

OER VS ZTC VS No-Cost Symbol  
August 9, 2019

A review of data gathered in 2018-2019 seeking information regarding the use of the legislated no-cost symbol in online schedules reveals that many colleges either had not implemented the symbol in 2018 Fall or extracting data related to its use was more complicated than anticipated (number of courses and number of sections was requested). While reviewing the collected data from last year, efforts were made to access schedules for 2019 Fall to determine whether or not the colleges that may not have been compliant in 2018 were now compliant. While it appears that many are, a number of interesting - and sometimes troubling - practices were uncovered. These observations validate the need for a resolution that was adopted in Spring 2019.

**13.01 S19 Develop Recommendations for the Implementation of a No-Cost Designation in Course Schedules**

Whereas, SB 1359 (Block, 2016) requires all segments of public higher education in California to “Clearly highlight, by means that may include a symbol or logo in a conspicuous place on the online campus course schedule, the courses that exclusively use digital course materials that are free of charge to students and may have a low-cost option for print versions” (California Education Code §66406.9) as of January, 2018;

Whereas, Determining what course sections qualify for a no-cost identifier as required by SB 1359 (Block, 2016) is subject to interpretation, with some colleges opting to interpret the legislation very strictly and others opting to highlight all courses with no associated costs (i.e., including those courses that have never required a text); and

Whereas, Developing guidance and suggested practices for local senates to consider for the implementation of SB 1359 (Block, 2016) may result in appropriate consistencies across the colleges;

Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges investigate the approaches used to implement SB 1359 (Block, 2016) across all segments of higher education in California and similar efforts in other states; and

Resolved, That the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges develop suggested guidelines, policies, and practices for implementation of SB 1359 (Block, 2016) no later than Spring of 2020.

## Observations

1. The use of the no-cost symbol is not consistent across the 72 districts and, possibly, not even within districts. While some colleges have implemented measures to only identify “courses that exclusively use digital course materials that are free of charge to students”, others are explicitly identifying courses with the no-cost symbol that do not - and have not required a text.
1. Some colleges have implemented OER, ZTC (no-cost), and low-cost designations.
2. OER and ZTC may not always be differentiated. At one college, when asked about this, it was determined that they would call everything OER in order to simplify things for students.

## Questions

1. Should courses with no textbook be recognized with the no-cost designation?
2. When quantifying use, should redundant support courses be counted?
3. Are OER, ZTC, and no-cost being appropriately differentiated? Do they need to be?
4. Should practices be consistent?
5. Is it SB1359-compliant to require students to click on section information to see that a course has the “no-cost” designation?

## Zero-Textbook-Cost Courses

In an effort to make textbooks more accessible to students and to reduce educational costs, X College offers zero-textbook-cost (ZTC) courses. A ZTC course constitutes one of the following:

- a course that does not require a textbook
- a course that lists its textbook as optional
- a course that makes its textbook available to students free of charge, through lending services or electronic book (e-book) databases
- a course that uses a free, open educational resource (OER) textbook
- a course that makes all required readings available for free, via websites or online databases.



Students who take ZTC courses are not required to pay fees to access software platforms or homework sites. However, students may be asked to purchase lab materials and supplies.

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X College publishes its ZTC offerings in compliance with Senate Bill No. 1359