

OPENSTAX



OpenStax is a nonprofit that provides free, openly licensed textbooks for high-enrollment introductory college courses and Advanced Placement courses. Founded in 2012 in the U.S.

www.openstaxcollege.org

Revenue model: grant funding, charging for custom services, charging for physical copies (textbook sales)

Interview date: December 16, 2015

Interviewee: David Harris, editor-in-chief

Profile written by Paul Stacey

OpenStax is an extension of a program called Connexions, which was started in 1999 by Dr. Richard Baraniuk, the Victor E. Cameron Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Frustrated by the limitations of traditional textbooks and courses, Dr. Baraniuk wanted to provide authors and learners a way to share and freely adapt educational materials such as courses, books, and reports. Today, Connexions (now called OpenStax CNX) is one of the world's best libraries of customizable educational materials, all licensed with Creative Commons and available to anyone, anywhere, anytime—for free.

In 2008, while in a senior leadership role at WebAssign and looking at ways to reduce the risk that came with relying on publishers, David Harris began investigating open educational resources (OER) and discovered Con-

nexions. A year and a half later, Connexions received a grant to help grow the use of OER so that it could meet the needs of students who couldn't afford textbooks. David came on board to spearhead this effort. Connexions became OpenStax CNX; the program to create open textbooks became OpenStax College, now simply called OpenStax.

David brought with him a deep understanding of the best practices of publishing along with where publishers have inefficiencies. In David's view, peer review and high standards for quality are critically important if you want to scale easily. Books have to have logical scope and sequence, they have to exist as a whole and not in pieces, and they have to be easy to find. The working hypothesis for the launch of OpenStax was to professionally produce a turnkey textbook by investing effort up front, with the expectation that this would lead to