



Building a Course That Feels Like Home:

How University of Louisiana
Lafayette's Psychology Department
Used Custom Publishing to Make
Lifespan Development More
Relevant—and More Sustainable

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The Department of Psychology at the University of Louisiana Lafayette has a long tradition of customizing course materials for its high-enrollment introductory courses. When faculty identified a similar opportunity in PSYC 255 (Lifespan Development), they partnered with Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions to do something genuinely new: instead of adding more text, they embedded original video content created by their own graduate students directly into a custom Achieve e-book built around Kathleen Berger's *Invitation to the Lifespan*.

The result is a course resource that feels unmistakably local. Students watching the videos see their own graduate teaching assistants—people who may have sat in the same classrooms, navigated the same campus, and are raising children of their own—talk through the developmental milestones they're studying. The initiative also generates royalties that fund undergraduate conference travel grants and scholarships, creating a financial feedback loop that benefits students at every level of the department.

The collaboration was anchored by an established relationship with a Macmillan sales representative and supported by a dedicated Macmillan publishing specialist throughout production. The process—from concept to Spring 2026 launch—was, in Dr. Christie Charles's words, "not an unpleasant event."

This case study documents the partnership, the process, and the design logic behind it—and outlines what the department plans to measure as the program matures.

At a Glance

Institution: University of Louisiana Lafayette

Department: Psychology

Course: PSYC 255 – Lifespan Development

Base Textbook: *Invitation to the Lifespan* (Berger)
via Macmillan Learning / Achieve

Custom Content: Student-produced video modules
+ curated departmental resource links

Launched: Spring 2026

Primary Contact: Dr. Christie Charles, Master Instructor
& Customization Committee Co-Chair

Macmillan Rep: Trish (sales); Bernadette (publishing specialist)

Financial Model: Royalties reinvested into undergraduate
travel grants and scholarships





Background and Context

The Department and Its Courses

Dr. Christie Charles has been teaching in the UL Lafayette psychology department since 2008, and has served as chair of the department's customization committee since approximately 2012–2014. With more than 20 years in the classroom, her portfolio spans from Psychology 110—the large-enrollment intro course populated largely by non-majors and first-semester freshmen—to upper-division courses in industrial-organizational psychology (PSYC 310), psychological measurement (PSYC 442), and professional issues (PSYC 400).

Customization in the department has historically been concentrated in PSYC 110, where enrollment volumes justify the royalty arrangements required by publishers. The customization committee—composed primarily of 110 instructors—has worked with multiple publishers over the years to develop localized supplements for that course.

Why PSYC 255 Became the Focus

PSYC 255 (Lifespan Development) had been using Macmillan's *Invitation to the Lifespan* along with the Achieve platform for instruction and assessment. Faculty found the platform and its embedded resources—test banks, instructor PowerPoints, existing videos—genuinely useful. But something was missing.

Co-chair Lori Gibson, a long-tenured 255 instructor, identified an opportunity: enrollment in PSYC 255 had grown large enough that a publisher royalty arrangement might be viable. She approached Dr. Charles with the idea of extending the department's customization work into the course. The department's established relationship with Macmillan—and a sales representative who had stayed connected even when the department wasn't actively using a Macmillan product—made the initial conversation straightforward.

“

It always helps when you have great relationships with the publishing company. Because we had an established relationship with Macmillan, entering into those conversations was really easy.”

– Dr. Christie Charles, Master Instructor & Customization Committee Co-Chair



The Challenge

More Than a Content Gap

The faculty wasn't dissatisfied with the Berger text or with Achieve. Their challenge was more specific: they wanted course materials that felt connected to their students' lives—to their institution, their community, and the people around them.

Standard publisher materials, however strong, are designed for a national audience. Students in Lafayette, Louisiana don't see their peers or their campus reflected in textbook examples or publisher-produced video content. That gap, the department believed, was a motivation and engagement gap as much as a content gap.

The Sustainability Problem with Text

The department had experimented with custom-written text supplements in the past. The experience revealed a significant operational problem: written content becomes outdated quickly, requires ongoing revision, and can become awkward or confusing when the faculty members named in it leave the institution. Dr. Charles was direct about this.

“

We used to have faculty members that we'd reference, and they're not even here anymore. So it's like I'm talking about Professor John Doe and he's not even here. We'd have to scramble and devote extra time to revise. I said, "I don't want to do that."

– Dr. Christie Charles

The department needed a format that was engaging, relatively easy to produce, and evergreen enough to remain useful without constant revision.

Financial Sustainability

A secondary but explicit motivation was financial. The department had developed a model for using customization royalties to fund undergraduate student travel to academic conferences and to provide departmental scholarships—support that didn't depend on university budget cycles. Extending that model to PSYC 255 would expand the funding base for those programs.



