

Estimated Savings from Zero Textbook Cost Courses in Fall 2023/Winter 2024

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Prepared for UASU Executive Committee by
Department of Research and Advocacy



Overview

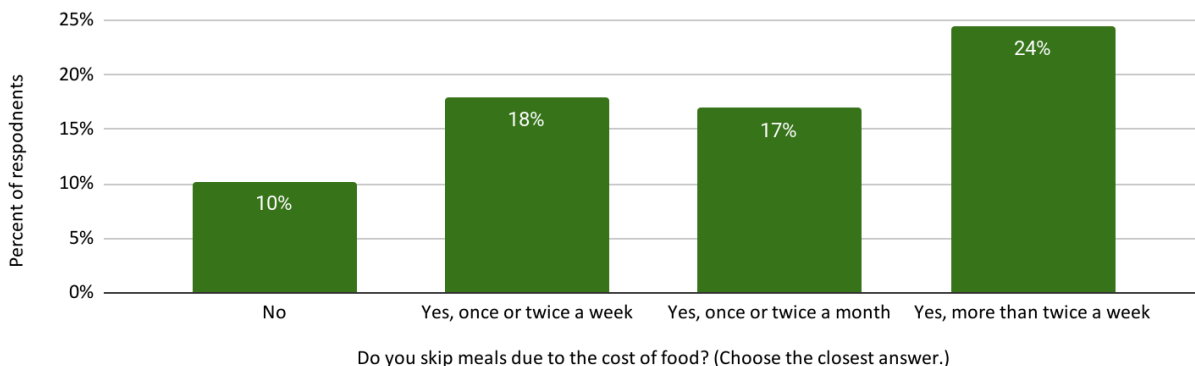
This briefing estimates potential savings to students from courses using the BearTracks Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) course indicator in its third year of implementation. Under Vice Presidents (Academic) Akanksha Bhatnagar, Joel Agarwal, Calliope Draper, Abner Monteiro, Gurleen Kaur, and Pedro Almeida, the ZTC indicator and materials affordability has been a UASU advocacy priority and longstanding collaboration with the University librarians and the Registrar's Office.

This briefing follows up on the savings estimates prepared for [2021/22](#) and [2022/23](#). Using the same method, which is based on the impact estimate methods used in other large-scale ZTC efforts, we found that this year's record-high numbers of participating class sections saved students up to \$13 million (equivalent to roughly \$320 if savings were evenly distributed across all undergraduate and graduate students), for a three-year total of up to \$30 million. These numbers are always reported as 'up to,' as students retain the freedom of choice to use their best judgment in terms of purchasing textbooks.

For a greater sense of proportion as to the benefits of the ZTC course indicator, a relevant question was run in the UASU 2023 Annual Survey. 14% of respondents had (at some point) picked a course because it was listed as ZTC, specifically instead of buying a textbook. This rose to 19% of disabled students, 19% of Indigenous students, and 21% of students who had visited a food bank in the past year. The rate also scaled with Fall 2023 food insecurity:

"Have you ever done the following INSTEAD of buying a textbook?...Picked a course because it was listed as Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC)," by Fall 2023 food insecurity

UASU 2023 Annual Survey, preliminary data



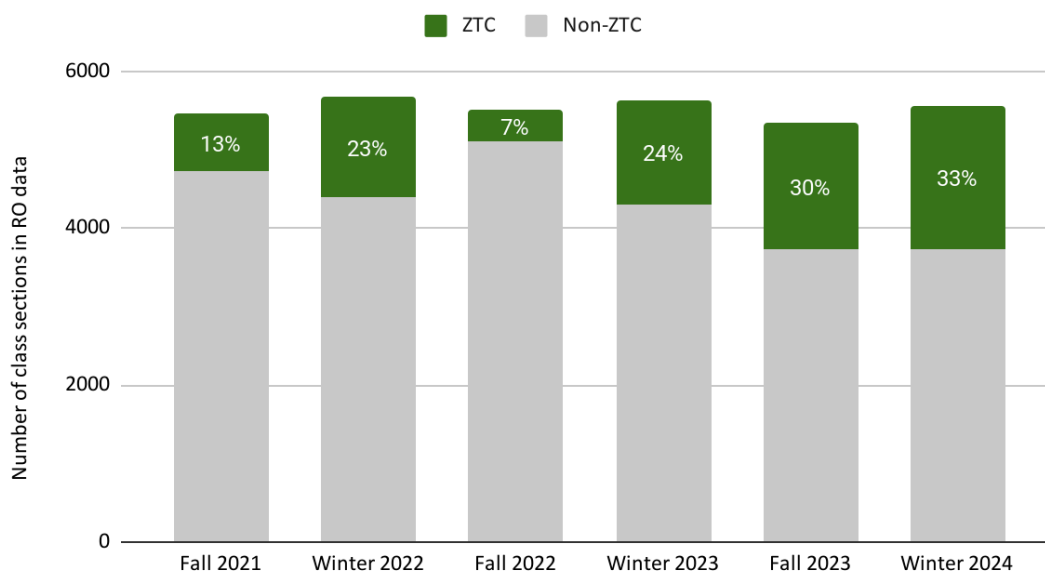
Methods and Assumptions

Some unknown proportion of these courses were already effectively ZTC, often due to instructors' work to minimize costs. Our calculations do not imply that the ZTC indicator caused all the savings. These numbers should be considered students' maximum potential savings in 2023/24 because of participating instructors' choices to run ZTC classes. This way of measuring potential savings is standard across other ZTC projects that we reviewed concurrent with the pilot project.

The impact estimate formula is: *(average per-student per-course per-term impact) x (average UAlberta class size) x (number of participating class sections)*

- For average per-student per-course per-term impact, we used the same \$115 value used in the past two years.
 - This was based on savings estimates from concurrent pilot projects at other North American post-secondary institutions.
 - It is also consistent with preliminary 2023 Annual Survey data: self-reported average cost of required textbooks for Fall 2023, excluding \$0 responses, was \$465, or 4x the \$115 estimate.
- [Per public figures](#), the average UAlberta class size is 38.
- The Registrar's Office has helpfully provided ZTC participation statistics. Across Fall 2023 and Winter 2024, over 3,400 class sections (31%) were marked ZTC.

Rising ZTC participation



We needed to adjust the resulting dollar figure based on a major difference in how Augustana class sections are recorded (i.e. a large number of listed sections with 0-4 enrolled in Winter 2024). After adjusting for that, however, we estimate a total potential savings of up to \$13 million, a notable increase. Up to \$299,000 of this was at Campus Saint-Jean (using CSJ's average class size of 25).