

Z-Major Development:

A 5-Step Process

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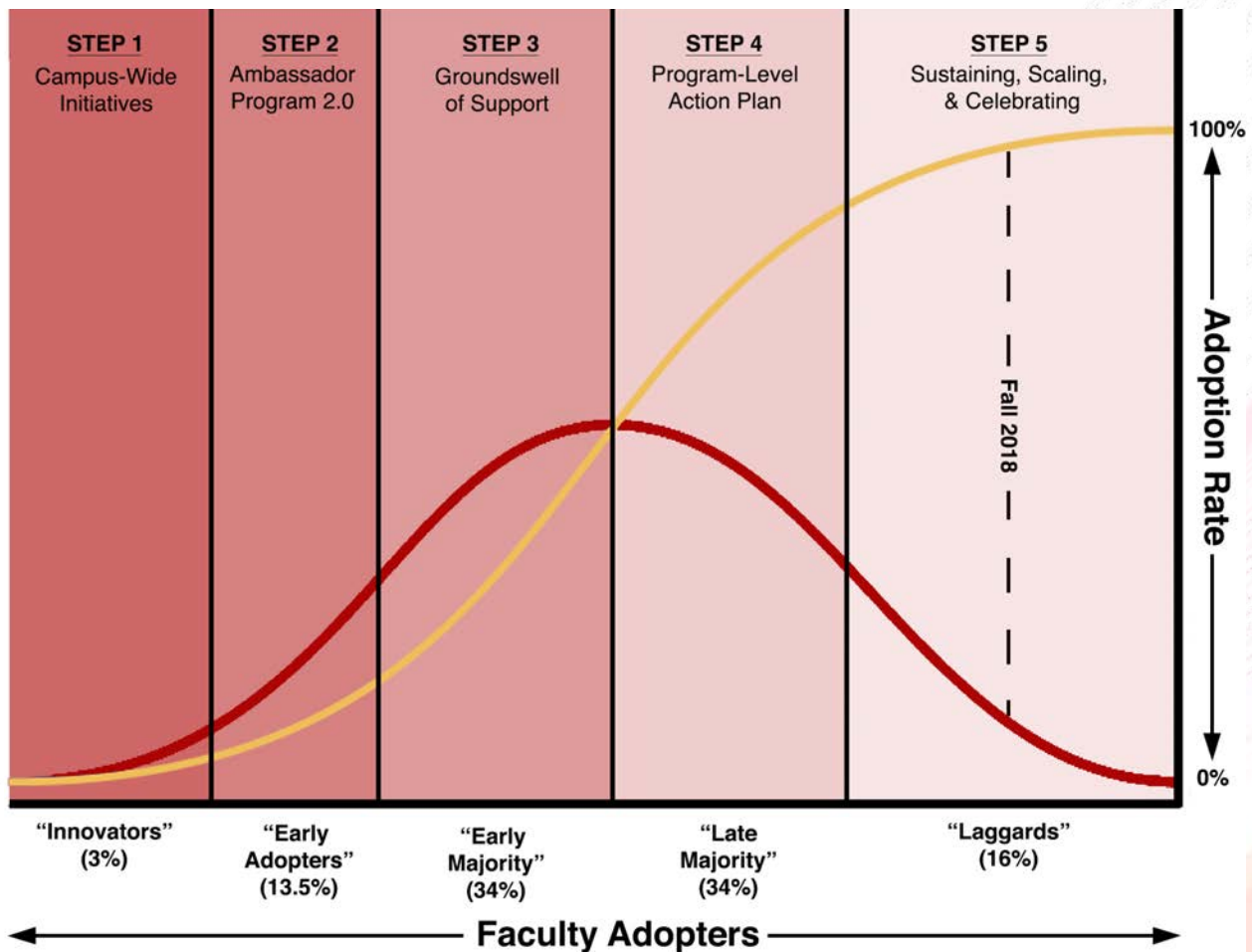


Abstract: This 5-Step process uses Everett Rogers' (1962/2003) *diffusion of innovations* theory to offer a retrospective understanding of how CSUCI developed the CSU's first three zero-textbook-cost undergraduate majors (aka, "Z-Majors") in Communication, Health Science, and Early Childhood Studies.

