EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PROPOSED POLICY: Tuition Benefits, Educational and Training Opportunities

New Policy ☐ or Substantive Revision ☒
Policy Type: Administrative
Responsible Office: Human Resources, Division of Administration
Draft Date: 03/25/2019
Initial Policy Approved: 12/01/1993
Revision History: January 16, 2009; August 21, 2012; December 19, 2014; August 06, 2015

Governance Process Tracking:
Integrity & Compliance Office Review: 10/08/2018, 03/11/2019
University Counsel Review: 03/25/2019
Public Comment Posting: MM/DD/YYYY
University Council Academic Affairs and University Policy Committee Review: MM/DD/YYYY
University Council Review: MM/DD/YYYY
President’s Cabinet Approval: MM/DD/YYYY
Board of Visitors Approval (if applicable): MM/DD/YYYY

1. Why is this policy being created ☐ or revised ☒?
The current policy does not address the new University and Academic Professional employee group.

2. New policy ☐: What are the general points or requirements covered in this policy?
   or
Revised policy ☒: What are the substantive differences between this draft and the current policy?
1. The name of the policy was changed to include “Tuition Benefit” and throughout the policy language reference was changed from “tuition waiver” to ‘tuition benefit” to make it clear that the cost of attending these classes is not “waived”. This is a benefit paid through the university’s fringe benefit program.
2. The new University and Academic Professional employee group has been added.
3. Allow one course per semester (the equivalent of three credit hours) to be taken during work time (v. non-work hours) with prior managerial approval. This is to align and be consistent with the career development section of the Working@VCU: “Great Place” HR Policies.
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The initial policy statement has been revised to better describe the reason for the policy.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Existing language was reorganized so that provisions applicable to all employee groups were moved to the beginning of the procedure section to reduce duplication.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Step-by-step procedures were added to Tuition Benefit, Tuition Reimbursement, and Educational Leave of Absence sections of the policy.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>Which stakeholder offices or personnel have provided input into this policy draft?</strong></td>
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<td>The HR Redesign Career Development Committee, Provost Office, Office of the VP for Health Sciences, VCU HR, and HR Professionals across the university have reviewed and provided input into this policy.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td><strong>Which other universities’ policies or resources (e.g., laws, regulations, etc.) did you consider when preparing this draft?</strong></td>
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<td>The committees described above have spent the last year researching best practices at other Universities and large employers. They have looked at the other Tier III Universities in the Commonwealth of Virginia, both Quest and SCHEV peer institutions, and have sought out other “best in class” practices at higher education institutions across the country.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td><strong>What is your general assessment of this policy’s impact on the university community?</strong></td>
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<td>Tuition benefits are consistently rated as highly valued benefits by VCU employees. It is frequently cited by both applicants/employees and managers as having a significant impact on recruitment/retention. This policy revision ensures that VCU continues to leverage this benefit in a competitive hiring market and that current employees have the university’s support for taking academic classes as one component of their career and professional development.</td>
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[DRAFT] Tuition Benefits, Educational and Training Opportunities

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Responsible Office: VCU Human Resources, Division of Administration  
Initial Policy Approved: 12/01/1993  
Current Revision Approved: MM/DD/YYYY

Policy Statement and Purpose

An essential part of making any institution a great place to work is the opportunity for employees to participate in lifelong learning. As an institution of higher education, lifelong learning is an integral core value at Virginia Commonwealth University. VCU is dedicated to providing a variety of opportunities for employees to continue their education, improve current job effectiveness, prepare for career advancement and enhance their personal career and professional development and growth. This policy affirms VCU’s commitment to providing learning and development opportunities to eligible employees and encouraging employees to continue their education and enhance their growth and development through tuition benefits and other educational opportunities.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation is prohibited against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question or participates in an investigation.

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Who Should Know This Policy

All eligible employees, as discussed below, are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

Educational Leave of Absence (ELOA)
A leave of absence to participate in or complete an approved educational course.

Tuition Reimbursement
Reimbursement for costs required to complete an approved, work-related educational course(s) at an institution other than VCU.

Tuition Benefit
A benefit to pre-pay costs required to complete an approved educational course(s) at VCU.

Contacts

VCU Human Resources officially interprets this policy and is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions, as required by the policy Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures, through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to VCU Human Resources, Office of Learning and Development.

Policy Specifics and Procedures

To realize the full potential of all VCU employees, managers/department heads are expected to support employees as they pursue their career interests, to adopt practices that promote career development throughout their discipline/area, and to allow employee participation in appropriate opportunities for learning and growth. It is important for employees to communicate with their manager/department head about their development interests and obtain the required approval(s) for enrolling in courses internal or external to the university.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. Eligible Employees:

   In order to be eligible for the educational benefits and training opportunities provided for in this policy, an employee must be salaried faculty, university and academic professional, or classified staff who are employed 75%FTE or greater.

   a. In an active employment status (i.e., not on leave with or without pay) in order to qualify for an educational leave of absence (ELOA);
b. In an active employment status to qualify for a tuition benefit unless they are on workers’ compensation or family and medical leave when they began the course while working full time or were laid off from employment after they began the course; and

c. Compensated (i.e., salary) from funds controlled within the institution.

