

Course Catalog Designators: Administrative Guide

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Overview

As of Fall 2018, University System of Georgia (USG) institutions are required to designate sections of courses where course materials exclusively consist of no-cost (open or free textbooks) or low-cost course materials to students at the point of registration. In Banner, USG institutions are using 2 designations for courses with:

- No-cost materials: \$0 required costs
- Low-cost materials: \$40 or under required costs

Included in the cost caps are textbooks and other text-based materials, workbooks, lab manuals, online homework platforms, and codes or publisher-provided curricular materials for students.

Excluded from the cost caps are equipment (such as art supplies, calculators, or physical lab materials) and fees (such as for test proctoring or labs).

These designations use the following codes in Banner:

- ZNCM: No-cost materials: \$0 required costs
- ZLCM: Low-cost materials: \$40 or under required costs

Definition: No-cost Designator

The No-cost Designator is for use with courses that exclusively use course materials that are free of charge to students. These materials may include open educational resources (OER), institutionally licensed campus library materials that all students enrolled in the course have access to use, and other materials that require no additional cost to students.

Open educational resources (OER) are high-quality teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license, such as a Creative Commons license, that permits their free use and repurposing by others, and may include other resources that are legally available and free of cost to students.

OER include, but are not limited to: full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, faculty-created content, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

Definition: Low-cost Designator

The Low-cost designator is for use with courses that require course materials which cost students a total of \$40 or less per course.

Guidelines

Optional costs should not be included in your calculation.

For example: you provide students with a link to a free, online version of your materials but give them the option to purchase materials in print or point them to an optional homework help platform. The cost of the optional materials should not be included in your calculation. However, if the print version or homework platform is required in your class, you should include that cost in your calculation.

Only identify courses that meet these cost-cap requirements (\$0 or \$40 or under).

By default, classes that do not meet one of these two cost caps will not be designated. Students will have the ability to search for courses that meet one of these two material cost caps in the schedule.

If a resource is used across multiple courses in a sequence, *do not* base your calculation on the cost divided by those courses.

For example, a text that costs \$120 that is required for three sequenced courses *does not* meet the \$40 or under label requirement. Not all students take all courses in a series, students may take courses over time and may have to pay for edition changes, and students would have to pay the full cost up-front and could not budget for three even payments.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the cost cap for low-cost materials \$40?

ALG set the \$40 cost cap by looking at peer institutions implementing course designators, but factors such as wages and inflation will be taken into account when looking at future adjustments. The current minimum wage for most employees in Georgia is [the federal rate of \\$7.25 for FLSA-qualifying employees](#), although the state minimum wage is [\\$5.15 for a small percentage of non-qualifying employees](#). Not including paycheck deductions such as taxes, most students would need to work six hours in one minimum-wage job to purchase \$40 in required materials for a course.

Do these designators infringe on the academic freedom that faculty instructors have in order to choose what materials they use in the classroom?

No-cost and Low-cost designators are a method of providing awareness and transparency to students when a course is using no-cost or low-cost materials. ALG hopes that this increased

visibility will lead some faculty to become more aware of no-cost and low-cost options, such as OER. For interested faculty, ALG also offers financial grants to assist in the transition from commercial resources to no- and low-cost options. However, this is in no way a requirement, and faculty should continue to select the materials that best work for them and their students, in coordination with their department.

What cost should I use? What if materials are less expensive online, but the bookstore price is over \$40?

To calculate your text-related costs for these designations, use the cost of new materials in your campus bookstore. While materials may be less expensive elsewhere, students using financial aid often must purchase materials from the bookstore, and while used prices might be lower, used purchasing can be complicated by limited supplies and edition changes. Contact your campus bookstore for help with bookstore pricing.

Do textbook rentals count as a low-cost option?

Rentals that are \$40 or under can count as a low-cost option for required materials, so long as this provides equal access to required materials for the duration of the course. When considering rentals as a low-cost option, be sure to make students aware of the option, along with the time period the rental covers and any late penalties or additional costs that rentals may incur. If your course is one where students frequently need to re-take the course, consider the extra costs these students may have by renting the same text twice when choosing this option.

What if my text is available as an eBook through the library?

