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MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE: FULLY ONLINE Z DEGREE IN COMMUNICATIONS SAVES STUDENTS TIME AND MONEY

By: Dawn Zimmer

April 2022

Member Spotlight

Tags: [Access \(/specialty-area/access\)](#), [Learning Environments \(/specialty-area/learning-environments\)](#), [Student Completion \(/specialty-area/student-completion\)](#), [Teaching and Learning \(/functional-area/teaching-and-learning\)](#)



Mesa Community College (MCC) launched its second Z Degree program, an Associate in Arts with an emphasis in communication, beginning in the spring 2022 semester. The college's first Z Degree, an Arizona General Education Curriculum certificate and general associate's degree, was introduced in 2019. A Z Degree is offered completely online with zero textbook costs, saving students time and money.

“The Z Degree offers students greater flexibility, enabling them to take classes that fit their schedule. We built this program for the students who want flexibility, less distraction, and less cost while pursuing their degree,” said Laura Ballard, MCC’s Director of eLearning. “While classes still have due dates, students can complete their work when it’s convenient for them.”

Students can take eight-week online Z Courses for a more focused semester and complete a degree in 18 months without taking breaks. They also have the option of combining Z Courses with in-person courses, which can lower the cost of their degrees. They may also take 14- and 16-week courses.

“Over the course of an entire associate’s degree program, students can save up to \$8,300 in textbook and commuting fees,” continued Ballard. “That’s a 62 percent savings. If you include child care costs, the savings are even more.” She notes that the communications Z Degree program will be offered online for several semesters and will most likely expand with student demand.

Instead of textbooks, students use open educational resources—freely accessible, openly licensed instructional materials—such as streaming media; faculty-developed content; and other digital assets that are useful for teaching, learning, assessing, and research. “Other resources include proprietary content that the college pays for such as library databases, books, and media,” Ballard explained. An August 2021 annual report on open educational resources indicated that MCC students saved \$400,000 in textbook costs the previous academic year.

Another advantage of Z Degrees is the easy transfer of credits to Arizona state schools—Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and University of Arizona—as well as Grand Canyon University, resulting in additional savings in time and the cost of taking unnecessary courses.

The faculty works closely with the MCC Center for Teaching and Learning team while developing content for each Z Course. While only two Z Degrees are currently available, there are 28 Z Courses in a variety of fields, including art, anthropology, science, communications, math, English, and sociology. These courses were developed with the highest standards and include multimedia, engaged faculty, and carefully selected content. “We are working to expand course offerings,” Ballard points out. Five additional degree programs could be offered as Z Degrees in the near future.

[Click here \(https://www.mesacc.edu/online/z-courses-and-z-degree\)](https://www.mesacc.edu/online/z-courses-and-z-degree) for more information about MCC’s Z Degrees.

Lead image: MCC eLearning team Laura Ballard, Stephanie Williams, and Ryan Matthews

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