



# Z Degree Mississippi

Robert Cummings  
Chair and Associate Professor  
Department of Writing and Rhetoric  
University of Mississippi

# What is Z Degree?

Z Degree is a plan to promote the use of Open Educational Resources in higher education.

Z Degree started at Tidewater Community College in Norfolk, Virginia, in 2013.



Z-DEGREE

# What is Z Degree?

Daniel DeMarte, VPAA, and Linda Williams, a faculty member in the School of Business, supported teams of teachers to redesign their curriculum. Using funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, they hired Lumen Learning, a consulting group with OER expertise.



# What is Z Degree?



Faculty worked in teams to reflect on course content and revise student learning outcomes. Then, with Lumen, they reviewed openly-licensed content in their disciplines. They took some content, edited some content, and authored some content.

# What is Z Degree?

The result were courses with much greater alignment between the content and the outcomes.

And of course, student textbook costs dropped from an average of \$290 to \$5.



# What is Z Degree?

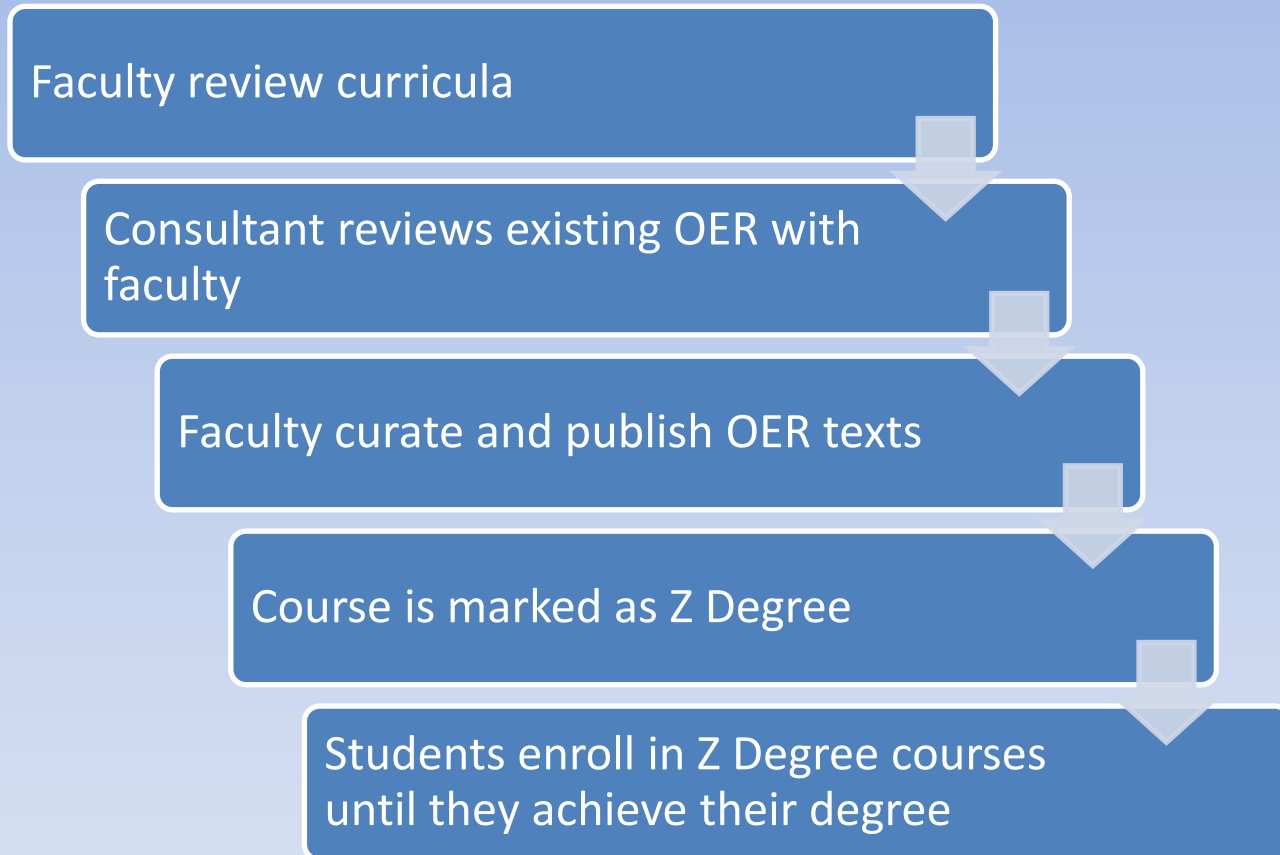


Z-DEGREE

But the real innovation came when Tidewater listed courses which no longer had textbook costs on their course schedules as “Z Courses.”