If your required text is available as a free-to-students eBook through the library, as long as you do not require students to purchase the printed text in your class, your course can qualify for the \$0 cost designation. Students may assume they must purchase the printed text if you mark a library-provided textbook as required. Consider listing the text as “optional” on the campus bookstore’s site and messaging students about their choices before the term begins.

If you are interested in the eBooks your library has to offer, please consult with a librarian at your institution’s library. The library can check as to whether or not an eBook’s licensing allows for the type of unlimited concurrent use for students that required course materials would need.

What if the library has a print copy of the text?

These designators are largely intended to indicate free and open *online* access to materials, but there are a few scenarios where print resources at the library may meet the no-cost criteria. Err on the side of caution when designating a course with only physical copies of a text at the

library. Will all students need to check out the material at the same time? If so, the library would need to have enough copies on hand to meet that need in order for the book to be considered no-cost to students. If the book will simply be referred to occasionally, or if only a small portion is required (and could therefore reasonably be photocopied), then perhaps one or two copies on reserve at the library will suffice. Please contact your local librarian to determine whether access to materials through the library – whether print or electronic – will work for your class.

What if I do not require any texts or commercial materials for my class?

Your course *can* qualify for the \$0 designation if no commercial materials or texts are required. For the purposes of these cost designations, it does not matter if you are using instructor-created materials, open educational resources, activities, slides, websites, or library materials. Apply this question: does my course have any textbook or publisher-related costs? If the answer is no, the course meets the no-cost designation. If the answer is yes, but \$40 or less, the course meets the low-cost designation.

What if I do not require the materials, but I strongly recommend them?

If the materials you are strongly recommending for your course are crucial enough for student success that avoiding the purchase of them would mean a significant decrease in performance for a student, these materials should be considered as required. For example, if you are strongly recommending a mathematics homework platform access code, and this platform is the only way to submit homework for the course, the platform should be considered required.

What if someone designated their course as having no-cost materials, but then the instructor for this section changed?

Please verify the use of no-cost materials with the new instructor and change this designator as soon as possible if needed. If the designator changes, please contact the students who have already registered for this course about the change, preferably with information about the new required materials.

What if I am unsure about the cost of my materials, or I'm not sure which textbook I will use?

Consult your bookstore for guidance. If you are still unsure about whether your course meets one of the two designations at the registration deadline, *do not* ask your schedule-builder to designate your course as no-cost or low-cost materials.

I am entering all sections of one course within the catalog. What if I do not know which textbooks these instructors will use?

If possible, contact the instructors and verify which textbooks will be used. If this is not possible, err on the side of caution when marking course designators – unless you are sure that the course will have no-cost or low-cost required materials, do not mark the course as ZNCM or ZLCM. While ideally all information will be as accurate as possible, we would prefer that students be pleasantly surprised that they don't have to purchase costly materials, rather than have them register with the expectation that they will be in a course with no- or low-cost materials and then discover that is not the case.

What should I be doing?

- Administration
 - Raise awareness regarding this change within your institution, both for faculty reporting designations and for students registering for Fall 2018 courses through effective outreach channels.
- Faculty
 - If your course meets one of the 2 designations, either contact the person who enters scheduling information for your department into Banner to notify them, or wait for your department chair to ask for this information. If your course does not meet one of these designations, you do not need to change anything.
- Department Chairs and Deans
 - Work with your faculty and staff to develop processes to collect this information from faculty each term. Designate roles and responsibilities in this information collection process. Suggestions include using a shared form or spreadsheet to allow faculty to input their own information, therefore reducing the workload for all involved.
- Schedule Entry Assistants and Staff
 - Work with your faculty and chairs to develop processes to collect this information from faculty each term. Designate roles and responsibilities in this information collection process. Suggestions include using a shared form or spreadsheet to allow faculty to input their own information, therefore reducing the workload for all involved.

While we ask that you help to facilitate these processes to collect this information, it is the responsibility of the faculty to communicate these designations by the time the classes are to be built in Banner (or when registration begins, at the latest).

We hope you find this information helpful for your planning and implementation of required course material no-cost and low-cost designation codes.

References

“Cost Designators for Required Materials in USG Course Schedules” is provided under a [CC-BY 4.0 License](#).

Attribution to the Oregon Guidelines Document:

[“Designation FAQ,” Portland Community College, CC-BY 4.0.](#)