

**Subject: Educational Assistance and Continuous Learning Program**

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**1. Purpose**

This policy establishes guidelines and practices in support of TCC employees’ pursuit of educational opportunities that will benefit the college, enhance their current job performance, improve their opportunities for advancement, and contribute to employees’ continuous learning goals. It implements the Commonwealth’s policies as embodied in Virginia Department of Human Resource Management [Policy 5.10](#) (Educational Assistance) and in VCCS *Policy Manual* [Section 3.10](#) (Educational Assistance and Continuous Learning Program Guidelines), and other related policies.

**2. Policy**

Tidewater Community College is committed to providing opportunities that promote professional and personal growth for all faculty and staff through educational assistance and a continuous learning program.

**2.1. Educational Assistance**

To the extent allowed by state and VCCS policy and the availability of funds designated for such purposes, TCC shall provide educational assistance to TCC employees taking

job-related undergraduate or graduate courses or pursuing job-related degrees, professional certification, or licensure. Educational assistance is neither a guaranteed benefit nor an entitlement of employment at TCC, and is limited by the availability of funds. Educational assistance is limited to six credit hours or nine-quarter hours, per semester.

This policy provides for payment of tuition and associated laboratory fees. Except as delineated below for agency-initiated courses, the individual employee is responsible for paying admission fees, student activity fees, course books and materials, or other fees not tied to an individual course.

### 2.1.1. Eligibility Requirements

A. **Program Criteria.** Requests for educational assistance must be for courses that are job-related or that are a part of a degree program:

1. **Job-Related.** Education or training related to an employee's current position to meet one of the following objectives as determined by the individual employee's supervisor:
  - a. To provide training in the use of new or modified methods and equipment;
  - b. To provide new knowledge and skills required by changes in the employees' current position, to enhance job performance, and/or to support TCC's mission;
  - c. To provide training required for job-related professional certification or license;
  - d. To enhance TCC's ability to respond to current and future needs.
2. **Degree Program.** Academic courses taken at an accredited institution:
  - a. To enable qualified administrative, professional, and teaching faculty to attain advanced degrees for the maintenance of established standards of the college or to meet specific needs that have been authorized by the college.
  - b. To enable classified employees to complete degree programs that will enhance job performance or support the college's mission.
  - c. The employee shall provide documentation of acceptance into a degree-granting program at a regionally accredited institution.
3. **Other Purpose Course.** Any course determined to be neither degree nor job related will only be approved as a continuing education course. Education Assistance funding may not be used for continuing education courses. Refer to section 2.2 for Continuous Learning Program (CLP) enrollment criteria.

### B. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance

1. All full-time employees shall be eligible for education assistance on the date of hire.
2. Adjunct faculty are eligible to receive educational assistance in any semester in which they are under TCC contract to teach.
3. Educational assistance is an employment benefit. Therefore, a person whose primary status with the college is as a student, or who serves in a position designated as a student position, is not eligible for educational assistance under this policy.
4. Educational assistance shall only be provided for enrollment that is approved prior to the start of the class (es) for which the assistance is requested.

**C. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance that Includes Educational Leave with Full Pay, Partial Pay or Without Pay**

**1. Eligibility**

- a. Classified employees shall have completed at least three (3) years of VCCS service.
- b. Teaching faculty, counselors, and librarians shall be eligible for, or have received, a multi-year appointment.
- c. Administrative and other professional faculty shall have completed at least three (3) years of VCCS service.
- d. Adjunct Faculty do not qualify for educational assistance that Includes educational Leave with Full Pay, Partial Pay or Without Pay.

**2. Application**

- a. The effective date to be used when placing nine-month faculty on educational leave with or without pay shall normally be the first day of the fall or spring semester. For other employees, it will be the last day worked before the leave period starts.
- b. The College President may waive these eligibility requirements in the interest of the effective and efficient operation of the college. When these eligibility requirements are waived, an explanatory justification statement approved by the College President shall be maintained in the college's Office of Human Resources files.

**D. Adjusted Work Schedule for Course attendance**

Staff who elect to take courses shall adhere to the policy as outlined below:

1. **Classified employees**: Courses may not be taken during normally scheduled work hours. Online courses must be pursued during non-work hours. Studying must be done on the employee's own time.
2. **Faculty**: all categories of faculty (full-time, adjunct, professional and administrative) are required to ensure that courses do not conflict with their teaching schedule and/or their college responsibilities.

**E. Agency-Initiated Courses**

1. Staff that take a course at the agency's request may take such courses when they are offered.
2. The supervising member of the President's Cabinet determines that an employee is required to complete a course for job-related professional certification or license or to provide new knowledge and skills required by changes in the employee's current position, to enhance job performance, and/or to support TCC's mission.
3. Expenditures for agency-initiated courses shall be made from unit operating funds, not from funds established to support employee requested education assistance.
4. When courses are agency-initiated, the college must cover the entire tuition cost, including any registration fees, and the cost of any associated certification or license. At the employee's request, the college shall cover the cost of any required or suggested books or materials, which shall become the property of the college. The college

will reimburse the employee within the allowable limits of TCC/VCCS travel policy.

