

## Zero-Cost Course Faculty Direct Stipend

*Or, How California State Colleges Can Make a Big Structural Change to the Academic Textbook Industry*

Many California college students can barely afford food and housing. Paying hundreds of dollars a semester for textbooks exacerbates this insecurity and negatively impacts student academic performance, graduation and retention rates. Big academic textbook publishers meanwhile rake in billions of dollars from students as captive consumers of the academic system. Most faculty accept and perpetuate this *status quo* based on notions of academic prestige/tradition, workload concerns, or royalties.

California leads the country in developing OER-related legislation. <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/state-policy-tracking/>. Even so, our best efforts are incremental. OER administrators, librarians, and a few faculty of goodwill are doing so much to try to change the system, but all of us who work in this area know that it's not nearly enough. Students deserve better. They deserve big structural change.

What is the main reason that things aren't changing more rapidly? Simply put, faculty have no significant incentive to change.

Some colleges do give one-time faculty stipends (e.g., \$1000) to provide training and assistance in redesigning courses to use OER and use low-cost or no-cost materials. Yet funding for these stipends is limited, the pool of participants is small, the management burden is significant, and the compliance rates are imperfect.

Faculty need a more direct, simple, clear, reliable and sustainable incentive if we are to change collectively. And whatever approach we take also has to respect academic freedom. Faculty must want to change, not be forced to change.

The solution is simple, yet profound: ***pay faculty direct, regular stipends for courses that are zero-cost to students.***

With such an initiative, everyone wins, except the big textbook publishers.

- The vast majority of faculty, both full-time and part-time/adjunct, will gladly participate in this program and welcome the additional regular income. Those few faculty that make significant royalties from textbooks might not participate, but they will seriously consider participating when they compare the stipend amount to their royalties.
- The vast majority of California students will be grateful to save thousands of dollars during college.
- The vast majority of OER professionals will be delighted that faculty start taking initiative to ask for their help and collaborate actively and passionately with each other to flip courses and programs to zero-cost curriculum.
- The vast majority of taxpayers will welcome all the free educational content that faculty will produce and archive.
- The vast majority of money saved will benefit California's economy instead of East coast or foreign publishers.

To be most effective and to have maximal impact, this stipend should have two tiers:

- Collaborator Level: \$50/semester/unit for courses whose textbooks and curricular materials are zero-cost for students, consisting entirely of publicly archived, Creative Commons licensed open educational resources
- Creator Level: \$100/semester/unit for courses whose textbooks and curricular materials are zero-cost for students, when those materials are publicly archived, Creative Commons licensed open educational resources entirely created, developed, and/or re-mixed by faculty in that department

The use of any commercial curricular content, whether purchased or subscribed by the Library, or scanned and put behind a learning management system course shell, would disqualify that course.

To be managed most efficiently, the stipend should:

- be made federal/state law and/or university policy, and draw on baseline funding (preferably directly from a government budget, but also potentially a mix of funding from college budgets and student fee allocations) that covers stipends for *all* courses. With funding to underwrite 100% participation, any remaining funds each year that result from non-participation would be allocated to college libraries and non-profit publishers to create, host and support Open Access and Open Educational Resources
- require faculty to sign a pledge several months beforehand to indicate course curricular materials will be zero-cost
- have all enrolled students certify *at the end of the course* that course curricular resources were in fact zero-cost and indicate whether the materials were entirely created, developed, and/or re-mixed by faculty in their department
- pay faculty within a month of the conclusion of each course
- practice public transparency in all of the above