Final Report: OER Textbook for Core A2 Courses

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Summary
This report provides an overview of the project completed with OER grant funds received from USF’s Gleeson Library in 2021. Our OER project was to create a textbook that would reduce costs for students in USF’s current Core A2 classes, including RHET 120, 250, 295 and HONC 132. It was also intended to provide a “multimodal” (writing, speaking, digital) approach to composition to reflect best practices and pedagogical innovations in the teaching of composition and communication. This report will cover the specific plan for the OER, what was accomplished, what assessment efforts were undertaken, and areas for further development. Findings included in this report will also be shared with the Department of Rhetoric and Language.

Project Plan
In 2021, four faculty members from the Department of Rhetoric and Language (Dr. Cathy Gabor, Dr. Michelle LaVigne, Dr. Leigh Meredith, and Dr. Julie Sullivan) were awarded $4000 to create a working draft of a textbook for courses that fulfill USF’s Core requirement in area A2. The proposal specifically sought to “fuse instruction in writing, speaking, and digital communication” because the marketplace currently offers no such textbook. Instead, students would have to buy three (or at least two) separate textbooks to cover those facets of rhetorical study. In addition, the grantees noted that “[e]xisting materials are also quickly outdated (particularly when it comes to digital rhetoric) and often fail to meet the best practices of anti-racist pedagogy. Our proposed project would fill this gap by creating a fully editable and annotatable set of resources that could serve as a ‘living’ and ‘liquid’ textbook.”
The initial plan was to create five chapters which would each be a mix of curated open-access content and original writing, paired with material to guide instructors using the OER. The five chapters were: Rhetorical Foundations (titled changed to Rhetorical Terminology and Ideology); The Rhetorical Situation; Discourse Communities; Introduction to Genre; *Eloquentia Perfecta*.

**Work Completed/Project Outputs**

At the writing of this report three of the five chapters are completed enough to be used in class. These chapters include:

- Rhetorical Terminology and Ideology
- Discourse Communities
- Introduction to Genre

The intent to create a mix of originally written text and links to other open-access content was achieved in the three aforementioned chapters, which were also edited and updated during the pilot semesters.

In addition, instructor materials to accompany the textbook have also been drafted and piloted. These include:

- Sample syllabi
- Course schedules
- Assignments (minor and major)
- Lesson Plans
- Lecture Notes and Slides

The chapter on *Eloquentia Perfecta* is technically functional in that there is a core text written by a former USF professor, but it has not been built out with links and intentionally antiracist examples. The chapter on The Rhetorical Situation is still in draft form. The primary reason for the state of the five proposed chapters is that two of the four professors originally awarded the grant left the project (and, in one case, left the university).
The 3 completed chapters and related materials have been piloted in the targeted classes during the following semesters: Spring 2022, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023. Students were able to participate in the development process in a number of ways. First, students were asked to read and informally comment on the efficacy of the materials in the relevant pilot courses. Second, a graduate student in USF’s Masters in Professional Communication program (MAPC), Madison Zarate, who was serving as a TA/RA for Professor Meredith in Spring ‘23, reviewed the chapters for clarity and suggested additional examples and case-studies. Further, Madison conducted 3 focus groups in Professor Gabor’s classes to solicit undergraduate feedback on these chapters (more on that assessment effort below).

In terms of current circulation and impact of these materials, we have shared what we’ve developed with additional PT and FT Rhetoric and Language faculty teaching the relevant courses in Fall 22 and Spring 23, and plan to roll out the final version of the textbook to the full department upon completion. We also plan to present on this process and its outcomes at the flagship conference for our field, the College Communication and Composition Conference (4Cs), in Spring 24.

Assessment
The grantees conducted one major and one minor assessment of the OER in Spring 2022 and Spring 2023, respectively.

In Spring 2022, 43 student work projects were gathered and assessed (direct), and 117 students were surveyed (indirect). The Spring 2022 assessment focused on the most fully developed chapter of the OER: Introduction to Genre, as well as the revised curriculum the textbook is intended to support. The data showed that students using the OER chapter on genre were able to identify and exemplify “rhetorical genre” better than their counterparts who did not use the OER chapter or participate in the pilot course. Comments from students using the draft textbook and related curriculum included:

- “The assignments allow for consciousness and increased awareness in connection to other
majors. The aspect of interlinking work of other classmates and being able to recognize and understand their form of linguistics expanded understanding and clearance of how some people communicate information. The class is structured in a very useful manner to be able to consider alongside the ideology of cura personalis while going against the grain of systemic form of oppressive literature that damages opportunities to underrepresented minorities and allow opportunities for people to speak in their most comfortable tone without academic penalty.”

- “The projects we did directly correlated to the norms of writing and rhetoric. For instance, we analyzed the genres within our major and also used different forms of presentation (website, essay, and speaking) to talk about topics.”
- “This class implemented the skill of critical thinking. I was able to look at my major in different perspectives and point out the significance of its standards. All of the projects (good ideas, genre, and the speech) combined allowed me to think broadly and learn more about my major than I initially thought.”

While this demonstrates the effectiveness of the new curriculum/resources, we also noted some areas for improvement. All students (both in pilot and non-pilot courses) showed difficulty analyzing genre and critiquing instances of systemic racism embedded in common genres and genre practices. These results reinforce the focus of the next OER grant the team will seek. (See the full assessment report here).

In addition, the Spring 2023 assessment consisted of three focus groups conducted by Madison Zarate, as a neutral party (not the grantees/authors): one on the Rhetorical Terminology and Ideology chapter and two on the Introduction to Genre chapter. The focus groups showed three major trends: 1) the students appreciated the no-cost textbook; 2) the chapters helped reinforce student knowledge of rhetorical concepts in an engaging way; and 2) the students wanted more academic examples (in addition to the popular culture examples presented). Both assessment data signal that the original grant was successful in providing a free textbook that delivered sound rhetorical instruction and that there are clear, key areas to build upon.

Next Steps:
While the OER textbook is functional and takes advantage of existing content and the expertise of the faculty authors, there are goals that yet need to be achieved, as noted in the original award
document from the OER Committee: “This is a big project! Possibly attainable.” Thus, the two remaining grantees--Gabor and Meredith--will apply for a larger OER grant in conjunction with two new faculty members of the Department of Rhetoric and Language, Dr. Phil Choong and Dr. Melisa Garcia. The plan will be to further develop the existing chapters and existing instructor guide, to possibly add a sixth chapter on Linguistic Justice, and to infuse the entire text with more antiracist theory. In addition to these goals, the next step for this OER will also be to add more student voices. At current, there are no contributions authored by students, but the grantees did gather robust data from students in the form of both direct and indirect assessments.

Further, we plan to explore, select, and implement a platform for the final version of the textbook (i.e, wiki, pressbook, etc).

We see the work we were able to complete here as an exciting first stage in a much larger, ongoing project. This initial grant helped us create the skeleton and key content for the textbook, and it also supported us in our initial research into why and how to use OER, as well as the variety of forms that OER can take. We thank Gleeson for their innovative support and look forward to continuing this exciting project.

*Report submitted by Leigh Meredith and Cathy Gabor*

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