5. For courses determined to be agency-initiated, TCC shall:
  1. make payments directly to the institution, rather than reimbursing employees for their expenditures;
  2. not require employees to refund tuition if they separate, whether their separation was voluntarily or involuntarily; and
  3. Not require work agreements for a specific period after course completion.

### 2.1.2 Payment Options

For employee-requested courses, the following payment options shall be used.

- A. Reimbursement: For courses at institutions other than TCC, employees shall pay the required tuition and fees. The employee will be reimbursed for the tuition and fees when the course is satisfactorily completed. Employees must provide a copy of their grades and proof of payment to be reimbursed.
- B. Up-front Payment: For TCC courses, the college shall pay for the course at the time of registration. If an employee fails to complete a class, or receives an unsatisfactory final grade, the college shall immediately initiate repayment provisions.
- C. Satisfactory Completion. For both payment options, the course must be completed satisfactorily with a grade of at least a "C" for undergraduate courses and at least a "B" for graduate courses.
- D. Other Funding. TCC will neither reimburse nor pay for classes paid from other sources, with the exception of Title IV Federal Direct student loans. When funding covers a portion, but not all of the cost of a course, TCC will only pay the portion of tuition not covered from other sources. Proof of payment must be submitted prior to payment processing to ensure that costs have not been met from other sources.

### 2.1.3 Employee Obligations

- A. **Promissory Notes**. Every employee receiving educational assistance for course completion, regardless of institution and/or leave status, shall execute a promissory note as follows:
  1. Staff receiving assistance without educational leave and without full or partial pay shall execute a promissory note for the costs paid by the college.
  2. Staff receiving educational leave with full or partial pay shall execute a note for the total amount of salary paid. The note shall be executed on the first day of the leave.

Completion of the promissory note is required as part of the approval process.

- B. Continuation Requirements.** Every employee receiving educational assistance shall be required to sign a continuation agreement.
1. An employee receiving educational assistance without leave and/or full or partial pay shall be required to continue his/her TCC employment a minimum of six (6) months beyond the completion of the course(s) for which such assistance was received.
  2. An employee receiving educational leave with full or partial pay shall be required to continue his/her employment with TCC for a period equal to twice the length of the leave period.
  3. Adjunct faculty will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine the beginning and ending date of their continuation period.

**C. Repayment Provisions**

1. If an employee does not successfully complete a course for which charges have been paid, yet he/she remains employed within the VCCS, reductions in the employee's salary shall be initiated to recover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. The repayment schedule, not to exceed three months, shall be immediately initiated.
2. An employee granted educational leave with full or partial pay that resigns from TCC prior to the completion of the promissory obligation, shall pay the pro-rata portion of the note from existing leave balances or the final salary payment. If recovery of funds is not available from these sources, a repayment schedule with interest at the prime rate plus one (1) percent shall be paid with the final payment due within three months of the employee's last day of employment.
3. If an employee accepts employment with another Commonwealth of Virginia agency or institution, a release from the promissory note may be obtained, providing that the employing agency or institution reimburses TCC in full by IAT (inter-agency transfer), the pro-rata portion of the note when leave with pay was granted.
4. When an employee terminates employment prior to completing a course with a satisfactory grade and when tuition was prepaid for the course, the employee is responsible for repayment of tuition to the college. Collection of the debt will be as outlined in TCC Policy 4203, Revision 1, dated January 22, 2015.
5. An employee who is terminated because of a reduction in force, e.g. an employee whose contract is not renewed or who has been laid-off, after enrollment in a course(s) for which education assistance has been paid, will be allowed to complete the approved course(s) without obligation for repayment of the tuition assistance. If unable to complete the course, the funds paid will not be recouped.
6. A military reservist who has been activated for duty, or has received change of duty notification, whether the service member or a service member's dependent impacted by the change in duty station after enrollment in a course(s) for which education assistance has been paid, will be allowed to complete the approved course(s) without obligation for repayment of the tuition assistance. If unable to complete the course, the funds paid will not be recouped.

## **2.2. Continuous Learning Program**

The Continuous Learning Program (CLP) provides TCC employees the opportunity to take TCC credit courses at no cost. Courses taken shall be for the employee's personal development.

### **A. Program Criteria**

1. Only TCC credit courses may be taken under the Continuous Learning Program.
2. Class sizes will not be increased to allow for the enrollment of employees under the Continuous Learning Program.
3. Employees enrolling under the Continuous Learning Program may not displace regularly enrolled students in any class section.
4. Employees enrolled under the Continuous Learning Program may not be counted in making the determination to allow an otherwise under-enrolled course to continue.
5. Classes must be for credit. Employees may not audit CLP courses.
6. Classes for classified and wage employees must be taken during non-work hours as described in section 2.1.1 D.1.

