

Elective Fees and Special Charges Requirements

The purpose of the elective fees/special charges form is to provide standardization across the University System of Ga. This form can also provide collaborative communication on campuses between all offices that may interact with elective fees/special charges.

BOR/USG policy 7.3.2.2 authorizes institution presidents to approve elective fees and special charges as outlined below; however,

- a. Any fee or special charge that is required to be paid by any standard subgroup of students based on grade level or previous credit hours earned shall undergo the same approval process as mandatory fees.
- b. Any elective fee or special charge that is required to be paid by all students in a specific degree program or in a specific course, with the exception of laboratory fees and supplemental course material fees shall be approved by the Board, but shall not require review by a student fee committee. (BoR Minutes, January 2010, February 2015)

Other Elective Fees and Special Charges

Other elective fees and special charges are defined as those fees and charges that are paid selectively by students. These fees and charges may include, but are not limited to:

1. Resident hall deposits;
2. Penalty charges;
3. Non-mandatory parking fees and parking fines;
4. Library fines;
5. Laboratory fees;
6. Post office box rentals; and
7. Supplemental course material fees to cover specific costs, such as art materials, course packets/kits, museum admissions, travel to off-campus learning sites, safety equipment, software/videos, and special equipment. (BoR Minutes, Jan. 2010; Feb. 2015)

Institutional presidents are authorized to establish and adjust these fees, as appropriate. Prior to implementation of such fees, institutions shall be required to report to the Chancellor any establishments and adjustments made thereto under procedures established by the USG chief fiscal officer. (BoR Minutes, Jan. 2010)

Note: Institutions must follow BOR policy but they can have their own more stringent policies as well.

Below is the **BPM 24.3.2** on Elective student fees for more detail.

24.3.2 Elective Student Fees

(Last Modified on December 28, 2016)

Elective fees, unlike mandatory fees, generally only apply selectively to students based on the purpose of the fee(s). The purpose of assessing an elective fee is to fund specific, unique costs that are the result of an action, election, or decision made by the student. Elective fees are not intended to supplement general educational activities inherent in the instruction of students. Nor are they a way to supplant state appropriations or tuition dollars. Expenditures of elective fee revenues should be aligned with the costs created by the action, election, or decision that prompted the assessment of the fee.

Section 7.3.2.2 of the BOR Policy Manual provides that institution presidents are authorized to approve elective fees. However, the Policy Manual provides the following exceptions to presidential authority to exclusively approve elective fees:

- “Any fee or special charge that is required to be paid by any standard subgroup of students based on grade level or previous credit hours earned shall undergo the same approval process as mandatory fees.” This means the fee must be reviewed and voted on by a student fee committee, be submitted with the level of documentation required of mandatory fees, and be approved by the Board of Regents annually. An example would be a fee charged to all freshman or all students with less than 90 credit hours earned; and
- “Any elective fee or special charge that is required to be paid by all students in a specific degree program or in a specific course, with the exception of laboratory fees and supplemental course material fees shall be approved by the Board, but shall not require review by a student fee committee.” Fees falling under this exception to presidential authority are discussed in the Other Course/Degree Program Fees section below.

Some common types of elective fees are supplemental material course fees. Elective fees and special charges are reviewed on an annual basis to determine use, effectiveness and appropriateness for continuation.

Supplemental Course Material Fees

As defined in Policy 7.3.2.2, supplemental course material fees are assessed “to cover specific costs, such as art materials, course packets/kits, museum admissions, travel to off-campus learning sites, safety equipment, software/videos, and special equipment.” Another common example is the cost of a professional examination/certification, required as a part of the class, and procured by the institution under a group purchase. These fees should be essentially pass-through, assessed with a very strict focus, in a limited manner, and should have the following features:

- The material or service is integral to the course in order for each student to reach the intended learning objectives.
- The student can easily identify the direct benefit he or she is receiving from the fee.
- The fee rate is equivalent to or lower than what the student would expect to pay for the material or service if purchasing independently at market price.
- Upon an in-depth review of the fee, the revenue received from the fee would directly align with the institution’s expenditures on the material or service provided.

In very limited cases, these fees may be used to fund the provision of services, such as tutoring. However, in keeping with the guidance above, the tutoring sessions should be considered an integral or required component of the class, the tutoring services should be obtained for the specific course for which the fee is assessed, and the payment to the tutor should align with the fee revenue. Supplemental course material fees may not be assessed for purposes of general student support services, textbooks, course development, salaries, travel or other intangible costs. Supplemental course material fees must be accounted for as Other General Funds (Fund 10600 for GeorgiaFirst institutions).

Laboratory Fees

Students in a course with a laboratory component, or those designated as a stand-alone laboratory course, will actively use equipment and materials in a direct manner to enhance practical skills or understanding of a concept. Labs are most typically a component of courses in a natural or physical science, but may also include design, the arts, etc. Laboratory fees may be assessed in these courses to cover the cost of supplies, materials, and services utilized by students in a lab. The lab must be specific to a course and attendance required as a part of the course. Lab fees for general learning centers maintained to provide optional tutoring or extra practice are not allowable.

Lab fees are similar to supplemental course material fees, in that they are used to fund the purchase of specific provisions for student use in the lab. Due to the nature of a lab environment, there are often times that the materials and supplies consumed are reusable. Because of this, it is not a requirement of lab fees that the cost to the student match exactly the material that the student receives. An example of this is a chemistry lab, where equipment can be reused (if not damaged) and chemicals are purchased in bulk. Institutions are required to analyze expenditure patterns for laboratory costs and set the lab fee rate equal to the revenue needed to cover these expenditures.

Lab fees may be used for student lab assistants, but may only cover the time spent attending to that specific lab. They are not intended to fund instructor or staff salaries, capital equipment, or staffing of a tutoring facility or general learning center, which should be funded through general operating budgets. Lab fees must be accounted for as Other General Funds (Fund 10600 for GeorgiaFirst institutions).

Other Course/Degree Program Fees

Based on the guidance in this BPM section, institutions will need to make the determination of whether a fee charged to all students as a condition of enrollment in the course is a lab or supplemental course material fee. If it does not meet one of those two definitions, in keeping with Policy 7.3.2.2, it must be approved by the Board of Regents. These types of fees will be approved on a limited basis, must still be tied to a specific and necessary cost, and will not be approved as a general fund supplement or supplantation.

Also required by Policy 7.3.2.2 is the annual approval of the BOR for all fees assessed to students in a specific degree program. This policy includes fees assessed every semester to all students in a specific degree program. The policy also includes fees assessed at least once to each student in a degree program.

Course fees requiring approval and degree program fees will be submitted with documentation to the Office of Strategy & Fiscal Affairs for review according to the timeline published in the USG Budget Calendar. Course and degree program fees must be accounted for as Other General Funds (Fund 10600 for GeorgiaFirst institutions).

Other Miscellaneous Fees

There are numerous other miscellaneous fees that institutions may charge depending on needs and the type of services provided. Some examples would be application fees, graduation fees, and transcript fees. In general, miscellaneous fees are charged for specific purposes and should be used to support the services charged. For example, graduation fees should be used to support activities related to graduation, such as commencement ceremonies and the mailing of diplomas. Likewise, parking fines should support the provision of parking services. Other miscellaneous fees should be accounted for in the fund in which expenditures related to the specific activities that trigger the fee occur.
