

CMAT 201: Communicating Effectively

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

- CMAT201 is a **graduation requirement** in **oral communication** for students at UB. It's taken by students in all majors.
- It is what communication experts call a hybrid course in that it covers both public speaking and communication theory concepts like verbal/nonverbal communication, listening, cultural competence, interpersonal communication, team and organizational communication, and identity and perception.
- Good textbooks for this course **typically run about \$200** new, so I was seeking to bring the cost of the course down for these non-communication major students.
- It was my hope that course materials under \$40 would improve retention and completion for students in the course.

IMPLEMENTATION

- I spent summer 2018 seeking OER materials suitable for this course.
- **Externally**, I searched OER catalogs like ones affiliated with the University of Minnesota, OpenStax, and modules provided by Lumen Learning.
- **Internally**, I worked with the UB Library and participated in an OER cohort sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Learning, Teaching, and Technology.
- Unfortunately, I was not able to find an OER book suitable for this course. I put together a few chapters from an open source book available from the U of MN, some OER modules from Excelsior about citing sources, and a traditional textbook that only costs \$32, bringing the cost of course materials down significantly. This textbook is called *Oral Communication: Skills, Choices, and Consequences*, and it's published by Waveland.

IMPACT

- UB teaches 2-3 sections of CMAT201 each semester. Instructors are able to choose their own course materials, but have been instructed to keep the cost below \$40, in line with OER goals.
- Unfortunately, I have not taught CMAT201 since Fall 2018 given staffing changes, but I implemented the OER plan in Fall 2018 and assessed the outcomes and student success.
- The OER implementation in Fall 2018 **saved each student about \$175**.



IMPACT (CON'T.)

- I compared the number of students who **passed the course with a grade of C or above** in Spring 2018 (no OER) and Fall 2018 (with OER).
 - **NO OER:** Spring 2018 with 21 students
 - Pass: 19
 - Average grade: 84% (B)
 - **OER:** Fall 2018 with 22 students
 - Pass: 19
 - Average grade: 81% (B-)
- We can conclude that the OER adoption is **not negatively impacting course success rates**.
- A few caveats are worth mentioning:
 - Fall 2018 was a wholly freshmen section, whereas Spring 2018 was mostly upper classmen, who are already acclimated to college pacing and learning styles.
 - Fall 2018 was a learning community, so I adjusted some assignments and assigned a final paper, which may have adversely affected success rates.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Successes:**
 - Again, it's clear that using OER is not negatively impacting students.
 - Anecdotally students appreciated the lower cost of the materials. Some mentioned it to me in person, and one noted it in course evaluations.
 - Overall, student evaluations of the course were positive.
- **Challenges:**
 - The \$200 textbook is more up to date and interesting.
 - I worry the dryer, cheaper book may encourage students to not do the reading as carefully.
 - There is no effective OER textbook that covers the hybrid nature of this course.
- **Advice:**
 - Make your peace with the quality/cost tradeoff. The OER materials or cheaper stuff won't be as good. It's okay. Let your dynamic teaching make up the difference!

FUTURE PLANS

- There are **three avenues** for future development possibilities:
 - **Seek to adopt OER for CMAT303**, the second of the oral communication grad requirement courses at UB. There are just as many sections taught of this course as 201.
 - **Develop an effective OER textbook** for a hybrid course like CMAT201. The ones out there are too outdated and far too long. I did not have the time to do this during the grant period, as it would be a massive undertaking.
 - **Develop an OER workbook** that includes public speaking and oral communication activities for instructor use. It could be available on OER repositories and on the OER@UB webpage through the UB Library. This is a much more manageable undertaking that developing a whole book, and it's something I hope to do soon.