readings.

Although I had used e-reserves with previous classes for a few supplemental readings in addition to traditional course textbooks in the past, the grant formalized the process giving me the support and motivation to fully take on this project, remove all textbook cost for the students, and improve the quality and accessibility of readings. This did take work to set up, but librarian assistance was always helpful and efficient. I was able to add readings throughout the semester, which limited the up-front time requirement and, more importantly, allowed me the flexibility to respond to student needs and interests as well as update/change/add readings throughout the semester. I will continue to use the established e-reserves list next year when teaching this course with updates to reflect current research and professional developments. I will also be sure to contact the bookstore to remove the list of required books.

I am teaching a new-to-me course in graduate occupational therapy theory next semester. I have not found a single, affordable textbook that would cover the content I wish to include in the class. Although the theory course will be a very different course than this semester’s course, I am considering establishing e-reserves to use for readings for that class as well. I will continue to balance textbook readings with research articles and other types of reading including student-selected readings.

Appendix

End of Semester Affordable Learning Grant Survey Data

Question 1

How would you rate the quality of readings for this course.

Excellent		15	(60 %)
Good		10	(40 %)
Fair		0	(0 %)
Poor		0	(0 %)

Question 2

Please explain your rating for the quality of course readings.

Responses grouped by topic:

Relevance to students and course content

- I feel like every article assigned was a good enough length that was not too difficult or too easy to read. I also liked the variety of articles.
- Readings were good and relevant to the course.
- The quality of the readings for this semester were excellent as it was relevant evidence based articles.
- For the class content I feel that the readings were appropriate.
- Current evidence-based research as well as historical studies and data.
- The quality of the course readings were great. I thought they were informative and I learned a lot from reading and discussing the articles.
- The readings were never too long and they matched with what we were discussing in class.
- Readings were on topic and provided a lot of evidence-based insight of what we were discussing in class
- The readings were beneficial and contained important content regarding course material. It addressed important content discussed in class, I just wish we dissected it more.
- Readings were always very applicable to class material, and the research gave great examples of how to apply our learning to interventions and within assessments.
- Most of the readings were of good quality and content, however some were a bit outdated, repetitive, or not as applicable to course content.
- All of the readings provided me with the proper information required for the course and for our profession. Some of the readings were more digestible than others.
- I think all course readings tied directly or make a furthering impact and information of topics being learned in class.
- They aligned with the materials and were easy to understand
- Accurate with content and informative
- I found the readings very informative, especially because a lot of the readings discussed the importance of arts-based interventions.
- The course readings were relevant to the course material and clearly evidence based.

Affordability

- I thought the readings were very helpful to our learning on the subject for that week. I am grateful for the opportunity to have these books provided through this program and did not have to pay any textbooks.
- I enjoyed the readings and appreciated how affordable they were.
- I learned a lot from these readings and being able to learn in a low-cost way.

Ease of access

- I really enjoyed how easy it was to access the material. Having it all in one folder and being able to go directly to the source is so helpful.

- All of the resources were easy to find/ access. I wish there was more information about interventions in the readings.
- I feel that the readings were good quality and easy to access.
- The course readings were very relevant to the class assignments and discussions. They were easy to access and conveniently located.

Depth of covered content

- The textbook we used for our population projects were very clear and interesting as well as robust. There were lots of variety that probably wouldn't have been with just one book.

Question 3

Please rate the ease of accessing course readings for this course.

Very easy		21	(84 %)
Easy		3	(12 %)
Neutral		1	(4 %)
Difficult		0	(0 %)
Very difficult		0	(0 %)

Question 4

Please select the option that best represents the percentage of assigned course readings that you completed for THIS course.

100%		12	(48 %)
75% or greater (but less than 100%)		12	(48 %)
50% or greater (but less than 75%)		1	(4 %)
25% or greater (but less than 50%)		0	(0 %)
0% or greater (but less than 25%)		0	(0 %)

Question 5

Please select the option that best represents the percentage of assigned readings you typically complete for your OTHER courses.

100%		2	(8 %)
75% or more (but less than 100%)		11	(44 %)
50% or more (but less than 75%)		9	(36 %)
25% or more (but less than 50%)		3	(12 %)
0% or more (but less than 25%)		0	(0 %)

Question 6

Please explain why you read more or fewer course readings for this course as compared to your other courses (or write, no difference if that is the case).