Then they cobbled together enough Z courses so that students could earn a two-year business associate degree. Thus, “Z Degree.”

# How does Z Degree Work? Model



# What is Z Degree?

## Results:

- Student retention improved.
- Student success improved.
- Student evaluation of teaching improved.
- Student evaluation of course materials improved.
- Z Degree went state-wide.



# What is Z Degree Mississippi?



A three-year plan to expand adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Mississippi public higher education.

# What is Z Degree Mississippi?

Invited participants include

Eight public universities:

- University of Mississippi
- Alcorn State University
- Delta State University
- Jackson State University
- Mississippi State University
- Mississippi University for Women
- Mississippi Valley State University
- University of Southern Mississippi

Four community colleges:

- East Mississippi Community College
- East Mississippi Community College
- Itawamba Community College
- Northwest Mississippi Community College



# What is Z Degree Mississippi?

## Cohort 1: Six Institutions, 22 Faculty, 15 subjects

Faculty Member	Subject	Institution
Heather J Allen	Modern Languages	University of Mississippi
Tara Blansett	Speech	Northeast Mississippi Community College
Susan Grayzel	Sarah Isom Center for Women & Gender Studies	University of Mississippi
Rachel Johnson	Writing & Rhetoric	University of Mississippi
Rhona Justice-Malloy	Theatre Arts	University of Mississippi
Claire Kimberly	Child and Family Studies	University of Southern Mississippi
Nicole Leach	Counseling, Education Psychology and Foundations	Mississippi State University
Maureen Meyers	Sociology & Anthropology	University of Mississippi



# What is Z Degree Mississippi?

## Cohort 1: Six Institutions, 22 Faculty, 15 subjects

Faculty Member	Subject	Institution
Mark Miller	Geography and Geology	University of Southern Mississippi
Brittany Moore	English	Northeast Mississippi Community College
Amy Pardo	Languages, Literature & Philosophy	Mississippi University for Women
Paige Sasser	English	Northeast Mississippi Community College
Donna Spell	Language & Literature	Delta State University
Jason Solinger	English	University of Mississippi
Leslie Stratyner	Languages, Literature & Philosophy	Mississippi University of Women



# What is Z Degree Mississippi?

## Cohort 1: Six Institutions, 22 Faculty, 15 subjects

Faculty Member	Subject	Institution
Michael Vera	Physics & Astronomy	University of Southern Mississippi
Joe Ward	History	University of Mississippi
Marc Watkins	Writing & Rhetoric	University of Mississippi
Brooke C White	Art & Art History	University of Mississippi
Ross Whitwam	Sciences & Mathematics	Mississippi University for Women
Amanda Williams	Child and Family Studies	University of Southern Mississippi
John Yarber	Economics and Business	Northeast Mississippi Community College



# What is Z Degree Mississippi?

## Goals:

- Degree Mississippi will unfold in three phases  
Phase 1 (through June 2016) Establish at least one OER course at each of 12 public institutions.
- Phase 2 (July 2016 – June 2017) Expand OER adoptions at four universities and two community colleges, focusing on those schools with the most faculty champions and momentum. Develop new OER courses to achieve 50% completion of general education/associate's degree pathway.
- Phase 3 (July 2017 – June 2018) Complete the OER general education/associate's degree pathway at two Mississippi schools, and continue expanding pathway at others. Create a plan to achieve a 4-year Z-degree pathway by 2020.



# What is Z Degree Mississippi? Funding

Z-Degree Mississippi is funded by a \$200,000 grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and \$80,000 in grant from the University of Mississippi College of Liberal Arts. These funds pay faculty and consultants. Once they are exhausted, faculty can choose to create a \$5 course fee for future consulting.



# Z Degree: What are They Saying?

## Students

- “Z Courses”
- During my academic experience thus far, textbooks are a waste of money for most classes. There is just too much material that is not needed, I think the Z-course approach is much better because we were being administered only the relevant materials for that course. I wasn't wasting time trying to decipher which material I needed to study for each exam. It also provided different learning styles. I was able to read, watch videos, and listen to the professor on blackboard to learn my course materials. I think that textbooks should be done away with. A professor that teaches solely out of the textbook is a bad professor in my opinion, because anyone can stay home and read out of the textbook.

## Faculty

- “Some of the best teaching I have ever done”
- “Students are much more engaged”
- “I didn't believe it at first. Then I went to the [Open Ed] conference.”



# Z-Degree Mississippi

## What will we learn?



- Will it work in the university environment?
- Will the course fee model be accepted?
- Will we be able to establish a true degree pathway – in the university or community college?
- Will our efforts be co-opted?