- **STEP 1:** *Campus-Wide Initiatives* ("Innovators")
- **STEP 2:** *Ambassador Program 2.0* ("Early Adopters")
- **STEP 3:** *Groundswell of Support* ("Early Majority")
- **STEP 4:** *Program-Level Action Plan* ("Late Majority")
- **STEP 5:** *Sustaining, Scaling, & Celebrating* ("Laggards")

Figure 1.

5-Step Process for Developing Z-Majors via Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory



STEP 1: *Campus-Wide Initiatives* (“Innovators”)

OpenCI began in Fall 2016 with a broad range of campus-wide initiatives. OpenCI sought to educate faculty members through formal workshops, informal word-of-mouth, and the launch of an original website (<https://www.csuci.edu/openci/>).

To help offset the time required to redesign their courses using no/low-cost materials, faculty members were offered one of three special consulting contracts: (1) current, (2) new, or (3) collaborative. Faculty who were currently using no/low-cost materials to save students at least 30% on the cost of course materials were offered \$500 to complete a data questionnaire and 3-minute video that shared the specific materials used with other interested faculty members. Faculty who redesigned a new course to save students at least 30% on the cost of course materials were offered \$1,500 for the same deliverables, and faculty who collaborated with others in their program to redesign at least 5 sections of a single course were collectively offered the equivalent of one course buy-out to be divided among themselves as they deemed fit (\$5,700).

During the 2016-2017 academic year, 25 faculty from across CSUCI’s campus committed to becoming an “OpenCI Ambassador” by accepting one of these three special consulting contracts. Referred to by Rogers (1962/2003) as “innovators” in the diffusion process, this relatively small group of faculty members were typically tech-savvy, more open to risk-taking, and/or had a close professional relationship with one of the OpenCI Campus Coordinators.

STEP 2: Ambassador Program 2.0 (“Early Adopters”)

Phase two of OpenCI’s implementation process included a more structured Ambassador program, as well as a shift in the program’s focus toward OERs’ pedagogical and curricular benefits (in addition to cost savings alone).

OpenCI’s “Ambassador Program 2.0” decreased the faculty members’ financial incentive to \$500, while increasing their level of support and engagement. In addition to completing a data questionnaire about their no/low-cost course materials, this new cohort of OpenCI Ambassadors was also required to participate in two synchronous meetings and to complete a “5-Day Workout” via Canvas (<https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/2241>). The self-paced workshop engaged Ambassadors for 20 minutes each day by addressing five interrelated topics: (1) affordability and student success, (2) understanding OERs’ significance, (3) how to search for OERs, (4) evaluating and using OERs, and (5) open pedagogy.

In addition to the redesigned Ambassador Program 2.0, work continued alongside previous OpenCI Ambassadors to co-curate and disseminate their course-specific OER content. These materials were then organized and disseminated as “Faculty Showcases” via OpenCI’s aforementioned website.

Together, each of these efforts resulted in a groundswell of “early adopters” within several programs on campus - particularly CSUCI’s Communication program. The realization that such a groundswell had formed was significant because early adopters tend to have the highest degree of opinion leadership among their peers (Rogers, 1962/2003, p. 283). This means early adopters

have a disproportionate influence on the opinions and actions of those around them, which made them integral to the future success of OpenCI.



STEP 3: Groundswell of Support (“Early Majority”)

OpenCI’s next phase was inspired by a fortuitous conversation with Linda Williams during the 2017 OpenEd conference in Anaheim, California. As architect of the nation’s first zero-textbook-cost major at Tidewater Community College in 2013, Linda Williams explained that a “Z-Degree/Z-Major” doesn’t necessarily require that every course offering be no-cost. Rather, at least one section of each course must be no-cost in order to offer students a no-cost pathway through the entire curriculum. This explanation challenged previous assumptions about zero-cost majors by emphasizing a bottom-up approach to curriculum redesign, instead of a top-down curricular mandate.

With this new understanding in mind, attention was subsequently focused on the specific programs where a groundswell of early adopters had previously been observed - particularly CSUCI’s Communication department. The Communication department’s entire curriculum was then evaluated class-by-class in order to identify the specific courses that had - and had *not* - been redesigned using low/no-cost course materials by current OpenCI Ambassadors. This process not only revealed that an “early majority” had already been reached among the Communication program’s faculty (Rogers, 1962/2003), but also that a surprisingly low number of barriers remained for creating a “Z-Major” pathway through its entire curriculum.

STEP 4: Program-Level Action Plan (“Late Majority”


Once the potential was realized for CSUCI’s Communication department to develop a zero-textbook-cost pathway through its entire curriculum, a mindful pursuit entailed of achieving CSU’s first undergraduate Z-Major.

