

## **Affordable Learning Implementation Grant**

### **Final Report (Spring 2025)**

**Brian Snee, Ph.D.**

#### **Comm 101 (.01, .02): Communication & Society**

In the spring of 2025, I was (generously!) awarded an Affordable Learning Implementation Grant. The proposal was to replace the very expensive text that my department tends to use wherever we offer sections (plural) of our basic course: COMM 101: Communication & Society. I proposed a pilot study in which students would be required to read a free, online text. I chose:

- *Mass Communication, Media, and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*. 2016.

This spring, I taught two sections of the class with a total of 58 students. The OER text was linked in my syllabus to avoid IP law infractions, and the contents of the text were included in all 7 of the bi-weekly online quizzes.

Unlike most of the courses that I teach, which need to be firmly rooted in the present – the content of our disciplinary material changes constantly – this introductory course covers more media *history* than any other that we offer. In other words, a book published in 2016 was likely to be “new enough” to include everything that I would want the students to read and know.

As one might imagine, the students did not complain about the cost, nor did they comment on the age of the text or the dated nature of the material. (Some of the examples used to illustrate the material were clearly no longer contemporary.) There might be three reasons for this. First, I warned them of this on Day 1 when we reviewed the syllabus that the text was a decade old, so they were primed not to be surprised. Second, they might not have read the book at all. Sadly, that is an

increasingly familiar trend regardless of the cost and age of the textbook. (Sigh.) Finally, they may have understood on their own that the timeliness of the examples mattered less than the time-tested theories and concepts being presented.

Whatever the reason(s) for their silence, one thing is clear: overall, **grades were neither lower nor higher than in previous years in which I taught this course and required a newer and more expensive book.** Therefore, if nothing else, I think we can conclude that the students did NOT suffer academically or intellectually in any measurable way because of the use of an OER text.

My personal conclusion is this: **I will never again ask first-year students to buy an expensive book for this introductory, history-based course.** Moving forward, I intend to use an OER text in every section in every semester.

I want to sincerely thank the OER committee for this opportunity. 58 students and 1 faculty member benefitted in a variety of ways from your work and your generosity.