



February 1, 2022

Z-Degrees Report to the Legislature

MINNESOTA STATE

Minnesota Statute

136F.305 Z-DEGREES

Subd. 2. **Requirement.**

(a) Three additional colleges must offer the opportunity to earn a Z-Degree by academic year 2020-2021. Four additional colleges or universities must offer the opportunity to earn a Z-Degree by academic year 2023-2024. Course offerings in a Z-Degree program must include at least two distinct courses in each transfer curriculum goal area and at least enough credits in each transfer curriculum goal area to complete the transfer curriculum package.

(b) The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities shall support a continuous process for colleges and universities to implement Z-Degrees, expand Z-Degree courses and sections, and sustain existing Z-Degrees.

Subd. 3. **Open educational resource development.**

(a) The system office must provide opportunities for faculty to identify, review, adapt, create, share, and adopt open educational resources. The system office must develop incentives to academic departments to identify, review, adapt, author, or adopt open educational resources within their academic programs.

(b) The programs and incentives developed under this subdivision must be implemented pursuant to faculty collective bargaining agreements.

Subd. 4. **Report.**

Annually by January 15, the board must submit reports to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education. Each report must include (1) the number of courses and course sections transitioned into a new Z-Degree, (2) the total amount of student textbook savings resulting from the transitions, and (3) information on the types of incentives developed and offered to faculty and the corresponding funding for those incentives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Status

Academic Years 2020-2021 (2019 - [136F.305 Z-degrees](#))

Minnesota State offered six (6) colleges the opportunity to offer zero-textbook cost associate degrees (“Z-degrees”) to ensure compliance with [SF2415](#). All six colleges are now offering Z-degrees as of Fall 2021.

- (1) Anoka-Ramsey Community College (Fall 2020)
- (2) Mesabi Range College (Fall 2020)
- (3) Northland Community & Technical College (Fall 2020)
- (4) Lake Superior College (Fall 2020)
- (5) Century College (Fall 2021)
- (6) Minneapolis Community and Technical College (Fall 2021)



Minnesota State Z-degree projects saved students **\$1,586,600** in textbook costs in academic year 2020-2021 and will have saved students an estimated total of **\$3,596,000** by academic year 2023-2024

Academic Years 2023-2024 (2021 - [136F.305 Z-degrees](#))

Three (3) more colleges are working on implementing Z-degrees in fiscal year 2022. The completion of these Z-degrees will bring the total to **10 Z-degrees** by Fall 2023.

- (1) Minnesota State Community and Technical College
- (2) Hibbing Community College
- (3) St. Cloud Technical & Community College

Additional funding was allocated to allow colleges to expand their existing Z-degree pathway to ensure zero-cost textbook sustainability.

- (1) Northland Community & Technical College
- (2) Mesabi Range College
- (3) Lake Superior College



System Office and Legislative Support

Through the collective work of the system office and the colleges, Minnesota State has successfully built upon existing efforts to expand the use of open educational resources (OER), paving the way for successful implementation of six Z-degrees by Fall 2021. During our continued OER expansion efforts, Minnesota State has continued to prepare and support faculty, staff, libraries, etc., including providing opportunities and incentives for faculty to identify, review, adapt, create, share, and adopt open educational resources. Finally, the state legislature's financial support was critical to OER and Z-degree development. Future financial support ensures that Minnesota State colleges can continue to implement new, sustain, and expand Z-degree opportunities. Minnesota State strongly believes this support is critical to ensuring access to course resources, which ultimately promote student success and degree attainment.

In addition to the information included below, more information about Minnesota State OER initiatives, including [Z-degree projects \(https://minnstate.edu/admissions/oer/oer-projects/index.html#zdegree\)](#), can be found on [the Minnesota State Open Educational Resources website \(https://minnstate.edu/admissions/oer/index.html\)](#). More information about the student, faculty, and administration perspectives on Z-degrees can be viewed in the Minnesota State Z-degree project video: <https://youtu.be/Xfc5hRzZ1Sw>.

Z-degree Efforts for Academic Years 2020 to 2024

Z-degrees are complete associate or bachelor's degree programs that exclusively use course resources that are no cost to students, such as open educational resources (OER), open textbooks, and library-curated materials.

Minnesota State has been building OER awareness, skills, and abilities across the system and at local campuses for over eight years. These efforts have created a foundation for OER and furthers readiness to accelerate OER creation, adaptation, and adoption.