- 6 students reported no difference

Other responses grouped by topic:

Ease of access and cost

- The readings for this course were more easily accessible than other textbooks.
- I felt I read more compared to other courses because I had access to the readings compared to other courses where I had to purchase expensive textbooks.
- Many of the articles in other courses had restricted access and I could not read the assigned material. Even when conducting my own research, I usually find a useful article but it is a hassle to request access and wait for the library to send the article so having these sources readily available was extremely helpful.
- The readings for this class were extremely accessible, being that they were no cost to us and all available online in one direct spot. Readings also did not feel like they were a waste of time, which often feels like

that in other classes as they do not apply directly to our role as entry-level clinicians. These readings were valuable and I gained knowledge from them.

- Accessing the readings for this course were easy, and I did not have to use my own funds to purchase a textbook. I feel I was more inclined to complete the readings as they were more accessible to me.
- Sometimes I do not purchase the textbooks for other classes due to the cost and I rely on classmates or online PDFs, however sometimes I can't access online PDFs because they are either behind a paywall or just not on a safe website
- I felt more compelled to acquire and read these articles and textbook chapters due to their accessibility. Each year, I am hesitant to purchase textbooks which tend to be hundreds of dollars because I do not want to spend the money. Now that these readings were free, I was more willing to read in entirety.
- I feel as though I read more for this class because they were light but informative readings that were all available right in our D2L course tab.
- Also because they were easy to access and I did not need to buy/rent the reading.

Time

- Don't always have time
- The amount I read depended on the free time I had and the amount of work I had for each class.

Class Structure and Relevance

- Additionally, other courses often assign readings which are not relevant to the class/instructional material/discussions. However, I always completed the readings for this class, as I knew they were important for discussions.
- The readings were shorter, they were always current with what we were learning, and they were evidence-based. It's more interesting than reading chapters in a textbook.
- Usually I don't read all textbook readings because some of it is repeat information so if I look at the chapter and already know the topic I won't read it but since these were all specific to what we were doing I read more
- I read more for this class because we used the material in the class. Often for other classes our assigned readings are not addressed during class so there is less of a need to read them.
- I read more of the readings in this class because we discussed them during class.
- Requirements in class discussions 'forced' me to read as if I were to be asked a direct question I would have to have read as the topics discussed in this class were highly specific.
- For some of the other courses, the reading was never discussed in class so I wouldn't feel the need to read it.
- I read more because I wanted to be able to understand what was being discussed during the discussions and participate during group conversations. I felt the readings provided me with most of the knowledge and content from the course as classes were focused on crafting or presentations for example.
- I was required to have these readings done before class as we had discussions on the readings. During some classes, we had to go into groups and put together main ideas from the readings as well which having the readings done helped us further discuss in class.
- I read more for this course because I knew that we would be doing in class activities with them.

Question 7

Please rank the following types of course readings based on your preference.

1 = your preferred type of reading

2 = second preference for type of reading

3 = least preferred type of reading

e-reserve assigned articles



student selected articles (you were assigned a topic and had to find, read, and share with others what you had found and read)



e-reserve assigned book chapters



Questions 8 and 9 on the survey asked the students to list their favorite (most impactful) and least favorite (least impactful readings) from the semester. I have omitted this data from this report as it does not assess the grant specifically.

Question 10

In a few sentences, please explain the personal impact (on you) of not having to purchase a textbook for this course.

Reduced financial stress

- I felt a lot less stressed with this option because buying textbooks for several different classes and then having to pick them up or them be delayed on you was hard when you need that information for class.
- Not having to purchase a textbook was very nice after coming off of 12 weeks of fieldwork. It was nice to know I did not have to buy an expensive textbook after working for free all summer.
- I am paying for college on my own so any little bit helps, especially because the books are usually 100 or more dollars and we never read the whole thing
- I truly felt grateful that I did not have to purchase a textbook. Money is tight for myself so not having to purchase an expensive textbook meant I was able to spend that money on other necessities such as gas, groceries, and rent.
- Instead of purchasing a textbook that I know I'd never look at, I was able to save my money for other things. For example, I fell in love with the craft I was doing, so I purchased more materials to continue doing the craft beyond what's required for the course.
- Grad school is already expensive, and not having to worry about purchasing another textbook was super helpful.
- I was grateful that I did not have to purchase a textbook for this course. I feel this helped lessen the financial costs that we already face as graduate students.
- Not having to buy a textbook was helpful because we had to buy art supplies. After the summer of fieldwork and significantly less time to work not having to spend lots of money on various textbooks would be a hardship.
- I liked the idea of not purchasing a textbook for the course. I have always bought almost every single textbook throughout my college experience, and I don't want to know what that number totals out to in regards to how much I have spent these last 5 years.
- Not having to buy a textbook saved me a lot of money.
- Not have to stress about the financial burden of an expensive textbook

