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| Policy Category:        | General                                                                             |
| Policy Number:          | 1.18.2024.U                                                                         |
| Policy Name:            | Digital Learning Resources and Field Trips                                          |
| Responsible Department: | Provost and Vice-President, Academic                                                |
| Approval Date:          | November 2023                                                                       |
| Approval Authority:     | Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Vice-President, Finance and Administration |
| Last Updated:           | August 2020                                                                         |
| Review Date:            | 2028                                                                                |

### **Policy Statement**

Nipissing University respects the authority of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) to regulate fees that universities charge to students. Fees charged in addition to tuition are governed through the Ministry's ancillary fee protocol to ensure that students are treated fairly and given assurances that additional costs for digital learning resources and field trips have been reviewed and weighed against alternative pedagogical choices.

Nipissing University aims to strike an appropriate balance between the desires to incorporate technology enabled learning and the expense that these resources represent to students. Mindful of the cost of education, instructors should endeavor to keep the total costs of all learning resources used in any course at a level that students can reasonably afford.

### **Reason for Policy**

In December 2013, MCU revised their Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines for Publicly-Assisted Universities to introduce a compulsory non-tuition-related ancillary fee "levied to cover the costs of items which are not normally paid for out of operating or capital revenue" and required Ontario universities to adopt policies to ensure alignment with the Guidelines.

In 2019, MCU revised their Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines. The revisions to the policy reflect the University's ongoing commitment to align with the Guidelines.

### **Policy Applies to**

- All academic units of the university and applies to all courses offered for credit towards degree programs in any delivery mode (e.g. in-person, online, hybrid, asynchronous, etc.)

### **Who Should Read this Policy**

- Deans, directors, and division heads
- All faculty and teaching support staff

### **Contacts**

- Dean, EPS
- Dean, A&S

## Definitions

**Digital Learning Resource (DLRs)** refers to digital resources such as applications (apps), software, programs, or websites that engage students in learning activities and support students' learning goals.

**Field Trip:** an event or activity where students leave the university grounds for the purposes of curriculum-related study (part of the classroom experience), or outdoor education. These trips range from a few hours during the school day to extended overnights and even out of province or country.

## The Policy

### 1. Digital Learning Resources

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution that Digital Learning Resources make to the quality of teaching and learning, including support for adaptive learning and formative assessment.

1.1. Instructors may choose to use physical and/or digital textbooks that have bundled software or online access to additional learning resources used in assessment, as a supplement to instruction and/or assessment.

### 2. Assessment instruments within Digital Learning Resources

2.1. MCU considers the payment of tuition as supporting the cost of instruction and assessment. Where a course or program relies substantially on instruction or assessments that are included with a learning resource, such as an online textbook, the following conditions apply:

2.1.1. When DLRs support the learning objectives of the course, instructors may use learning resources provided by third-party vendors for assessments (such as simulations, online quizzes and other interactive assignments) provided that:

- a. the functionality is not reasonably available through University-supported tools (e.g., the learning management system, currently Blackboard Ultra);
- b. the cost of these resources to a student is no more than \$100 in total, before taxes, for a single term three-credit course, and assessments that require use of these resources constitute 20% or less of the final grade in the course.
- c. Instructors clearly communicate details concerning the use of third-party digital resources for assessment in their course outlines.

#### 2.1.2. Further Clarification

- a. The cost limit applies only to resources that each student in the course must purchase in order to complete assignments, tests, quizzes, exams, or other graded assessments (i.e., students are not able to share or borrow or otherwise obtain access to the resource).

**The cost limit does not apply to required textbooks.** When instructors include a textbook, digital or paper-based, as required in the course syllabus, it is understood that it is access to the material *within* the textbook that is required. Students can choose to access this content through a variety of means, including purchasing older editions (when content has not changed materially) or alternative texts, sharing a text with a classmate, or accessing copies through the library (when available).

- b. If the cost of DLRs required for a course exceeds \$100, or the total grade value of assessments that rely on the DLRs exceeds 20%, the instructor must provide students with a no-fee assessment alternative that gives students an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. For example, this can take the form of alternative assignments, tests or quizzes (which could be online, but at no cost to students), or access to the DLRs used for assessment through on-campus computer labs at no cost to students.
- c. It is increasingly common that (print or digital) textbooks come bundled with learning resources that instructors can choose to use in assessment. The cost of this bundle is often less than the costs of the textbook and the extra resources purchased separately. Instructors can list such a bundle as a “required text” provided that the

resource to be used for assessment is available to students separately and the cost of the assessment portion of the bundle is no more than the stated limit. If the learning resources are not available separately, the entire bundle should be within the cost limit of \$100 and the total value of the assessment being no more than the stated limit.