### **B. Employee Eligibility for Continuous Learning Enrollment**

1. All full-time instructional faculty, administrative/professional faculty, full time classified employees, wage employees and adjunct faculty are eligible to take Continuous Learning courses.
2. Adjunct faculty who have at least one semester or summer session of prior TCC service are eligible for Continuous Learning enrollment at the college in any semester in which they are under contract to teach a course.
3. Wage employees with six (6) months of TCC service, who are hired to work at least twenty (20) hours per week, are eligible for Continuous Learning enrollment in any semester or summer session in which they are employed.
4. Wage employees whose primary status is as a student are not eligible for this program.
5. The Continuous Learning Program is an employment benefit and therefore it is intended to exclude students from eligibility. An individual whose primary status with TCC is as a student is not eligible for enrollment under this policy. In this context, students who receive financial assistance under a work-study program are not considered TCC employees.
6. Eligibility for Continuous Learning enrollment shall continue if the employee has completed the course with a "C" or better.
7. An employee who fails to complete one consecutive continuous learning course will not be eligible to enroll in another continuous learning course until the next academic calendar year.
8. Employees may only take continuous learning courses at the community college where they are employed. No more than six (6) credit hours may be taken in a semester (This is a total for all courses, for example continuous learning and degree or job-related course enrollment).

### **2.3. Approval Authority**

Authority to approve requests for educational assistance and continuous learning enrollment has been delegated to the Associate Vice President for Human Resources.

## **3. Responsibilities**

The Associate Vice President for Human Resources shall develop and promulgate procedures to implement the policy delineated above.

## **4. Procedures**

Standard operating procedures for implementing and carrying out of this policy are maintained by the Office of Human Resources and are revised annually, as applicable. **Education Assistance forms, documents and processing outlines are provided on the Training and Development site on the [HR SharePoint webpage](#).**

## **5. Definitions**

**Academic Discipline-** An academic discipline, or field of study, is a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at the college or university level. A scholar's discipline is commonly defined and received by the university faculties and learned societies to which he or she belongs and the academic journals in which he or she publishes research.

**Agency-Initiated Courses-** Educational courses required or suggested by the college for which educational assistance will be provided.

**Awarded-** Funds have been encumbered for course enrollment.

**Approved/Approval-** Funding has been awarded, signatory approvals have been received, and required documents and forms related to the type of enrollment requested have been submitted; the applicant may enroll in the courses for which approval was sought.

**Continuous Learning Course-** Credit course offered to TCC employees at no cost. The courses may or may not be job-related.

**Course-** Any class offered by a college or university in which an employee desires to enroll, regardless of the delivery mechanism, grading structure, or purpose, and for which college or transcript credit will be given.

**Degree Program-**Academic courses taken at regionally accredited institutions to enable qualified administrative, professional, and teaching faculty to attain advanced degrees for the maintenance of established standards of the college or to meet specific needs that have been authorized by the college, or to enable classified employees to complete degree programs which will enhance job performance or that will support the mission of the college.

**Educational Assistance-**Financial support for approved educational courses or the acquisition of job-related degrees, professional certifications, or licenses. Educational assistance may be granted for a single course or may be combined with educational leave. Financial support shall consist of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. In cases with educational leave, full pay or partial pay is provided. An employee may also request educational leave without pay.

**Employee-Requested Courses.** Educational courses that are not required or suggested by the college for which an employee requests TCC educational assistance.

**Reasonable tuition and fees:** the rate at which coursework successfully completed at other institutions of higher learning or proprietary schools will be reimbursed, not to exceed the average cost of in-state, part-time tuition and mandatory fees at Virginia's public colleges and universities. Tuition and mandatory fees may be granted for a single course or combined with educational leave.

**Satisfactory Completion.** Completion of approved courses with passing grades or receipt of professional certification or licensure.

## **6. References**

Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) Policies

[Policy 4.15](#) Educational Leave

[Policy 5.05](#) Employee Training and Development

[Policy 5.10](#) Educational Assistance

Virginia Community College System (VCCS) Policies

[Policy 3.10](#) Educational Assistance Guidelines

[Policy 5.0](#) Educational Programs

## **7. Review Periodicity and Responsibility**

The Associate Vice President for Human Resources shall review this policy annually at the anniversary of its approval and, if necessary, recommend revisions.

## **8. Effective Date and Approval**

This policy is effective upon approval by TCC's President on September 24, 2018.

Policy Approved:

Procedure Developed:

Gregory T. DeCinque, Ph.D.

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Interim President

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Associate Vice President for Human Resources

## **9. Review and Revision History**

This is the first version of this policy.