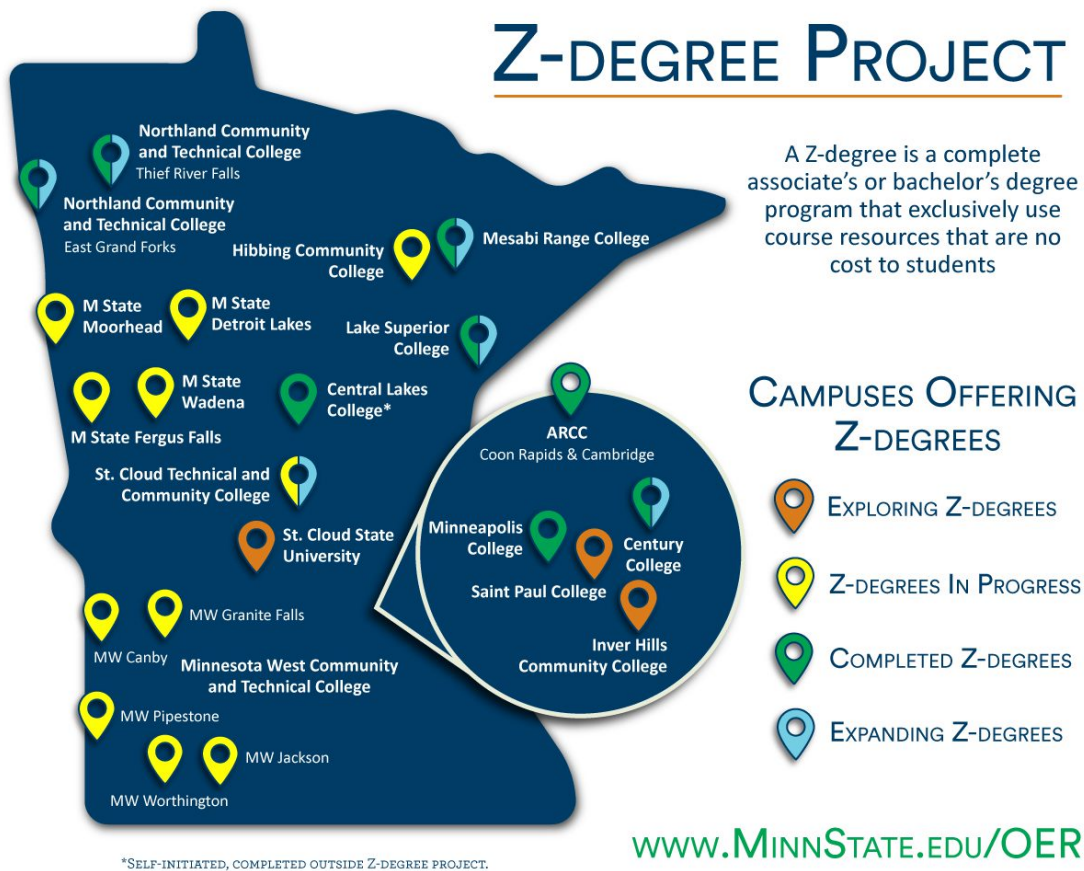


Figure 1: Z-degree efforts supporting [136F.305 Z-degrees](#) through academic year 2024

Definitions

Adaptation: Faculty modify an existing OER for use in a course. Openly licensed materials allow faculty to modify OER to meet the needs of their course.

Adoption: Faculty adopt OER for use "as is." Adopting is the simplest way of including OER in a course, and the least time intensive.

Creation: Faculty create and openly license course materials. Creating OER allows faculty to develop high-quality OER for a subject that does not exist or does not meet faculty needs.

Expansion: The campus effort to expand existing Z-degree pathways. These expansions can include adding courses or sections to existing zero-cost courses

Exploration: The campus effort to explore the feasibility of implementing a full Z-degree. Feasibility can include assessing existing courses using zero-cost resources and understanding campus culture in accepting zero-cost course resource efforts.

Implementation: The campus effort to implement a student pathway to zero cost course resources (Z-degree)

Open Education Resources (OER): Teaching, learning, and research resources that make use of appropriate tools, such as open licensing, to permit their free reuse, continuous improvement, and repurposing by others for educational purposes.

Zero-cost course resources: Zero-cost course resources constitute any variety of educational content that has no direct cost to students, removing barriers to access and improving students' opportunities for academic success (<https://digitallearning.ucf.edu/ilab/aim/zero-cost-materials/>).

