Account String Instructions
What number should I use to charge an expense?

When you spend money at Lawrence, you must enter an account string—the series of numbers that tells the Finance office where to charge the expense. Whether submitting an expense reimbursement form, completing your corporate credit card report, or writing an account number on an invoice for payment, it is important to know the correct account string.

Terminology

The account string is sometimes also called the GL code or FOAPAL:

    GL = general ledger, meaning the accounts of the university
    FOAPAL = acronym for Fund, Org, Account, Program, Activity, Location
        note that Location codes are primarily used only by Facilities

What do the numbers mean?

Most account strings have three important pieces. You need to know <u>all three</u>. Some strings also have a fourth component that you need.

<div align="center">

100001 – 1234 – 56 – 70123 – 456
FUND – ORG – program – ACCOUNT - ACTIVITY

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FUND – the 6-digit FUND code tells us whether this is an operating budget item or is being charged to some special, non-operating budget fund. **100001 means the expense is being charged to the operating budget.** That is the most common. External grants, start-up or professional development funds, Viking Bench, and other types of "special" funds in separate buckets from the operating budget will all have different 6-digit FUND codes.

ORG – the 4-digit ORG code can be thought of as your department code. Academic departments, administrative departments, athletics teams, etc each have their own ORG code.

ACCOUNT – the five-digit ACCOUNT code describes the budget "line item" or category of the expense or revenue item. For instance: Books & Periodicals (70163); Mileage (70213); Seminars/Conference Fees (70211); General Office Supplies (70061). Mostly, revenue account codes start with 5 and expense codes start with 7.

For most charges, these three items are all that you will need. But there are two more components you may need in some situations:

ACTIVITY – a 3-digit* activity code is a tool that some budget managers elect to use to distinguish budgeted funds and expenses for different types of activities within their department budget, or activities that may cut across multiple ORGS and FUNDS. Using an activity code makes it possible to run a report of just the revenue and expenses associated with that activity, within one ORG or even across multiple ORGs or FUNDs. If an activity code has been established, it is important to use it!
* occasionally activity codes are 4 digits. This is pretty rare.

program – there is also a two-digit "functional category" code. This is the code that lets the Finance office translate our departmental budgets (organized by ORG and ACCOUNT) into the categories of revenue and expense that are reported on Lawrence's audited financial statements: Instruction, Student Services, Institutional

Administration, etc. Each ORG is linked to a specific program code, so in most cases this isn't something you need to worry about.

Does it really matter whether I charge something to the right account string?

It does, for a couple of reasons.

The account strings are used to pull reports that managers, the president, and the Board of Trustees use to see whether we are spending at, over, or under budget in various areas. We report on spending by department as well as spending by account or "line item" such as meals, mileage, supplies, etc. Those numbers are also used to generate Lawrence's audited financial statements, which are important public documents. So making sure expenses are in the right "buckets" helps make sure that Lawrence is reporting accurately to its stakeholders, enables managers to accurately evaluate whether next year's budget for specific areas should be increased or decreased, and helps with financial analysis of whether we are using funds in the most effective places to serve our mission and our students.

In some cases, charging expenses inaccurately could result in Lawrence violating the requirements of a grant or gift, or cause a shortfall in a fund restricted to a specific purpose.