



Academic Excellence Fee Policy

Office of Budget and Finance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic Excellence Fees (“AEFs”) provide critical resources and financial support to the unique needs of specific college graduate programs and degrees at the City University of New York (“CUNY”). In general, the AEFs paid by graduate students enhance the student experience both in and out of the classroom including the teaching and advising environment for these students. The revenue from the fees helps increase the quality of the program offerings and adds value to the students’ graduate experiences in order to launch them into promising careers. The intent of these fees is primarily to support students that are currently enrolled in the supported program/degrees, and therefore the revenue from these fees should be used during the fiscal year that they were collected. However, it is also acceptable to use a portion of the fees for strategic investments for the benefit of current and future students.

AEF can only be requested and will only be considered for graduate programs. All college requests for AEFs must be approved first by University Management and then by the University Board of Trustees.

2. PURPOSE

This policy articulates the process for establishing AEFs and the requirements for usage and reporting.

3. SCOPE

Unless otherwise specified, these guidelines apply to all Colleges, as that term is defined below.

4. DEFINITIONS

As used in this guideline:

“College” means a constituent unit of the University, including without limitation senior and community colleges, graduate and professional schools, Macaulay Honors College and the central office as well as fund groups and organizations that are not legally separate from the University (e.g., the School of Professional Studies and the Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy).

“CUNY” and “University” mean The City University of New York.

5. USE OF FEES

While colleges should specify the type of activities their AEFs intend to support in their request for approval, fees should pay for those supplementary activities and costs that require the need for additional revenues generated from the academic excellence fee. Colleges need to clearly indicate why these additional expenses are required and demonstrate how they improve the outcomes for students in the program. Eligible expenses can include enhanced teaching and learning; the temporary employment of students in mentored and collaborative research with faculty; digital technology for teaching and learning; subscriptions to online software, tools, library resources and databases specific to the program; maintenance of equipment and facilities specific to the program, such as simulation labs; program expenses necessary to achieve or maintain program accreditation; conference attendance by students; student recruitment; and student support services such as tutoring, mentoring, career services, internships, and academic advising.

Since AEF fees are considered tax levy funds, when using these fees, colleges must also comply with the relevant and applicable policies and procedures related to spending tax levy funds.

6. PROCESS FOR REQUESTING AND EVALUATING FEES

The Chief Academic and Chief Financial Officers at the colleges must review and approve new AEF requests and are required to consult with elected faculty and student government representatives on any proposed new, or changes to existing, fees. The college is responsible for fully vetting new academic excellence fee requests prior to submission to University Management for review. The factors the colleges should use to evaluate requests include the fee amount (which should be commensurate with planned expenditures), the justification for the fee and the programmatic needs funded by the fees.

Valid AEF justifications include program cost, the potential outcomes/marketability for students and program quality as evidenced by rankings or other metrics. Colleges are required to provide the dates for the consultation meetings with elected student and faculty leaders, as well as with the students and faculty in the program/degree/school that is affected. In addition, colleges must also provide a description of the competitive environment for the degree/program, identifying the competitors and how they compare in terms of both quality and price with the CUNY college. The amount of the fee and the projected revenue that the AEF will generate must be in the proposal along with how the funds will support and enhance the programmatic needs of the degree.

Once documentation containing the above is submitted, University Management evaluates the AEF proposals based on the components submitted --- how the funds will support the academic and programmatic needs of the students as well as the benefits for enhancing the overall quality of the program. The University Management review team consists of representatives from the Office of Budget and Finance, the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs. This team will make recommendations to the Chancellor, or his or her designee, who will make a determination whether to submit the proposal to the Board of Trustees.

7. CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEE REVIEW AND APPROVAL

After approval by the University Management, the AEF proposal is brought to the Board of Trustees' Committee on Fiscal Affairs for consideration. If the proposal is approved by the Fiscal Affairs Committee, the full Board of Trustees votes on the AEF for final approval and implementation via a Board Resolution. Future changes to any fees must be approved by the Fiscal Affairs Committee and the full Board of Trustees.

8. ACCOUNTING AND FISCAL REPORTING

The University Office of Budget and Finance established coding in the University's enterprise resource planning system, that helps identify both the revenues and expenses for AEFs by academic program and by college. Colleges are required to use this coding for all AEF-related expenses in order to standardize the recording of these AEF supported expenditures.

Colleges are responsible for ensuring that coding of expenses is correct for reporting purposes. It is recommended that expenses for this funding source are analyzed regularly against expectations.

The University Budget Office is responsible for assembling the Quarterly Financial Report, which includes a section on the year-to-date revenues and expenses of all college AEFs. Colleges have the opportunity to review and

provide feedback on the reports prior to being finalized. Quarterly Financial Reports are presented to the Board of Trustees Fiscal Affairs Committee and shared with University and college leadership.

Colleges are required to expend 100% of the revenue in the year in which it is collected so that the students paying the fee receive its benefits. Any college that ends the fiscal year with an unspent AEF balance or has a planned strategic investment related to the AEF, is required to provide an explanation to the Board of Trustees Fiscal Affairs Committee through the Office of Budget and Finance. If there are unsubstantiated unspent balances in a second consecutive year, the fee will be eliminated.

9. AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT

The college's use of the AEF will be subject to a period audit by the Office of Internal Audit and Management Services. The objective of this audit will be to determine if the fees were used for their intended purposes as described by the approved Board resolution for the particular fee and in the first paragraph of Section 5: Use of Fees. The result of the audit will be presented to the Board of Trustees Committees on Fiscal Affairs and Audit.

For each excellence fee, campuses are required to conduct ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the fee investments in enhancing student experience, learning and success, including retention and graduation rates and program outcomes such as career placement, and pass rates on professional examinations. Assessments should demonstrate how faculty and students are engaged in ongoing planning and budgeting of fee investments, informed by the results of assessment.

Campuses shall provide a summary report of the assessment findings every 5 (five) years to the Board of Trustees Committee on Fiscal Affairs. This assessment summary should also be widely shared within the campus community.

10. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMENDMENTS

Except for modifications, supplements or updates necessitated by changes in law, regulations, or administrative requirements; or for consistency with other University policies, the CUNY Board of Trustees must approve any proposed amendments to this Policy. The University Office of Budget and Finance will be responsible for the periodic review of this Policy, as well as ensuring that all appropriate parties are informed of them.

11. EFFECTIVE DATE

This policy is effective immediately.