

Background for June 2020 discussion about a short term “temporary exception protocol” for ancillary fee guidelines for Fall 2020

History and purpose of the guidelines

University students have always had to buy textbooks in addition to paying tuition, and sometimes to buy supplies for lab or art studio courses. It has also traditionally been part of an instructor’s job to design and develop the means to assess student learning. In the past 20 years or so an increasing variety of electronic learning resources came to market, some of which blur the line between textbooks and learning resources use for assessments by bundling them together. These learning resources can add significant value to a course, particularly for assessment purposes.

In 2013, the Ontario Government, which regulates both tuition and non-tuition fees in Ontario, gave universities responsibility for developing policies outlining which learning resources students could be required to purchase for courses, and what sorts of assessments they could be used for.

The current Waterloo guidelines were the result of a process that involved significant consultation with student leadership at the time:

- The maximum fee for a learning resource that will be used for assessment is (normally) \$50/course
- If the resource costs more than \$50 and is used anyway, students must be provided with a no-cost alternative
- The normal maximum value of assessments that can rely on student-purchased electronic resources is 20%. With permission of the Dean this limit can rise to 35%.

Why we need to do something now

Pre-COVID-19, we intended to revisit the guidelines later in 2020 to address the following concerns:

- *Revise text for clarity* - Some pieces of the guidelines are commonly misunderstood
- *Revisit current limits* - Are they still reasonable and appropriate, or should Waterloo follow the path of other Ontario schools that have increased them?
- *Check accuracy* - Some of the provisions currently listed may be out-of-date; for instance, will publishers sell an electronic textbook separate from learning/assessment resources?

Changes imposed by COVID-19 (e.g. the move to 100% remote delivery in Spring 2020) have introduced additional concerns that warrant urgent action:

- Some longstanding courses have relied on tools that cost more than \$50 and have developed ways of providing no-fee or lower cost alternatives that are not feasible in the current environment. For example,

Language labs – For in-person language courses, students often complete assessments using electronic tools that they can purchase. The no cost alternative is to complete them at a language lab. The language labs are closed for Spring Term and may still be closed in the Fall.

Laboratory- or studio-based courses – Many courses offer(ed) hands-on learning activities within laboratory (or studio) settings. For the Fall term, we are exploring digital options to

replace the lab/studio setting, which would enable students to complete their program more quickly than they would if they have to wait until these courses can be offered on campus.

What we can do about it

Most of the resources we know instructors are considering would be made eligible if we simply raised the cap to \$100/course; however, doing so may prompt vendors to raise the price on products, so we propose postponing discussion of an across the board increase in the cap until later in the year.

For now, we will do something more specifically focused on the issues we know about. The existing \$50 cap/20% of grade caps remain, as does the possibility for the Dean (or delegate) to grant an exception on the grade cap up to 35%. We also enact the following

Temporary Covid-19 Learning Resources Guidelines Exception Protocol:

1. Deans, or Associate Deans Undergrad/Grad (as appropriate, acting as delegates of the Dean) may grant permission for instructors to require students to purchase learning resources that cost \$50-100/course, **provided one of the following conditions applies**
 - a. Restrictions in place because of the Covid-19 pandemic have made a reasonable no- or lower fee alternative unfeasible.
 - b. The resource makes it possible to offer an online version of a (e.g., lab- or studio-based) course that would normally depend on resources located on campus, there are no alternatives that would result in a course of similar quality, and offering the course online now will enable students to progress in one or more academic programs.
2. Instructors may submit a request to the Associate Vice President, Academic to make a case for the following:
 - To use learning resources that would cost more than \$100/course
 - To use learning resources to assess more than 35% of the final course mark

In making a decision about a request, the AVPA may consult with representatives of WUSA or the GSA, as appropriate.