



March 6, 2023

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 seven (7) colleges the opportunity to offer zero-textbook cost associate degrees (“Z-degrees”) to ensure compliance with [SF2415](#). All seven colleges have been offering Z-degrees as of Fall 2021.

- (1) Anoka-Ramsey Community College (Fall 2020)
- (2) Central Lakes College (Fall 2020)
- (3) Century College (Fall 2021)
- (4) Northland Community & Technical College (Fall 2020)
- (5) Lake Superior College (Fall 2020)
- (6) Minneapolis Community and Technical College (Fall 2021)
- (7) Minnesota North College [formerly Mesabi Range College] (Fall 2020)



Minnesota State Z-degree projects saved students **\$2,385,200** in textbook costs in academic year 2020-2021, **\$2,357,200** in academic 2021-2022, and **\$1,088,520** through the end of fall semester 2023. Since its inception the Z-degree initiative has saved students **\$5,831,040**.

This represents ROI of \$6 per student for every \$1 the state has invested. As more students enroll in these courses the ROI will increase.

Academic Years 2022-2023 (2021 - [136F.305 Z-degrees](#))

One (1) college and one (1) university received funding to explore the establishing of Z-degrees on their campuses.

- (1) Inver Hills Community College
- (2) Saint Cloud State University

Three (3) more colleges implemented Z-degrees in fiscal year 2022. The completion of these Z-degrees brought the total to **9 Z-degrees**, adjusting for the merger of Hibbing Community College and Mesabi Range College).

- (3) Minnesota West Community and Technical College
- (4) Minnesota North College (formerly Hibbing Community College)
- (5) 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) St. Cloud Technical and Community College

Academic Years 2023-2024

Minnesota State completed a call for applications in February 2023 for college and universities to explore, implement, or expand Z-Degrees.

Two (2) colleges and two (2) universities received funding to explore the establishing of Z-degrees on their campuses.

- (1) Bemidji State University
- (2) Fond Du Lac Tribal and Community College
- (3) Minnesota State University Moorhead
- (4) Rochester Community and Technical College

Two (2) colleges received funding to implement Z-degrees on their campuses.

- (1) Minnesota State Community and Technical College
- (2) Normandale College

Three (3) colleges received funding to expand Z-degrees on their campuses.

- (1) Century College
- (2) Minnesota North
- (3) Minnesota West Community and Technical College

Z-Degree Implementation Status

Z-DEGREE PROJECT

A Z-degree is a complete associate's or bachelor's degree program that exclusively use course resources that are no cost to students.



MINNESOTA STATE

Open Educational Resources

COMPLETED - SEARCH FOR NO COST COURSES DURING REGISTRATION



IN-PROCESS



Figure 1: Completed and In-Process Z-Degrees March 2023

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 nine (adjusting for the merger of Hibbing Community College and Mesabi Range College) Z-degrees by Fall 2023. 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. The state legislature's financial support has been 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 essential to ensuring access to course resources, which ultimately promotes student success and degree attainment.

In addition to the information included below, more information about Minnesota State OER initiatives, including [Z-degree projects \(https://minnstate.edu/admissions/oer/oer-projects/index.html#zdegree\)](https://minnstate.edu/admissions/oer/oer-projects/index.html#zdegree), can be found on [the Minnesota State Open Educational Resources website \(https://minnstate.edu/admissions/oer/index.html\)](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 Activities for Academic Years 2020 to 2025

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 nine years. These efforts have created a foundation for OER and furthers readiness to accelerate OER creation, adaptation, and adoption.

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 2019 – 2020

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. Based on strong campus interest in pursuing Z-degrees, 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, \$175,000 in academic year (AY) 2021, and will include \$150,000 in academic year (AY) 2023.

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 implementation 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 2020-21

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 2023.

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. Minnesota North (formerly Mesabi Range College)
4. Northland Community & Technical College

Academic Year 2021-22

Z-degree Exploration Awards

One (1) college and one (1) university submitted interest applications in November 2021 to explore campus readiness for future Z-degrees. Inver Hills Community College and Saint Cloud State University were awarded \$25,000 each to assess campus readiness and culture to ensure future success in implementing a Z-degree:

Z-degree Implementation Awards

Minnesota State awarded Minnesota West Community and Technical College \$100,000 to fund and support completion a Z-degree by academic year 2024.

Z-degree Expansion Awards

Appropriations, as well as Minnesota State funds, also allowed for the funding for Saint Cloud Technical and Community college, which had already implemented a Z-degree, to expand their current Z-degree offerings. Expansion funds of \$25,000 were awarded to add courses and course sections to an existing Z-degree.

Academic Year 2022-23

Z-degree Exploration Awards

Two (2) colleges and two (2) universities submitted interest applications in February 2023 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. Bemidji State University

2. Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College
3. Minnesota State University Moorhead
4. Rochester Community and Technical College

Z-degree Implementation Awards

Minnesota State awarded two colleges \$100,000 each to fund and support college completion of a Z-degree by academic year 2025.

1. Minnesota State Community and Technical College
2. Normandale Community College

Z-degree Expansion Awards

Appropriations, as well as Minnesota State funds, 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.