The Solution: Student-Produced Video Embedded in Achieve

The Core Idea

Rather than producing more text, the co-chairs decided to commission original video content from their own graduate teaching assistants. Each TA was assigned a lifespan development topic of their choosing, grounded in empirical research, and asked to produce a video of 10–15 minutes. The videos were then embedded directly into the custom PSYC 255 Achieve e-book, where students access them alongside the Berger text.

The topic areas tracked closely to lifespan development themes—developmental milestones, family formation, parenting, identity development—giving TAs the flexibility to draw on their own life experiences. One TA who had young children could speak authentically about parenting and development from a first-person vantage point. Another could speak from a different stage of life. The diversity of perspectives, the department believed, would itself be pedagogically valuable.

“

We wanted the content to be created by students. They hear enough from faculty. Let's get students involved.”

– Dr. Christie Charles





Incentivizing the Content Creators

Graduate students were compensated for their work through a portion of the royalties generated by the custom publication—a model that gave them a direct stake in the quality of what they produced. Dr. Charles described the energy TAs brought to the project as notably high: “They really enjoyed recording the video. They were very, very excited.”

The remaining royalty revenue flows into the department’s grant program, which awards undergraduate students up to \$300 toward conference travel to present their research, as well as departmental scholarships.

Supplementary Digital Resources

In addition to the video modules, the custom e-book includes curated links to departmental and university-level resources—support services, academic references, and guidance materials that are specifically relevant to UL Lafayette students. Unlike the video content, some of this supplementary material was adapted from resources already used across the department’s customization work with other publishers, with appropriate clearances confirmed.

Delivery: Custom Achieve E-Book

All custom content was embedded in a Macmillan Achieve e-book tied to the Berger text. Students access the resource digitally—the department notes that print adoption has declined significantly, and the e-book model accommodates easy content updates. Integration with the department’s Moodle LMS was designed to allow single sign-on access, reducing friction for students navigating between course tools.





The Process: How It Came Together

Starting the Conversation with Macmillan

The department's existing relationship with Macmillan—maintained by their sales representative Trish even during periods when the department wasn't actively adopting Macmillan products—was the critical enabler. When enrollment in PSYC 255 reached a threshold that could support a royalty arrangement, co-chair Lori Gibson signaled the department's interest and Macmillan was receptive immediately. Dr. Charles notes that the concept of multimedia-first customization was something they floated early, and "Macmillan was already privy to those conversations."

Production and Specialist Support

A Macmillan publishing specialist (Bernadette) was assigned to the project and served as the primary operational contact throughout production.

The workflow involved:

- Faculty providing production direction and topic guidance to TAs
- TAs recording video content and submitting files via a shared OneDrive folder
- The Macmillan specialist integrating the video files and supplementary materials into the Achieve platform
- Review cycles to confirm content ownership, format compatibility, and platform integration

One format issue arose during production: some TAs submitted their videos embedded in PowerPoint files rather than as standalone MP4s. The issue required clarification of technical submission requirements—a lesson Dr. Charles flags for any department undertaking a similar project. "Just knowing: give people directives. Make sure when you record, you're able to create an MP4."



Timeline Flexibility

The project was completed during Fall 2025, with launch targeted for the subsequent semester. When the department's building underwent HVAC replacement mid-semester, the team requested a brief extension from Macmillan, which was granted without disruption to the launch timeline. The custom content was in students' hands for Spring 2026.

“

**Macmillan gave us a timeline and they were flexible...
Long story short, it was not an unpleasant event.”**

– Dr. Christie Charles

Intellectual Property and Content Ownership

Content ownership was an explicit point of discussion and documentation. The department's work with multiple publishers required clear delineation between what was produced exclusively for Macmillan and what could be shared across customization projects. The video content was created specifically for the Macmillan PSYC 255 project. Some supplementary materials—university-level resource links not specific to any one publisher—were handled separately based on guidance from the Macmillan team.



Outcomes and Early Indicators

Important Note on Stage of Implementation

The custom PSYC 255 resource launched in Spring 2026 and is in its first active semester at the time of this writing. The department has not yet conducted a formal assessment of student engagement with the custom materials, and Dr. Charles—who does not herself teach PSYC 255—appropriately notes that she does not have direct data on how instructors are deploying the materials or how students are responding.

What follows reflects the design intent, early framing, and qualitative signals from the implementation process. The department has identified specific outcome metrics they plan to pursue as the program matures.

