

Spring 2020 OER Implementation Grant Report

In Fall 2020, I applied for the OER grant to use and implement a free online textbook called *The American Yawp* in my Hist 111: US History since 1876 course. The 35 students in the course, therefore, were assigned a free textbook, which was something that many of them personally told me they appreciated. In addition to the information conveyed in the textbook, the other appealing aspect of *TAY* were the primary sources (documents written by eyewitnesses to historical events) included in the website.

1. Students Engagement with the OER materials

In a survey I conducted with my Hist 111 course after the semester concluded, 85% of the respondents (17 of 20), said that I should continue using *TAY* going forward. Comments from the survey ranged from: “I enjoyed the free online textbook. It saved me a lot of money but also offered lots of valuable information that helped me to follow along well in lectures” to “I really liked that it was free, and that the language wasn't too complicated so it was pretty easy to understand even if I got distracted by other things and had to come back to it.”

There were some drawbacks. Three students noted that the important parts of the textbook were not “called out” (either through holding or highlighting or some other form of textual marker). Others noted that they were unable to highlight for themselves things they found to be important. There are valid complaints and real drawbacks of the text, which is only available in pdf or hypertext.

Overall I was pleased with the ways in which students interacted with the text. Two students noted that engaging with the primary sources was difficult at first, but they improved as the semester went on, which is essentially all I can ask for.

2. Future OER Plans

I plan on using as many OER materials as possible going forward (or, conversely, using sources from non-profit publishers). In my upper level courses, especially Hist 313: The Age of Jackson and Hist 314: The Civil War and Reconstruction, I have been able to find document readers that faculty have put together and have put online. These are primary sources found that have been placed online by various archives and are therefore open source and free to use. As soon as I teach those courses again, I will definitely be using them.

3. Additional OER resources Discovered through your Implementation

I have started looking for other OER textbooks as a way of attempting to address the concerns raised by the students—especially the markers within the textbook that

draw attention to important material. Using the website oercommons.org, I found several other US History textbooks. One, from the University of Georgia called *History in the Making* seemed promising, but I didn't like some of the interpretations the text takes. Rice University has an OER Program called OpenStax. The US History textbook there might answer some of my students's concerns: the sections are smaller, the important information is clearly marked, and the text is well-written.

4. General Feedback Regarding OER and your Implementation

Implementing an OER this semester actually turned out to be fortuitous. When students were forced to leave campus, not having to lug another textbook home proved useful. It also meant I could be certain that every student was able to keep up with the readings and other assignments because I knew they had access to the materials. Overall, I think OER should be implemented on a more widespread basis and I'll do my best to keep using as many free or open sources as available.