5. Century College
6. Minnesota North College
7. Minnesota West College

Rate of Return on Investment (ROI)

The State of Minnesota, supplemented by Minnesota State, invested \$1 million in the nine colleges (adjusting for the merger of Hibbing Community College, Mesabi Range College, and three additional colleges to form Minnesota North College) currently offering Z-degrees. The savings to students is conservatively estimated to have been \$5.8 million (see tables below) since the passage of the legislative support in 2020. This represents a return on investment of \$6 per student for each \$1 invested in the creation and implementation of Z-degrees. As those programs continue, and new Z-degrees are implemented, we anticipate that this ROI per student will increase.

Institution Summary

Academic Years 2020 – 2023 Z-degree Cost Savings

Minnesota State continues to expand Z-degree offerings through the support of the Minnesota State legislature. Following are AY21, AY22, and summer/fall semester of AY23, actual savings of campuses implementing and expanding Z-degree offerings.

Institutions	AY20-21				AY21-22				AY22-23 through Summer/Fall 2022			
	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings
Total	642	1,181	23,851	\$2,385,200	786	1,167	23,574	\$2,357,320	321	540	11,121	\$1,088,520
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	75	172	4,226	\$422,600	60	109	2,566	\$256,000	18	30	660	\$66,000
Central Lakes College	177	252	4,799	\$479,900	230	304	5,281	\$528,100	67	85	1,659	\$165,900
Century College*	70	128	2,132	\$213,200	104	142	2,745	\$274,500	63	81	1,727	\$172,700
Lake Superior College	100	181	3,718	\$371,800	95	152	3,416	\$341,600	64	103	2,319	\$231,900
Minneapolis Community and Technical College*	65	199	4,388	\$438,900	43	137	2,819	\$281,900	38	118	2,432	\$243,200
**Minnesota North College (formerly Hibbing Community College and Mesabi Range College)	45	56	1,144	\$114,400	59	80	1,452	\$145,200	NA	NA	NA	NA
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	50	79	1,356	\$135,600	30	67	1,142	\$114,420	4	16	272	2,720
Northland Community & Technical College*	60	114	2,088	\$208,800	66	147	2,474	\$247,700	34	65	1,062	\$106,200
St. Cloud Technical & Community College					50	78	1,679	\$167,900	33	42	990	\$99,900

Table 1: Total cost saving impact on all courses using zero-cost course resources for FY21 and FY22 and summer/fall semester of FY23 (actual). Please note that the methodology of determining the courses converted to Z-degrees, the number of sections offered, the students, enrolled has been updated since the February 2022 report. In that report a mix of self-reporting and acquiring data from Minnesota State's student information system (SIS) was utilized. Beginning with this report, Minnesota State will be using its SIS as the sole source of truth for Textbook Cost Level. This data, which began being collected in January 2020, tracks whether a course offers an Open Educational Resource (OER), a No-Cost Textbook, or a Zero-Cost Textbook. For this report, as with prior reports, average textbook cost savings is calculated at \$100 per course per student enrolled. Using the SIS data will provide more consistent and auditable reporting.

** Funding was provided by Minnesota State system office, not from state Z-degree legislature allocations**With the merger of Hibbing Community College (HCC), Mesabi Range College (MRC), as well as with Itasca College, Rainey River College, and Vermillion Community College in May 2022, the data regarding courses converted, sections offered, students enrolled, and cost savings for HCC and MRC's Z-degree have been combined. For AY23, Minnesota North has not yet began specifying whether a course is Open Educational Resource (OER), a No-Cost Textbook, or a Zero-Cost Textbook, and whether the course supports a Z-degree. We anticipate that this data will become available in the future as Minnesota North fully completes its merge*

Academic Years 2020 – 2023 Total Z-degree Cost Savings

Minnesota State continues to expand Z-degree offerings through the support of the Minnesota State legislature. Following are AY21, AY22, and fall semester of AY23 total actual cost savings at campuses implementing and expanding Z-degree offerings.

	Combined AY20-21, AY21-22, and Fall 23			
	Courses Converted	Sections Offered	Students Enrolled	Savings
Total	1,749	2,888	58,546	\$5,831,040
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	202	262	7,452	\$744,600
Central Lakes College	474	641	11,739	\$1,173,900
Century College*	237	351	6,604	\$660,400
Lake Superior College	259	436	9,453	\$945,300
Minneapolis Community and Technical College**	146	454	9,639	\$964,000
Minnesota North College (formerly Hibbing Community College and Mesabi Range College)**	104	136	2,596	\$259,600
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	84	162	2,770	\$252,740
Northland Community & Technical College*	160	326	5,624	\$562,700
St. Cloud Technical & Community College*	83	120	2,669	\$267,800

Table 2: Total cost saving impact on all courses using zero-cost course resources for colleges offering Z-degree for FY21, FY22, and summer/fall semester of FY23 (actual)

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

**With the merger of Hibbing Community College (HCC), Mesabi Range College (MRC), as well as with Itasca College, Rainey River College, and Vermillion Community College in May 2022, the data regarding courses converted, sections offered, students enrolled, and cost savings for HCC and MRC's Z-degree have been combined. For AY23, Minnesota North's total does not include summer/fall semester of AY23 specifying whether a course is Open Educational Resource (OER), a No-Cost Textbook, or a Zero-Cost Textbook, and whether the course supports a Z-degree. We anticipate that this data will become available in the future as Minnesota North fully completes its merger.

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 compensation (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 will offer six additional Z-degrees by academic years 2023-2024. 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 and saved students six dollars for every one dollar invested. 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 essential to ensuring equitable access, student success, and degree attainment.