Academic Years 2020 – 2021

The State of Minnesota legislature provided \$500,000 in funding for at least three Minnesota State colleges to offer Z-degrees by academic year 2020-2021. This funding was split, awarding \$250,000 in academic year 2020 and \$250,000 in academic year 2021. The funding went toward faculty creating, adopting, or adapting OER textbooks in courses directly related to a Z-degree. There was strong interest in the Z-degree opportunity, so Minnesota State provided matching funds to maximize the Z-degree efforts. The funds contributed by the Academic & Student Affairs (ASA) division totaled \$390,000 in academic year (AY) 2020 and \$175,000 in academic year (AY) 2021.

The Minnesota State system office invited colleges within the system to submit an interest application as the first step to participation in the Minnesota State Z-degree project. Z-degree funds were awarded to individual campuses based upon responses provided in the following readiness categories:

- The Readiness of Campus Personnel
- Structural Readiness
- Cultural Readiness
- Current Open / Zero-Cost Textbook (ZTC) inventory
- Proposed Z-degree and Course Sequence

Z-degree Large Grant Awards

Minnesota State awarded six colleges \$100,000 each to fund and support college completion of a Z-degree.

1. Anoka-Ramsey Community College*
2. Century College
3. Lake Superior College*
4. Mesabi Range College*
5. Minneapolis Community and Technical College
6. Northland Community & Technical College

** Funded through legislative appropriations. The remaining three (3) colleges were funded in-kind by the Academic & Student Affairs (ASA) division*

Z-degree Small Grant Awards

Funding did not allow for all colleges that applied to receive the large grant award. However, Minnesota State wanted to ensure that remaining colleges maintain momentum in working toward Z-degrees. The four colleges not receiving the large grant received \$10,000 each to continue foundational work toward a Z-degree.

1. Central Lakes College
2. Hibbing Community College
3. Inver Hills Community College
4. Minnesota West Community & Technical College

Academic Year 2023-24

Z-degree Exploration Awards

Two colleges submitted interest applications to explore campus readiness for future Z-degrees. These colleges were awarded \$25,000 each to assess campus readiness and culture to ensure future success in implementing a Z-degree:

1. Minnesota West Community & Technical College
2. Saint Paul College

Z-degree Implementation Awards

Minnesota State awarded three colleges \$100,000 each to fund and support college completion of a Z-degree by academic year 2024.

1. Minnesota State Community and Technical College
2. St. Cloud Technical & Community College
3. Hibbing Community College

Z-degree Expansion Awards

Appropriations also allowed for the funding of campuses that already implemented a Z-degree to expand their current Z-degree offerings. Expansion funds of \$25,000 per campus were awarded to add courses and or course sections to an existing Z-degree.

1. Century College
2. Lake Superior College
3. Mesabi Range College
4. Northland Community & Technical College

Institution Summary

Academic Year 2020-21 Z-degree Efforts

Four of the six colleges completed Z-degrees by Fall 2020 and the remaining two colleges completed Z-degrees by Fall 2021. Although Century College and Minneapolis College did not complete the Z-degree pathway until Fall 2022, most of the courses in that pathway were offered in AY20-21. Following are actual savings to students based on AY20-21 Z-degree course offerings:

Institutions	AY20-21			
	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings
	414	799	15,866	\$1,586,600
Anoka-Ramsey Community College*	72	190	4,076	\$407,600
Lake Superior College*	77	170	3,533	\$353,300
Mesabi Range College*	57	88	1,457	\$145,700
Northland Community & Technical College	70	114	2,005	\$200,500
Century College**	69	67	1,278	\$127,800
Minneapolis Community and Technical College**	69	170	3,517	\$351,700

Table 1: Z-degree Annual Report AY20-21. Cost savings directly tied to campus Z-degree efforts.

* Funded through legislative appropriations. The remaining three (3) colleges were funded in-kind by the Academic & Student Affairs (ASA) division

** Z-degrees were not completed, but courses in the Z-degree pathway were converted and offered to students during AY20-21

Academic Years 2020 – 2022 Z-degree Cost Savings

Minnesota State continues to expand Z-degree offerings through the support of the Minnesota State legislature. Following are AY21 actual savings and AY22 projected savings for campuses implementing and expanding Z-degree offerings.