- Not having to purchase a textbook for this course was incredibly relieving. As a graduate student, a lot of bills, payments, and other expenses have been placed on me as I transition out of school and textbooks are an additional expense that can be so overwhelming. I appreciated not having to worry about paying rent or buying textbooks, as they can often equal the same amount.
- I was very grateful for not having to purchase textbook for this course. I try my best to find textbooks online or having versions that are cheaper because graduate school is a lot of money in general. I have a part time job along with school to help pay my tuition and it is a big help not to pay additional money for textbooks. Having all of our books on ebooks were very convenient as well as we were able to do all of our assignments on time as our books were right on e-reserves and did not have to wait for our textbooks to be delivered. Graduate school I also have less scholarships then undergrad, which means i have to pay more and not having to pay for textbooks helped tremendously.
- As a graduate student that works to pay rent and pay for my own groceries and college education, textbooks are a huge stressor every semester in order to afford them so I can participate in class.
- As a graduate college student there are a lot of small expenses that I must pay for and keep up with from week to week on top of larger expenses such as tuition and rent. It was extremely beneficial for me to have one less cost to worry about while still getting the supplemental education needed for this course. Not having to purchase a textbook relieved both a financial and mental burden from me this semester.
- Not having to but textbooks was very beneficial to me, as most books are expensive
- I work but not having time to work over summer really impacted me. My parents support me but I am responsible for most of my finances. This really helped me because I usually am buying \$300 books that I never open.
- Not having to purchase a textbook was great! I didn't have to pay upwards of \$100 for a textbook, and I didn't have to worry about when my textbook would come in.

Feel textbook purchases can be a waste of money, especially when is unused or underused

- I truly appreciated not needing to purchase a textbook for this course. As a graduate student, money is often very tight. Therefore, this was one less burden. Additionally, I have been required to purchase textbooks in the past which the professors only used infrequently or hardly used at all, making me feel as if I have wasted money which I could have saved for loans or other school supplies. Therefore, I feel grateful I was not required to purchase any additional materials.
- I feel I waste so much money on textbooks when I purchase a book that we only read a few chapters from. Combined with all the textbooks we need to buy for each class, it can easily cost over 500 dollars a semester. Therefore, the e-reserves allowed me to read specifically the chapters and articles required for the course without spending so much money on wasted material.
- Not purchasing a textbook was highly beneficial. For courses we usually buy a \$100 textbook and then never read it.
- I am paying for college on my own so any little bit helps, especially because the books are usually 100 or more dollars and we never read the whole thing

Easy to access anywhere/anytime

- It was very convenient to not have to purchase a textbook for the class. Both the finances and not having to carry around a textbook were good aspects.
- Additionally, instead of carrying a textbook around campus I was able to do the readings easily on my computer.
- I feel I was more inclined to read e-text as compared to other classes due to how easily accessible it was. I can read my laptop anywhere, but I usually am not carrying around a textbook with me.
- Being a college student, it is hard to find hours to be able to work while going to classes, studying, and completing homework. Not having to buy a textbook for this course has allowed me access to all the readings without having to spend money on an expensive textbook or just not being able to read at all.

Enhanced learning

- Not having to purchase a textbook was very helpful not only in my personal finances but also in my learning. Most times professors force students to buy a textbook for a class, and do not even reference it throughout the course. Having the material provided to me showed me it would be discussed, and is important material that the professor found time and saw the value of sharing it.

- It made it much easier to actually complete the readings and also the financial burden was relieved.
- I also think that having articles on e-reserves is beneficial because the research is more accurate as it is likely less outdated than a textbook would be.

Appreciation of faculty effort

- I wish more professors took the time to consider how expensive textbooks are for students, especially those who do not receive little to no financial support from their parents.
- Having this grant made a huge difference for me, and I'm so thankful that I didn't have to pay for it. This is the first class I have had this grant and been able to save money, so thank you so much for getting it and being so thoughtful for the students!

Question 11

Please select your preferred reading type for next semester's graduate theory course.

Traditional textbook (I prefer to purchase a textbook to own and use for class)		0	(0 %)
A combination of e-book chapters and articles available for free through the library e-reserves		25	(100 %)