Student Engagement: Design Intent

The video-based format was chosen specifically to match how students currently learn. Discussion of audio accessibility features built into most e-books—which students use even without documented learning differences—reinforced the department's belief that multimedia engagement is now the baseline, not the exception.

Each video is paired with a short set of open-ended reflection questions (approximately five per video) designed to confirm engagement without adding cognitive burden. Instructors were given flexibility to assign the videos as required content or offer them for extra credit, with the shared

expectation that required embedding would become standard practice over time.

Financial Outcomes

The royalty model is already functional. Revenue generated by the custom publication flows into the department's student support fund, which provides undergraduate students with conference travel grants (capped at \$300 per student) and scholarship support. This model has operated successfully in PSYC 110 for over a decade; the PSYC 255 partnership extends and strengthens it.

What the Department Plans to Measure

Dr. Charles identified the following as priority data points for the next phase of the program:

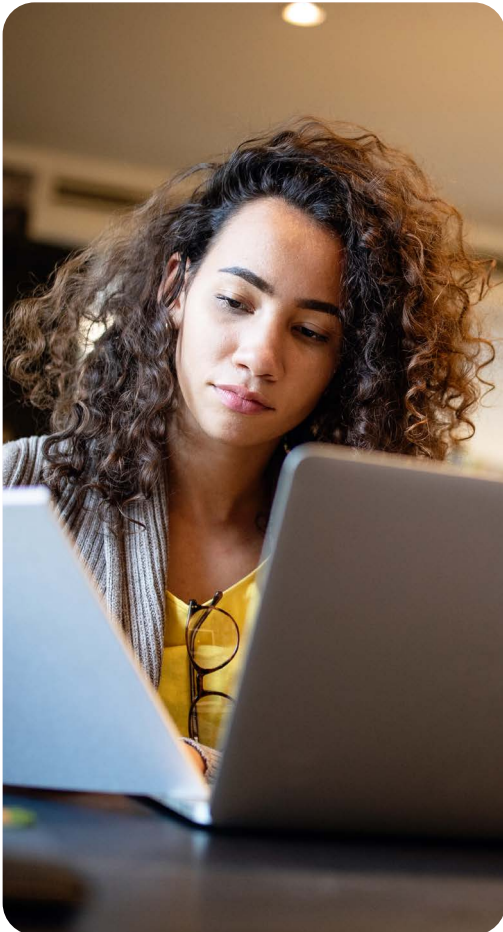
- Student video completion rates (ideally tracked through Achieve analytics)
- Quality of student responses to the reflection questions tied to each video
- Instructor-reported observations on student preparation and class participation
- End-of-semester faculty review of how the materials were assigned and received

She specifically flagged a desire to understand whether Macmillan's Achieve platform can provide back-end analytics on video engagement—a capability she observed in training on the platform's assessment tools. "That would be cool as far as our videos—just to help us behind the scenes."



Lessons for Institutions Considering Custom Publishing

Dr. Charles offered the following guidance, drawn from the department's experience leading customization efforts across multiple courses and publishers:



Be Creative with the Format

Text-heavy customization is labor-intensive to produce and even more labor-intensive to maintain. Multimedia content—especially video—is more engaging for current students and does not require the same level of ongoing revision. Institutions willing to think beyond ePub supplements will find the process easier and the student experience stronger.

Leverage Existing Publisher Relationships

The UL Lafayette–Macmillan partnership succeeded in part because of a relationship that had been maintained over years, even during periods when the department wasn't actively purchasing Macmillan products. Departments should invest in those relationships as an ongoing practice, not only when a specific need arises.

Give Your Content Creators Clear Technical Direction

When working with student or graduate-assistant content creators, format requirements should be documented and communicated explicitly from the start. Submission format issues (such as video files nested in PowerPoint presentations) are easily preventable with upfront guidance.



Tie Customization to a Sustainable Financial Model

The royalty-to-student-support pipeline the department has built transforms a publisher arrangement into an ongoing departmental resource. Institutions with high-enrollment courses that haven't explored this model may be leaving meaningful funding on the table.

Plan to Measure from the Start

The department acknowledges that they moved quickly from concept to launch and did not build formal assessment into the initial rollout. Dr. Charles recommends that future projects build in mechanisms—student self-reporting, usage analytics, structured faculty review—from the beginning, so that outcome data is available to guide iteration.



About Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions

Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions partners with higher education institutions to develop course materials tailored to specific departmental needs—incorporating original content, curating existing resources, and delivering custom materials through digital platforms including Vital Source and Achieve. From individual chapter selections to fully original program-authored front matter, Custom Solutions supports the full production lifecycle: content curation and rights management, organizational design, platform integration, print and digital fulfillment, and ongoing support.

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