Institutions	AY20-21				AY21-22				Combined			
	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings
	414	799	15,866	\$1,586,600	496	708	20,094	\$2,009,400	499	1,507	35,960	\$3,596,000
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	72	190	4,076	\$407,600	54	93	9,833	\$983,300	54	283	13,909	\$1,390,900
Lake Superior College	77	170	3,533	\$353,300	77	81	1,456	\$145,600	77	251	4,989	\$498,900
Mesabi Range College	57	88	1,457	\$145,700	57	51	914	\$91,400	57	139	2,371	\$237,100
Northland Community & Technical College**	70	114	2,005	\$200,500	83	147	1,209	\$120,900	83	261	3,214	\$321,400
Century College**	69	67	1,278	\$127,800	69	72	1,496	\$149,600	69	139	2,774	\$277,400
Minneapolis Community and Technical College**	69	170	3,517	\$351,700	69	75	1,581	\$158,100	42	245	5,098	\$509,800
Hibbing Community College*					21	34	355	\$35,500	51	34	355	\$35,500
Minnesota State Community and Technical College*					33	95	2,090	\$209,000	33	95	2,090	\$209,000
St. Cloud Technical & Community College*					33	60	1,160	\$116,000	33	60	1,160	\$116,000

Table 2: Total cost saving impact on all courses using zero-cost course resources for FY21 (actual) and 22 (projected)

* Z-degrees are not completed, but courses in the Z-degree pathway were converted and offered to students during AY21-22

** Offers Z-degree, funding was provided by Minnesota State system office, not from state Z-degree allocations

Academic Years 2020 – 2022 Total Cost Savings Related to OER and other Zero-Cost Course Resource Initiatives

Minnesota State campuses are developing a culture of creating, adopting, or adapting equitable and culturally relevant resources through OER and adopting zero-cost course resources to reduce student textbook costs. Minnesota State wants to highlight the student impact of ALL OER and other zero-cost course resource initiatives at all colleges that have implemented Z-degrees. The following table includes courses that have zero textbook cost but are not part of a Z-degree pathway.

Institutions	AY21				AY22 Projections				Combined			
	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings
	833	1,469	25,341	\$2,534,100	789	1,547	20,447	\$2,044,700	786	3,016	45,788	\$4,578,800
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	94	190	4,076	\$407,600	54	81	1,456	\$145,600	54	271	5,532	\$553,200
Lake Superior College	100	181	3,718	\$371,800	77	286	3,226	\$322,600	77	467	6,944	\$694,400
Mesabi Range College	171	199	2,618	\$261,800	57	114	1,659	\$165,900	57	313	4,277	\$427,700
Century College***	70	128	2,132	\$213,200	83	174	1,348	\$134,800	83	302	3,480	\$348,000
Minneapolis Community and Technical College**	69	67	1,278	\$127,800	69	100	1,780	\$178,000	69	167	3,058	\$305,800
Northland Community & Technical College***	69	229	4,390	\$439,000	69	152	2,881	\$288,100	69	381	7,271	\$727,100
Central Lakes College**	260	475	7,129	\$712,900	260	414	4,101	\$410,100	260	889	11,230	\$1,123,000
Hibbing Community College*	0	0	0	\$0	54	71	746	\$74,600	51	71	746	\$74,600
Minnesota State Community and Technical College*	0	0	0	\$0	33	95	2,090	\$209,000	33	95	2,090	\$209,000
St. Cloud Technical & Community College*	0	0	0	\$0	33	60	1,160	\$116,000	33	60	1,160	\$116,000

Table 3: Total cost saving impact on all courses using zero-cost course resources for FY21 (actual) and 22 (projected)

* Z-degrees are not completed, but courses in the Z-degree pathway were converted and offered to students during AY21-22.

** Offers Z-degree, funding was provided by campus, not from state Z-degree allocations

*** Offers Z-degree, funding was provided by Minnesota State system office, not from state Z-degree allocations

Incentives to Faculty

As noted above, during our continued OER expansion efforts, Minnesota State has continued to provide opportunities and incentives for faculty to identify, review, adapt, create, share, and adopt open educational resources. Incentives offered to faculty included stipends (pursuant to collective bargaining agreements), professional development opportunities, training, and staff support. The funding for these incentives came from a mix of legislative funding and Minnesota State funding.

Conclusion

Minnesota State achieved and surpassed the legislative requirement to create at least three additional Z-degrees by the academic year 2020-2021 and is on track to offer an additional three Z-degrees by academic years 2023-2024. The process allowed Minnesota State to build upon existing OER efforts, and resulted in the implementation of four new Z-degrees in the fall of 2020, with two additional Z-degrees being added in the fall of 2021. Minnesota State efforts to prepare and support faculty, staff, libraries, etc., during earlier OER efforts proved instrumental in the success of Z-degree development. Finally, the state legislature's financial support was critical to the success of Z-degree implementation. Future financial support will ensure that Minnesota State colleges can continue to implement new, sustain, and expand existing Z-degree opportunities. Minnesota State strongly believes this support is critical to ensuring equitable access, student success, and degree attainment.