



PRESS RELEASE

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zyBooks Now at 200 Universities in Two Years, Challenging the "Free Materials" Movement as Well as Big Publishers

LOS GATOS, California –April 6, 2015 – A company formed by professors and computing professionals to help college students succeed in STEM courses seems to have struck a chord, with over 200 universities and 60,000 student users in just two year. Yet unlike many recent efforts towards free materials such as Khan Academy, MOOCs, and OpenStax, this company unabashedly charges a subscription fee.

The company, zyBooks, was co-founded in 2012 by Smita Bakshi (CEO), a former UC Davis professor and long-time Silicon Valley computer professional, and Frank Vahid (CTO), a UC Riverside professor for 20 years and well-known textbook author. Their approach: Create learning material natively for the web, using less text, and instead using animations, learning questions, simulators, games, auto-generated auto-graded homework and labs, and more, all in a single integrated web product. "The zyBooks platform is state-of-the-art, using cloud services and HTML5, designed for ease-of-use by students and instructors" says Bakshi. "Unlike other products, there's little time spent learning the system or getting lost jumping around."

"Most companies getting attention today provide free video-recorded lectures or free textbooks on the web. But lectures and textbooks are the old paradigm. If the web is a superhighway, those companies are filling it with free horses" says Vahid. "Of course, if a student is going to be required to use an outdated paradigm, I'd rather they get it for free. But our students deserve better." Bakshi says they charge a modest amount (about \$45) to ensure the platform and content stay state-of-the-art, and so the company is directly accountable to instructors and students. "The free movement may be short-sighted", suggests Vahid.

The company is serious about results, doing extensive research, with a 2014 ASEE best paper and four more papers being published in education conferences this summer, one showing that switching to a zyBook and making no other changes improved student course grades by 1/3 to 1/2 a letter grade. "That's in addition to tons of positive, almost giddy, feedback from instructors and students", says Bakshi.

"The big publishers have attempted to develop something similar to zyBooks, but their attempts aren't nearly as good" says Bakshi. "Maybe they are too invested to the old paradigm to really make the big needed changes." Other web-native products like ALEKS, MathXL, My Math Lab, WebAssign, and others, focus primarily on practice/drill, having weak integration with the conceptual material, says Vahid. "This generation of students has become adept at solving exercises, but have little idea what they are actually doing. We instead integrate concepts and practice, so students learn better."

Their first zyBooks were on computing topics (Programming in C, C++, Java, Python, MATLAB; Discrete Mathematics; Digital Design; Embedded Systems; Computing Technology). The company is expanding the platform, adding zyBooks on math and other topics, and expects to have hundreds of thousands of users in the next two years. Their efforts to date have been supported by the National Science Foundation's SBIR program and a group of angel investors. Vahid and Bakshi are now actively raising their Series A funding.

For more information on zyBooks, visit www.zybooks.com or email press@zybooks.com.