Willenbrink Affordable Learning Implementation Grant Report

Background

I applied for the Affordable Learning Implementation Grant targeting three courses that I regularly teach: ENLT 122: Introduction to Drama, THTR 211: Theatre Histories I, and THTR 212: Theatre Histories II. As with many literature survey courses, which focus on a broad swath of time (in my case from the ancient Greeks to present day), these courses had previously been taught with (and around) anthologies of world drama. Since coming to the University back in 2009, I've used four different anthologies—*The Bedford Introduction to Drama* and *The Norton Anthology of Drama Volumes I* and *II*, as well as *The Norton Anthology of Drama Shorter Edition.* These anthologies have each been updated once over the past fifteen years, so in total, I've taught with eight different anthologies. While such anthologies are useful for those scope and the breadth of knowledge and content that they provide, they come with a hefty price tag. The Bedford lists for $125. Each version of the Norton retails for nearly $100.

Choosing an anthology also means choosing my course content. Because of that price tag, I was reluctant to ask students to buy anything outside of the anthology even though playscripts are generally among the most affordable pieces of literature one can buy with acting editions retailing for only around $8. So, in these courses, the anthologies (and their price tag) essentially determined the content of my courses as I would have to build my teaching practice around content that was collected by the editors. The way that I used to justify my reliance on these anthologies was to say to my students that I would always use content from the anthologies in my classes, essentially offering them the opportunity to purchase a textbook for more than one course.

Need for Change

The need to change my course materials has been made obvious since the COVID-19 pandemic as more students have moved to virtual learning and as I have grown my virtual course offerings, especially ENLT 122: Introduction to Drama, which I have taught four sections of over the last two summers. With students off campus and the course meeting asynchronously, I could not be sure that we were working off the same text, taking away our one shared point of connection. Furthermore, in the case of my Theatre Histories classes, these anthologies were one of a pair of texts that were required, the other was a theatre history text, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* ($90), so I was essentially adding an extra $200 to my students' textbook orders with one course.

Implementation

I piloted open educational resources in my two sections of ENLT 122 in Summer 2024. As many of the text that we use are in the public domain, I was able to keep much of the content the same this year as I have in years past. However, through using open resources, especially archive.org, I was able to curate editions and translations in a way that I haven't been able to in the past. For example, I'm a devotee of the translations of Aristophanes by Jeffrey Henderson, who renders the ancient Greek into the contemporary mélange of slang that we, US English speakers, use. Henderson's translations make a 2,000+ year old text leap off the page, and I have finally been able to use them in my classes because of this grant.

I also made use, as I have in years past, of media resources offered through the library. Because drama is both written and performed, I find the recordings of material to be especially important in helping my students see what is on the page come to life and, thus, be able to think about the presence and aliveness of theatre in different ways.

Results and Student Response

I'm proud to report that the use of these resources also enabled my classes to have a shared, common texts, which enhanced my students' work as well as the experience of the class. The student response to these resources were strong as well. I am including anonymous student feedback from my first section, Summer I 2024, with this report, which reflects the positive response that the students had to using these resources.

Areas for Improvement & Future Plans

The area of growth and revision that I've identified is around citation. As I continue to develop my courses with OER as a central component, I need to be more diligent and work in more detail to teach my students how to properly and effectively cite these sources in their written material. In future iterations, I plan on using other pieces of free technology like Zotero, to aid with this goal. I am also, as I indicate in my application, using open resources in my Fall 2024 Theatre Histories I course and plan to continue to use these resources in other courses in the future.

Anonymous Student Responses to Survey (11 out of 18 students responded):

This is my first time to use free, openly available materials in my classes. How was your experience using these? Were there any issues? How did the use of these materials change how you engaged with the class?
No issues they were all there set up nice easy access
I found no issues with the materials and I thought they were effective.
the free openly materials were very easy to use.
I loved the free online materials that we were able to use. I had no issues at all. At first it was a little confusing on how to access the readings, but once I figured it out it was a great resource that allowed me to save a good amount of money.
it was great, it allowed me to learn without worry and was enjoyable.
I found it very helpful! There were no issues for me. I probably would go about the class the same with or without openly available materials in my classes.
This was one of the last classes I'm taking at the university of scranton. Thank you for being a great and understanding professor. My experience using the materials helped me tremendously. I'm so thankful for the U and their great professor's.
I had no issues with getting the materials, though (personally) I feel that reading plays subtracts from them heavily. It helped me a lot to watch performances of the material in addition to reading along. These were rather easy to find, since I knew where to look… though perhaps including these performances could help?
I thought the materials were good. There were no problems that I came across.
Whatever you started to do keep doing it lol i liked the way the class was structured it was very organized and helped me feel on top of my work

I found that these materials were easy to use, and I did not encounter any issues while using them. I think that having all the materials online made it easier to engage with the class.