

Proposal from the campus OER Liaison to Academic Senate to define the Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) designation and the Low Textbook Cost (LTC) designation

Background:

To comply with the requirement of SB 1359 to notify students about Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) classes in the online class schedule by January 2018, Las Positas College has enabled faculty to designate class sections as ZTC or LCT in ClassWeb. Clicking on the “Search for Zero Textbook Cost or Low Textbook Cost Classes” link on the ClassWeb homepage and searching for these courses at both colleges shows 335 courses with the ZTC or LCT designation, with 21 of those courses at LPC. A [survey of Las Positas College Spring 2022 courses](#) indicates that if defined and used campus-wide at LPC, this number would be closer to 665 (471 ZTC and 194 LCT, as defined below).

With the passing of SB 1359 and the addition of the designations in ClassWeb, many faculty and LPC student government representatives have asked good questions seeking to clarify what is and is not ZTC, and have also expressed interest in a schedule designation for classes that have low textbook cost (LTC). Additionally, the [ASCCC passed a resolution](#) encouraging local Academic Senates to support an LTC designation. In recognition that there currently exists a range of low cost thresholds across the state ranging from \$30 to \$50, that students may register at more than one college, and that statewide student input is needed, an additional ASCCC resolution was passed in 2021 to [Develop Statewide Recommendation for Definition of Low-Cost Course Materials](#).

Recent Work:

An inquiry of ZTC/LCT definitions and LTC thresholds across California was done into how other California Community Colleges and CSUs ([click to view](#)) navigated ZTC/LTC designations. Definitions were noted, with specific attention to whether materials were included and the low-cost threshold. Of the colleges included, with easily accessible, public, definitions, the majority did not include materials and the low-cost thresholds ranged from \$30-\$50, with the majority at \$50 (a close contender was \$40).

A survey of the [Las Positas College Spring 2022 courses](#) found that 38% of courses offered in Spring 2022 were offered with zero textbooks costs and 15% with course textbook costs of \$50 or less. The mean (average) cost for a course's textbooks was \$66.72. The median cost was \$40.00. The first quartile was \$0.00, the second quartile was \$40.00, the third quartile (75% at or below) was \$126.75, and the largest value (100% at or below) was \$424.25 (EMS).

Proposal to more clearly define what is considered a ZTC class:

Courses with this designation have eliminated textbook costs by using alternative instructional materials and methodologies, including open educational resources. Students who take ZTC courses are not required to pay fees to access software

platforms or homework sites. Students may be required to purchase other course-specific materials and supplies unrelated to textbook costs.

Examples of courses with this designation:

- 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 provides a class set of textbooks through a lending program. The textbook or set must be available to all students in the course.
- a course that makes all required readings available for free, via websites or online databases.

Proposal to set a threshold for what is considered an LTC class:

Courses with this designation have eliminated most textbook costs, but still, have costs of \$50 or less. Costs may include the purchase of new or widely available used textbooks, digital textbook access, or fees to access software platforms or homework sites. Students may be required to purchase other course-specific materials and supplies unrelated to textbook costs.

Proposal of the following clarifications (to accompany ZTC and LTC definitions):

- The costs for the Low Textbook Costs course section designation are based on pre-tax prices.
- Any zero cost or low cost option must be available to ALL students in the course to be eligible. If there is an option, but it has limited availability, then the course would need to rely on the option that is widely available for all students in the course.
- A class that uses free digital materials but requires students to print some of the course materials may be designated as Low Textbook Cost if the print costs can be reasonably expected to be under the threshold. Costs associated with students choosing to print instructional materials shall not be considered a cost as part of this program.
- Zero Textbook Costs or Low Textbook Cost course sections may have required costs for supplies or other materials (ex: lab equipment or art supplies) that are not related to the textbook costs.
- The college strives to ensure that ZTC and LTC designations in the class schedule are accurate; however, there may be some circumstances, where there is a sudden change in availability or faculty may have to adjust the textbook selection and this can affect course material costs. It may also be necessary to change instructors. Replacement faculty have academic freedom

to choose instructional materials regardless of costs and are not obligated to use free or low cost course textbooks or digital access selected by an instructor previously assigned to the class. Please be sure to verify course textbook information as the course start date nears, especially if there has been an instructor change.

Proposal of the following recommendations to support the adoption of the above definitions:

- Create a webpage to communicate these definitions to the campus.
- Encourage faculty to let their deans know if one of their course sections should have a ZTC or LCT designation.
- Encourage faculty with course sections that require materials costs (outside of textbook costs) to include a note in their course section notes with an approximate cost.
- Investigate adding a “Lower than Average” designation that would take into account the average course textbook costs for a discipline and designate those that are lower than average.
- Seek out professional development funds and other funding that could be used to support those faculty wishing to explore zero textbook cost or low cost textbook OER options for their courses.
- Continue to communicate OER professional development opportunities and OER resources to the campus.

Notes:

This proposal is based, in part, on Miracosta College’s Proposal to their academic senate.

The initial ZTC/LCT definitions were based on findings from an inquiry of ZTC/LCT definitions and LCT thresholds across California ([click to view](#)); comments and discussion from the November LPCSG meeting; along with results from the *Fall 2021 LPC OER & Course Materials Survey*, and the *Spring LPC OER & Course Materials Survey*.

Instrumental in the definition development to this stage were comments and discussion from the April 25, 2022, BSSL Division Meeting Academic Senate portion, and a supplemental *What do the Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) and Low Cost Textbook (LCT) ClassWeb designations mean at LPC? - Survey*.

Each of the above are woven throughout the proposal, definitions, clarifications, and recommendations.