Frequently Asked Questions
Business Expense Policy
Controller’s Office, UMass Boston
November 10, 2011

1. Does “all funds” include grants?

Yes. According to the Board of Trustees policy, “All funds, regardless of the source or the manner in which they are acquired, are considered to be University Funds.”

2. The policy seems reasonable, but the approval process seems time-consuming and sometimes confusing.

The policy requires one pre-approval: food and beverage expenses greater than $1,000 must be pre-approved by the appropriate dean, vice provost, or vice chancellor. While we understand that this practice may involve some inconvenience, we believe that it will ultimately save time by eliminating issues that might otherwise arise when requests for payment are made. The pre-approval can be done with an email that is attached to the Business & Entertainment Expense Authorization Form. All other accounts-payable procedures were updated recently with FY10-CON-004 Vendor Payment Policy & Procedure. To assist departments, we have created the Business Expense Policy Approvals at a Glance, which is on the Controller’s website.

3. Does the policy allow payment for light refreshments during weekly research seminars with off-campus guest speakers and students?

Yes. However, please consider whether refreshments are necessary every week for a successful seminar and whether serving them reflects sound, economical management with limited public resources.

4. What if a department has its own faculty awards for outstanding contributions, such as $500 add comp or supply funds?

No university funds should be used for gifts to employees other than those provided through recognition programs authorized by the Human Resources Office. Please contact that office to discuss forms of employee recognition, including the use of add comp or supply funds.

5. The policy doesn’t seem to have much of a research context. What about other collaborative research meetings that do not involve external sponsors or even may not be funded externally yet?

We have modified the wording in “Food and Beverage Provided at University Functions.” This policy applies regardless of the type or content of the meeting, and regardless of source of funds. It will permit using university funds to pay for light refreshments at “collaborative research meetings,” when those meetings deal with university business and “when participants are from more than one department, or
when at least one participant is from off campus, or when the meeting is scheduled to accommodate maximum faculty and staff attendance.” External funds may have additional restrictions.

6. Can I continue to use university funds for lunch at department group faculty meetings?

The use of university funds is permitted if you can document that meetings are held during meal times in order to accommodate an extended agenda or that participants could not meet during regular business hours. Meals served more than once a month to the same group of participants requires a pre-approval.

7. Can I continue to use university funds to take a faculty member to lunch for mentoring or business purposes?

No. Using university funds for one-on-one business meals is prohibited by the University Board of Trustees policy when the meals are shared by two employees of the university.

8. How do one-on-one business meals work when two employees are on UMass Boston business travel?

When two employees are traveling on UMass Boston business, they may be reimbursed as usual, according to the travel policy set forth in FY09-CON-002 Travel Policy and Procedure.

9. Can I continue to use university funds for refreshments at departmental faculty/staff meetings? And can I continue to use university funds for refreshments for degree program meetings when attended by faculty from more than one department?

Thank you for these questions. We have modified the policy, which now reads: “Light refreshments (coffee, soda, and other non-alcoholic beverages, and pastries, fruit, snacks, and similar foods) may be paid for when participants are from more than one department, or when at least one participant is from off campus, or when the meeting is scheduled to accommodate maximum faculty and staff attendance.”

10. Can I continue to use university funds for employee transitions?

No. These are considered occasions of a personal nature.

11. Can I continue to use university funds for employee retirements?

Yes. For an employee retirement gathering, light refreshments and non-alcoholic beverages may be purchased for a modest sum commensurate with the nature of the event and the employee’s contribution to the university, but in no case greater than $1,000.

12. Can I continue to use university funds for student graduations?
University funds may be used for formal individual college ceremonies that are held in conjunction with the university graduation, or program graduations. For such events, food and non-alcoholic beverage expenses in excess of $1,000 require documented pre-approval by a dean, vice provost, or vice chancellor, as appropriate.

13. Does this policy apply to scheduled programs for students?

Yes. The definition of university functions includes “various student events held in conjunction with student activities.” When food and beverages are served, pre-approval is required from the dean, vice provost, or vice chancellor for expenses greater than $1,000. Expenses must be reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances and moderate and in good taste.

14. Are holiday parties allowed?

Yes, as long as no university funds are used.

15. The summer timing of this policy does not seem ideal for faculty input.

We agree that the timing has not been ideal for everyone who might want to comment. The policy has circulated in draft form since December 2010, first among the Executive Leadership Team and Finance and Administration Advisory Group and then on July 7th to these groups plus directors, department heads, chairpersons, principal investigators, finance users, time approvers and time keepers. We have carefully considered all comments to date and are now seeking additional input. To make wide participation easier we are extending the comment period to October 1, 2011. The final policy will take effect December 1, 2011.