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[LATEST \(/INNOVATION#LATEST\)](#)  
[\(/INNOVATION#POPULAR\)](#)

[THEME \(/INNOVATION#THEME\)](#)

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## MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ASSOCIATE IN ARTS, EMPHASIS IN ANTHROPOLOGY, WITH ZERO

### TEXTBOOK COSTS

**By: Dawn Zimmer**

December 2023

Member Spotlight

**Tags:** [Access \(/specialty-area/access\)](#), [Inclusion \(/specialty-area/inclusion\)](#),

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Mesa Community College (MCC) introduced the new Associate in Arts, Emphasis in Anthropology, in fall 2023. This is the fourth Z Degree offered by the college that is entirely online and uses open educational resources (OER), saving students time and money. Chief Online Education Officer Laura Ballard said anthropology was selected for Z Degree learning because,

The department was already offering zero-textbook-cost courses, incorporating openly licensed content, library materials, and instructor-developed content. This allowed us to focus on design and copyright when building out the degree because the content and practice were already in place. It was a quick win.

OER, Ballard explained, are freely accessible, openly licensed instructional materials such as text, media, and other digital assets that are useful for teaching, learning, assessing, and research purposes. "Our Z Degrees use OER along with proprietary content the college pays for like library databases, books, and media."

"Dr. Annalisa Alvrus, Senior Residential Faculty, was innovative and progressive in the development of anthropology content for our initial Arizona General Education Curriculum Z Degree, benefiting students not necessarily on a path to a career in anthropology," said Ballard. "She has now helped to build a Z Degree specifically for students pursuing a degree with an emphasis in her field. Her dedication to developing OER content is benefitting many more than just those pursuing an anthropology degree."

As part of the MCC Online team working with Ballard and Alvrus, Amaranth Weiss, Anthropology and Cultural Science Faculty, said the new Z Degree was designed "to make anthropology more accessible to learners. The materials we selected are written in a student-centered way."

"For students who need the flexibility to take classes that mesh with their schedules and demonstrate a cost savings, the Z Degree could be a program that works best for them," said Ballard. She pointed out that by eliminating expensive textbook costs and commuting time and expense, the financial comparisons are significant. She continued,

Over the course of an entire associate's degree program, students can save up to \$8,300 in textbook and commuting fees over the traditional cost of a degree. That's a 62 percent savings. If you include child care costs, the savings are even more.

Alvrus noted that,

In developing the Anthropology Z-Degree, we are building on the visionary work of former anthropology faculty Dr. Rick Effland, who was one of the first instructors at MCC to recognize the importance of the Internet as a means for educating students.

Students may take eight-week online Z courses for a more focused semester and complete a degree in 18 months without taking breaks. There is also the option of combining Z courses with in-person or hybrid courses, lowering the overall cost of earning their degree.

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

For more information, visit the [MCC Z Degree web page \(http://www.mesacc.edu/online/z-courses-and-z-degree\)](http://www.mesacc.edu/online/z-courses-and-z-degree).

*Lead image: Dr. Annalisa Alvrus (left) and Laura Ballard (right) provide students in Z courses with opportunities to inspect fossils as they would in an in-person setting.*

*Dawn Zimmer is Media Relations Manager at Mesa Community College in Mesa, Arizona.*

*Opinions expressed in Member Spotlight are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the League for Innovation in the Community College.*

## Upcoming Events



<https://www.league.org/eli2023>

December 10-13, 2023 (in person)  
and January 23-25, 2024 (virtual)