

LUMEN LEARNING



Lumen Learning is a for-profit company helping educational institutions use open educational resources (OER). Founded in 2013 in the U.S.

lumenlearning.com

Revenue model: charging for custom services, grant funding

Interview date: December 21, 2015

Interviewees: David Wiley and Kim Thanos, cofounders

Profile written by Paul Stacey

Cofounded by open education visionary Dr. David Wiley and education-technology strategist Kim Thanos, Lumen Learning is dedicated to improving student success, bringing new ideas to pedagogy, and making education more affordable by facilitating adoption of open educational resources. In 2012, David and Kim partnered on a grant-funded project called the Kaleidoscope Open Course Initiative.¹ It involved a set of fully open general-education courses across eight colleges predominantly serving at-risk students, with goals to dramatically reduce textbook costs and collaborate to improve the courses to help students succeed. David and Kim exceeded those goals: the cost of the required textbooks, replaced with OER, decreased to zero dollars, and average student-success rates improved by 5 to 10 percent when compared with previous years.

After a second round of funding, a total of more than twenty-five institutions participated in and benefited from this project. It was career changing for David and Kim to see the impact this initiative had on low-income students. David and Kim sought further funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who asked them to define a plan to scale their work in a financially sustainable way. That is when they decided to create Lumen Learning.

David and Kim went back and forth on whether it should be a nonprofit or for-profit. A nonprofit would make it a more comfortable fit with the education sector but meant they'd be constantly fund-raising and seeking grants from philanthropies. Also, grants usually require money to be used in certain ways for specific deliverables. If you learn things along the way that change how you think the grant