- d. If it is generally expected that a required learning resource will again be required in a subsequent course, the cost of this learning resource can be averaged over the courses, subject to the Dean's approval. For example, if Subject 101 and Subject 102 are both required to be completed in a given program and the same DLRs are required in both courses, and no additional resources are required for Subject 102, the cost limit would in effect be \$200 for Subject 101. [N.B. Some DLRs time limit access to the resource. If a DLR is expected to be available for use over time in multiple courses, the instructor(s) should document that this is practically possible given the terms and conditions of use of the resource.]
- e. These guidelines do not apply to physical learning resources that become the property of the student and are retained beyond the completion of the course, and the dollar limit described above does not include these costs. Examples include:
- a student response device, such as a clicker;
  - learning resources such as art supplies, nursing kits, and laboratory equipment (e.g., lab coats, goggles).

## 2.2. Exceptions to 2.1.1

- 2.2.1. The Dean may grant exceptions under any of the following provisions. When such an exception to these guidelines is granted, instructors will note in the course syllabus and provide a rationale. When the exception is to the cost limit, a suitable no-cost option, as described above, must be available to students.
- 2.2.2. Exceptions to the cost and grade limit can be made when DLRs (such as software) are an integral part of the content of the course (e.g., purchasing programming tool X in a course on "Programming in X"). Such exceptions must be approved by the Dean of the Faculty (or delegate, i.e., at the Dean's discretion, an Associate Dean or the Chair/Director).
- 2.2.3. Exceptions to the percentage limit can be made when the learning resource is a tool that allows students to complete assessments, but the assessment questions or tasks are generated by the instructor (or by a group of Nipissing University instructors), rather than the instructor employing assessments designed outside of the institution, (e.g., questions selected from an exam bank provided by a third party). For instance, Mobius is a tool often used this way. Such exceptions must be approved by the Dean of the Faculty (or their delegate).
- 2.2.4. Deans (or their delegate) may grant other exceptions to these guidelines provided that:
- The cost of the learning resource or resources is less than \$200
  - The percentage of graded work that requires access to those resources is no more than 35%
  - The instructor has presented a compelling rationale that there is no lower-cost alternative resource that would allow the course in question to be delivered in a way that provides similar learning opportunities for students
- 2.2.5. A list of all such exceptions granted should be provided by the Deans (or delegates) to the PVPA annually, to facilitate ongoing monitoring of the need to update these guidelines.
- 2.2.6. All exceptions must be sought and granted at least three weeks in advance of the start date of a course.**

## 2.3. DLRs as Assessment Platforms

- 2.3.1. Instructors using any assessment software, other than the university's approved learning management system (i.e., Blackboard) cannot view these assessments as secure online examinations. Rather, third-party assessment software must be considered as a take home exam. Per the [Policy on Final Examinations](#), instructors are responsible for scheduling the due date for any take home exam. If the take home exam is a final exam, the due date must fall within the scheduled final exam period. It is the instructor's responsibility to work with Student

Accessibility Services to ensure students' testing accommodations are met. It is also the instructor's responsibility to manage any requests from students to schedule an alternate due date, if they are unable to meet the deadline due to conflicts, illness, or other extenuating circumstances.

2.4. Other

- 2.4.1. Programs may require third-party software systems and tools to enhance programming and prepare students for Provincial and National licensure examinations. These costs, where possible, will be applied over a multi-year horizon and are not capped when required by external licensure bodies.

3. Field Trips

- 3.1. Students may be charged a compulsory ancillary fee for a field trip to any location within the province of Ontario, and which is **required** for their program of study.
- 3.1.1. Field trip fees for required courses must cover only the reasonable, direct costs of travel and accommodation for students on required field trips.
- 3.1.2. Field trip fees for required courses are not to cover salaries, benefits or travel and accommodation for faculty.
- 3.1.3. It is prohibited to charge a tuition-related activity fee for required field trips.
- 3.1.4. Students cannot be charged compulsory ancillary fees for any component of an out-of-province compulsory field trip in a required course.
- 3.2. Students may be charged fees for **optional**, credit-earning field trips both within and outside the province of Ontario.
- 3.2.1. Field trip fees for optional courses may cover the reasonable, direct costs of travel and accommodation for students; and/or fees for materials or services required for the field trip for which the university collects this fee through an agreement with a vendor and does not produce net revenue.
- 3.2.2. Field trip fees charged to students for optional courses can contribute to offsetting the travel and accommodation costs of instructors or teaching assistants participating in the field trip but not their salaries and benefits. Any fees charged to students which offset instructor or teaching assistant costs must be approved by the Dean of the Faculty. Instructors are encouraged to seek financial assistance from their department or faculty in helping lower students' costs, where possible, and to make trip costing information readily available to students.
- 3.3. Instructors shall indicate as early as possible (e.g., in the course syllabus made available at the start of the term, and certainly no later than the course registration deadline) whether additional fees are associated with their courses, and the fee amount.
- 3.4. Field trips out of province and out of country may require students to incur the cost of vaccination, travel insurance, expedited return, documentation, etc. All costs should be made legible to students in advance of registration.

**Forms and Tools**

"Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines Publicly-Assisted Universities. Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. 2019-20 and 2020-21."

<https://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/mtcu-university-tuition-framework-guidelines-mar2019-en.pdf>

**Name of Document:** Digital Learning Resources and Field Trips Policy <URL to be provided, when proliferated.>