

# Zero Textbook Cost Degrees: A Snapshot of Student Savings and Success

## Removing Barriers, Expanding Opportunity

Every semester, California students face an important choice: purchase required textbooks right away, delay buying them, share them with classmates, or go without altogether. For many students, textbooks can cost more than \$1,000 each year, a major financial burden for those already struggling to pay for tuition, housing, and transportation. Zero Textbook Cost Degrees offer free textbooks and materials that are easing financial burdens, increasing student success, and improving time to degree completion. When students have the tools they need without financial barriers, they thrive.



## Why Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) Degrees?

Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) pathways allow students to earn a degree or Career Education certifications without spending money on textbooks by primarily leveraging open educational resources and other no-cost materials. Designed and curated by educators, these courses remove cost barriers, while providing adaptable, responsive, and flexible options for both students and educators.

## Success Story at a Glance

### 115 Colleges

115 California community colleges participating

### 2,480+ Courses

2,480+ unique ZTC grant-funded courses

### 11,500+ Sections

11,500+ ZTC grant-funded sections

### Nearly 50%

Nearly 50% of ZTC efforts are integrated into broader equity planning

### \$32.9M

\$32.9 million estimated students savings in 2024-2025 alone

## California Students Saved Nearly \$33 Million on Textbooks Last Year Alone

In 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Legislature allocated **\$115 million** for Zero Textbook Cost Degrees across the California Community Colleges. As a result, the program is on track to create more than **1,000 degrees and certificates** that students can earn without spending money on textbooks. Building on the success of the 2020 ZTC pilot program—which delivered a more than a **700% return on investment**—the 2021 investment is positioned to deliver even greater impact.

# Student and Faculty Voices

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California’s investment in Zero Textbook Cost Degrees demonstrates what is possible when affordability and student success are addressed together. By eliminating textbook costs, these pathways help students retain more of their financial resources, accelerate progress toward completion and transfer, and reduce the debt burden that can follow them after college. As the cost of living continues to rise, ZTC Degrees represent a proven strategy for expanding educational opportunity, strengthening workforce readiness, and supporting long-term economic mobility.

**James Todd**, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

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Being enrolled in a class with free textbooks has taken a huge weight off my shoulders. As a full-time student who also works and is financially independent, the cost of course materials can add a lot of stress. Having access to these free resources has allowed me to focus more on learning rather than worrying about extra expenses.

**Brianna Swanson**, Nutrition Student

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As a student, I worked full-time to pay for courses, but I could not afford most textbooks. I would borrow the books and make copies of texts I could not find in the library. ZTC courses help me to make sure all students have access to the materials when they are needed, starting from day one.

**Heather Hutcheson**, English Faculty

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Being a student who requires financial assistance, this was a huge help for me. This was the first professor and class that I took with the ZTC program and it was really such a relief not having to worry about how I am going to afford my books for class.

**Ilaisaane L.**, Allied Health Student

## The Future of Zero Textbook Cost: What’s at Stake for Students?

Funding for the Zero Textbook Cost Degree Program expires at the end of 2026. While the openly licensed materials will remain free and available to educators and students, updates, expansions, and ongoing support will no longer be available without state dollars.

### Winter 2026

Zero Textbook Cost Degree Program funds end

### Spring 2027

Preliminary ZTC report by Chancellor’s Office made available

### Summer 2027

Final ZTC report by Chancellor’s Office made available

**Help students put their tuition toward their futures, not inflated textbook costs. Support ZTC Degrees to make quality education accessible and truly debt-free for all.**

### Learn More

Have additional questions about the Zero Textbook Cost Program or textbook affordability in California? Contact Cailyn Nagle, Open Educational Resources Senior Program Manager, Michelson 20MM Foundation, [cailyn@20mm.org](mailto:cailyn@20mm.org).