

Spring 2026 Affordable Learning Implementation Grant Report

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Course and Grant Overview: During Spring 2026, I implemented affordable learning materials in my Hist 131: *World History from 1500 to the Present* course as part of the Affordable Learning Implementation Grant. The course enrolled 70 students and covered major global developments from the early modern period through the contemporary world, through the lens of global capitalism. We discussed the historical development of capitalism through issues of imperialism, industrialization, nationalism, global conflict, decolonization, the Cold War, globalization, and current global issues.

The primary goal of the grant implementation was to reduce the financial burden associated with course materials while maintaining, and where possible, improving the quality and accessibility of resources available to students. In a world history course, students are asked to engage with a substantial amount of reading, historical evidence, maps, primary sources, and secondary scholarship. The cost of commercial textbooks and supplementary materials can therefore become a significant barrier to participation.

The grant provided an opportunity to reconsider the course's required materials and replace costly resources with affordable and openly accessible alternatives. Rather than treating affordability as separate from academic quality, I approached the implementation as an opportunity to make course materials more accessible while preserving the historical depth, breadth, and rigor expected of the course.

Overall, the implementation was successful. Students had access to required learning materials from the beginning of the semester without the need to purchase an expensive textbook, and the use of affordable materials became an integrated part of the course rather than an additional resource placed alongside a traditional commercial textbook.

Specific Implementation of Affordable Learning Materials (OER and Licensed Materials):

The most significant change supported by the Affordable Learning Implementation Grant was the replacement of the traditional commercial textbook with a collection of affordable and openly accessible learning resources. Rather than asking students to purchase one textbook and use it as the primary source for the entire semester, I redesigned the reading component of *World History from 1500 to the Present* around multiple types of materials that could be accessed by all students at absolutely no cost.

This approach was particularly appropriate for a world history course because no single textbook can fully represent the geographic breadth, historical perspectives, and primary-source evidence that are necessary for students to understand global history. The grant allowed me to build a more flexible collection of materials that addressed specific topics and learning objectives throughout the semester.

The OER materials used in the course included the following:

1. Open-Access Textbook-Style Resources: Where students needed broad historical background and chronological context, I used open-access textbook materials rather than requiring students to purchase a commercial world history textbook. These readings provided students with foundational information about major events, historical periods, and global developments. The open-access materials served as the structural foundation for the course, replacing the role that a traditional commercial textbook would normally play. Students could access these materials electronically without purchasing a textbook.

2. Primary-Source Documents: I supplemented the textbook-style readings with openly accessible primary-source documents. These materials included historical speeches, political documents, letters, firsthand accounts, legal and governmental documents, and other evidence produced during the historical periods under study. The use of primary sources was particularly important because students in a world history course need to learn how to interpret historical evidence rather than simply read a narrative account of the past. This allowed the affordable-learning initiative to contribute directly to the course's emphasis on historical thinking and source analysis.

3. Open Educational Resources and Scholarly Readings: I also incorporated selected open educational resources and openly accessible scholarly materials to provide additional perspectives available in our library database. These resources were selected according to their relevance to specific course objectives rather than simply because they were free. I myself reviewed materials for historical accuracy, academic quality, readability, and appropriateness for undergraduate students. Using multiple sources also allowed students to encounter different interpretations of historical developments. This was especially useful for subjects where historians have debated causes, consequences, and interpretations.

4. Digital Archives and Museum Resources (MET): Another important component of the course was the use of freely accessible digital collections, archives, and museum resources, especially the MET. These resources were particularly valuable for helping students understand that history is constructed from evidence. Students were therefore encouraged to move beyond simply asking, "What happened?" and consider questions such as:

- What evidence do historians use to understand this event?
- Who created this source?
- What perspective does the source represent?
- What information does the source provide?
- What information might it leave out?
- How does this source compare with other historical interpretations?

5. Instructor-Curated Course Materials: An additional benefit of the grant was the ability to curate materials specifically for this course. Instead of directing students to a commercial textbook for every topic, I selected individual readings and resources based on what students needed to accomplish in each unit. This resulted in a more focused set of course materials.

For example, one unit might combine an open-access historical overview with a primary-source document and a digital archive, while another unit might use an open-access scholarly reading alongside maps and visual evidence. This approach allowed me to construct a course "text" from multiple affordable sources rather than treating a single commercial textbook as the central authority for the course.

Evaluation of the Affordable Learning Implementation Model: From an instructional perspective, the replacement of the commercial textbook was one of the most successful aspects of the grant implementation. Students retained access to the background information necessary for the course while gaining access to a broader range of primary and secondary sources. The model also gave me greater control over the relationship between readings and learning objectives. Rather than assigning a textbook chapter because it happened to be the chapter corresponding to a particular week, I could select materials based on their direct usefulness for the historical question or skill being addressed.

The grant therefore supported both affordability and pedagogical improvement.

The experience has convinced me that affordable learning materials are most effective when they are intentionally curated and integrated into the course. The goal is not simply to find free materials to replace a textbook; the goal is to construct a coherent set of academically rigorous resources that gives students reliable access to the information, evidence, and perspectives necessary to succeed in the course. There is no doubt that this is the model I will continue to work with, and improvise on, in the future.