

UTA CARES Grant Program

Final Report

Open Access Introduction to Archaeology Textbook

Report Prepared and Submitted by Ashley Lemke

First, I would like to thank the UTA CARES Grant Program for its support and guidance in completing this project. The CARES Grant Program provided me with a unique opportunity to create and provide a zero-cost resource for University of Texas at Arlington (hereafter UTA) undergraduate students, and this project would not have been possible without the CARES program.

Purpose

I have completed my fourth year as faculty at UTA as an Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. In my time at UTA I have taught ANTH 2339: Introduction to Archaeology every semester I have taught (Faculty Leave, Fall 2019). This class is a requirement for the Anthropology Major at UTA and also serves a diverse body of students across programs. Over the course of teaching this class, several students informally commented on the textbook, oftentimes citing the expense of the book particularly coupled with the expenses of all the book students needed to buy for all their classes each semester. While I had been using an older edition textbook to reduce cost, it became clear that most students in the course were not purchasing the textbook. During the 2018-2019 academic year, I prepared materials for the course and submitted it to be considered for the Core Curriculum at UTA. In the Summer of 2019, the course was approved. Introduction to Archaeology now fulfills a Social and Behavioral Sciences requirement for all UTA students. Its adoption into the Core Curriculum has increased enrollment, and in turn lead to an even greater need for affordable resources. For these reasons, a UTA CARES Grant application was submitted and was successfully funded in April of 2019.

Challenges and Accomplishments

One of the biggest challenges during the creation of the textbook was the lack of already available Open Access content. The original plan was to create an Introduction to Archaeology textbook, open access, but similar to traditional textbooks in terms of style, content, and layout. After receiving the grant and looking for materials, it was surprising how little OA material was available for archaeology. Furthermore, the material that was available focused solely on individual archaeological sites and was not general overviews necessary for an introductory text. Given these circumstances, it was not possible (financially or given time constraints) for me to write an entire textbook from scratch. Fortunately, I had developed several exercises and paper assignments that were already part of the course and the decision was made to create a “workbook” instead of a “textbook.” Therefore, rather than a traditional text which focused on long descriptive blocks of text, the resulting OER is a more “hand-on” and engaging collection

of activities and exercises that range from filling in tables, thinking critically about important questions, conducting research, and templates for effective note-taking. Overall, despite the initial surprise and having to adapt quickly, I believe the resulting book is unique, and will be much more effective. Additionally, it stands in contrast to the extremely large number of Introduction to Archaeology textbooks already available including a forthcoming OER text (by other authors) on the same topic.

The first half of the process, from receiving the grant, to creating the book, to the implementation semester was straightforward. The book was created during the Fall 2019 semesters and a draft was implemented in the Spring 2020 semester. Despite tremendous hurdles and disruption midway through this semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workbook was extremely useful for both the students and myself as the instructor. As noted by a student, in response to the question “Which attributes of the course and/or the professor helped you learn the material?”:

“using external materials that she created herself beyond a physical textbook. Her own book was extremely helpful without being a burden on my wallet and backpack.”

-Student Feedback Survey, Spring 2020, *SmartEvals*

Additional comments were collected from the UTA CARES Student survey, where the majority of students indicated that the OER was easier to use than educational resources in their other classes. Students commented further on the ease and accessibility of the book:

“I liked having all the material printed with me to take everywhere since it wasn't a bulky book. All the chapters also followed the lecture material exactly so I wasn't lost or hunting through my notes to find what I needed to answer the questions.”

“I had the pdf version in my desktop which allowed me to be able to look at it anytime and without internet access and mark it up without having to physically carry a book.”

-UTA CARES Student Survey, Spring 2020

It was also clear from the UTA CARES Student Survey that the workbook had a direct impact on student success:

“If every class could have a workout [workbook] that accurately reflected the lectured material, it would make it easier for students to understand and retain learning objectives. The workout [workbook] plus having great lecturers equals good grades.”

“I think it is an amazing thing! Really beneficial to everyone. I signed up for another course in astronomy, I had to buy the lab book and couldn't pay for the textbook which resulted in me getting a low grades in my pre-lab quizzes. It really makes a difference to have free resources when you can.”

-UTA CARES Student Survey, Spring 2020

Overall, the student feedback survey and UTA CARES student survey were helpful to understanding how the students used the OER and its impact on their learning. I believe these are

extremely positive results particularly given that this was the implementation semester and a disrupted semester due to COVID-19. One unforeseen outcome, given the necessary transition of the class from face-to-face to all online after the midterm, was that the OER had an additional test for a its suitability as an online resource. Due the organization of the workbook, it worked extremely well for an online learning environment, as there was topic each week with a corresponding workbook exercise or activity that students could turn in. The workbook therefore served as a review for the students, a participation credit, as well as informal way for me to track student progress and success online.

The steps after the implementation semester to publication were not as clear. Again, COVID-19 surely had an effect. It would be very useful for OER grant recipients to receive a timeline or outline of all the steps to completion. It appeared that the Milestones links were implemented after I created the book, so I was unaware of these at the start of the project. As the CARES program continues to grow, I believe it will only get stronger and the process more streamlined for both the UTA library and faculty creating OER.

Funding

The funding provided by the CARES grant was instrumental for the creation of the book. Simply put, this workbook would not exist without UTA CARES. The support provided by the library staff was critical for understanding the process for creation, implementation, and publication. The funding was critical for supplementing the time required for me to create this resource, particularly since I was on Faculty Leave the semester we created the workbook. Since UTA CARES provides both a grant and publication, these are measurable outcomes that faculty can list on their research profiles

Project Timeline

Milestone	Date or Semester of Completion
Grant awarded	April 9, 2019
Textbook created	Fall 2019
Implementation semester	Spring 2020
Revisions	Summer 2020
Publication	August 10, 2020