First, a campus-wide call was distributed to program chairs that offered \$10,000 in support for a program-level effort to reduce student textbook costs by 30% or more. Two programs responded to the call: Communication and Early Childhood Studies.

Next, a three-tiered program-level Action Plan was developed for how Communication’s program could best leverage the \$10,000 in AL\$ funding. Part one of this three-tiered plan collaborated with current OpenCI Ambassadors in the program to extend their student savings to all corresponding course sections. Part two collectively curated a no-cost reading/resource for COMM 101: Public Speaking. Part three targeted additional courses with particularly high potential for cost savings. Ultimately, part two of the program-level Action Plan resulted in the co-creation of a Canvas shell for COMM 101, which was later shared openly via Canvas Commons (<https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/4000>). This Canvas shell was developed alongside six Communication Lecturers and offered both a “Quick Start Option” and “Customizable Option” of no-cost materials that could be shared and archived for future use. The shell’s Quick Start Option included the full text, chapter quizzes, and original PowerPoint slides for *Fundamentals of Public Speaking* (Rice, 2017). The shell’s Customizable Option included 21 content area modules (e.g., audience analysis, speech writing, visual aids, etc.), with each module containing three potential readings, videos, and activities for faculty to choose from.

Parts one and three of Communication's program-level Action Plan resulted in the removal of each remaining course barrier toward becoming the CSU's first undergraduate Z-Major.

In the end, this program-level Action Plan proved essential for recruiting the "late majority" of Communication's faculty. As Rogers (1962/2003) explains, the late majority tend to approach any innovation with high levels of skepticism. The late majority are also unlikely to adopt an innovation until an early majority has already done so, and after a proof of concept (PoC) has demonstrated the innovation's feasibility (p. 283). Thus, the Communication department's three-tiered, program-level Action Plan served as PoC for those who constituted the program's late majority.



STEP 5: Sustaining, Scaling, & Celebrating (“Laggards”)

After creating a zero-cost pathway through the Communication program’s entire curriculum, attention was turned to how this pathway could be sustained into perpetuity, as well as how it might be scaled for additional programs throughout CSUCI and beyond. Each of these goals were addressed through the creation of shareable Dropbox folders and Canvas shells, as well as an OpenCI Program Lead.

Canvas shells were modeled off of the previous Canvas shell that had been created for COMM 101 (see <https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/4000>). A Dropbox folder and Canvas shell were created for each additional course in the Communication department’s curriculum, with each folder and shell containing a collection of course-specific no-cost materials for faculty to use.

(For additional Canvas shell examples, please see

<https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/4179/modules>, <https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/4382/modules>, and <https://cilearn.csuci.edu/courses/4383/modules>, etc.; for additional Dropbox folder examples, please see

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/guy5bsqqozwmiuf/AADxeTnXaCun6Y6N_jfZoJ4za?dl=0, https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a4udfcia6rs4gh/AAAaHz_W9XGzIyWnkiNjRQzCa?dl=0,

and <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5ksf7yz6egiyub6/AADbpgmgBywza8aebb1NNehFa?dl=0>, etc.)

During the Fall 2018 semester, an OpenCI Program Lead was also piloted to help with sustainability and scalability. As a perceived opinion leader and “change agent” within the department (see Stone, 2000), this Program Lead was offered a \$2,000 special consulting contract. S/he was tasked with sustaining and scaling the program’s Z-Major efforts from year-

to-year by maintaining the aforementioned Dropbox folders and Canvas shells, curating and disseminating additional no-cost materials as needed, liaising between the program and OpenCI's larger campus efforts, and so on.

In addition to sustaining and scaling the Communication program's Z-Major efforts, OpenCI also sought to celebrate faculty accomplishments via blog posts, press releases, newspaper editorials, feature articles, radio appearances, and more. This final step served to further enhance and solidify faculty members' morale, level of buy-in, and sense of personal ownership.

Each of these realities is especially significant for "laggards" (Rogers, 1962/2003) in the diffusion of innovation process: individuals who have limited opinion leadership, an aversion to change agents, and/or a heightened affinity for the way things are traditionally done (p. 283).

This final step in our 5-step implementation process also served to disseminate OpenCI's achievements throughout the CSU and beyond, in effort to help others who are interested in pursuing a Z-Major of their own.