2. Ineligible Employees:

Hourly, wage, post-doctoral fellows, part-time and student employees; employees on educational or study research leave, with or without pay; and those on conditional personal or disciplinary leave without pay are not eligible for tuition benefit or tuition reimbursement.

Work Hours:

1. One course (equivalent to three credit hours) per semester may be taken during work time. The course does not have to be specifically job related to be taken during work time. If more than one course is taken during the same semester, the employee may use flex-time, leave, or may take the course during non-work hours. Employees are responsible for coordinating class time with their manager/department head when attending a course during normal work hours.

2. If a course is taken during working hours, it is important to ensure compliance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) as follows:
   - If the employee’s position is “exempt,” the manager may adjust the employee’s work schedule to achieve a normal workweek.
   - If the employee’s position is “non-exempt,” time in excess of a 40-hour workweek may be subject to overtime. Contact your HR Professional for guidance.

Tuition Benefits:

A tuition benefit is available for eligible employees to take both job-related and non-job-related courses at the university. The tuition benefit covers the costs of standard undergraduate and graduate tuition for the credit hours, which includes the university fee, student activity fee, student government fee, technology fee and capital outlay fee. A tuition benefit does not cover audited (non-credit) courses, individual or private lessons, or program fees not a part of undergraduate and graduate tuition. See section below for specific provisions regarding adjunct faculty tuition benefits.

The tuition benefit requirements are as follows:

1. It may be used for undergraduate, graduate or first professional degree courses for academic credit at VCU.

2. One course per semester (equivalent to three credit hours) may be taken during work time.

3. If a course is taken during working hours, it is important to ensure compliance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) as follows:
   - If the employee’s position is “exempt,” the manager may adjust the employee’s work schedule to achieve a normal workweek.
   - If the employee’s position is “non-exempt,” time in excess of a 40-hour workweek may be subject to overtime. Contact your HR Professional for guidance.

4. The course does not have to be specifically job related to be taken during work time.

5. If more than one course is taken during the same semester, the employee may use flex-time, leave, or may take the course during non-work hours.
6. It cannot be retroactively applied to previous semesters, and
7. Tuition benefit hours cannot be accumulated or carried over.

Participation in the tuition benefit program is done by submitting the Tuition Benefit Application and Fact Sheet For Full-time Faculty, University and Academic Professionals and Classified Staff to the manager/department head who approves or denies the request prior to registration. If an ineligible employee is granted tuition benefit by their department, the department is responsible for the cost of tuition and fees and will be billed accordingly. The steps in the approval process are as follows:

Step 1. Before submitting a tuition benefit application form, the employee must have on file a completed Application for Virginia In-State Tuition Rates with VCU Records and Registration so it can be determined whether the employee is eligible for in-state tuition rates, pursuant to Section 23-7.4 of the Code of Virginia.
Step 2. The employee submits the tuition application form to the manager/department head for approval.
Step 3. The employee submits the approved application form to VCU Student Accounting (campus mail to Box 843036 or deliver to Harris Hall, 1015 Floyd Avenue, first floor) upon registering for the class.
Step 4. If the employee withdraws before the end of the semester or session, receives a grade of less than “C,” fails in a pass/fail course, changes their employment status from full-time to part-time, voluntarily separates from employment or is separated for cause by the institution prior to completing a tuition-waived course, the employee is responsible for repaying the cost of tuition and fees for tuition-waived courses in which the employee was enrolled.

Tuition Benefits for Adjunct Faculty:

Below is separate tuition benefit process for employees whose primary appointment is as an adjunct faculty member:

1. Adjunct faculty may take one course (one to three credit hours) after they complete teaching courses equivalent to nine credit hours.
2. An adjunct faculty tuition benefit must be used within the three-semester period immediately following the completion of teaching the nine credit hours. The summer semester counts as a semester. A new adjunct tuition benefit may be earned upon completion of teaching an additional nine credit hours.
3. Adjunct faculty are not eligible for tuition benefit if they have not completed teaching courses equivalent to nine credit hours or have failed to make use of the tuition benefit within the three-semester period immediately following completion of teaching nine credit hours.
4. Tuition benefit hours are not available retroactively.
5. Decisions related to adjunct faculty are administered through the Adjunct Benefit Program within each school.
6. Participation in the adjunct tuition benefit program is by application using the Adjunct Faculty Tuition Benefit Application, which must be submitted and approved well in advance of the beginning of the semester in which the course is taken. The adjunct tuition benefit requires approval by the respective supervisor; director, department head or chair; dean; and respective vice president who review/approve or deny the request prior to registration. If an ineligible
An employee is granted tuition benefit by their department, the department is responsible for the cost of tuition and fees and will be charged accordingly.

**Tuition Reimbursement Benefits**

Eligible employees may be reimbursed for no more than two job-related courses (six credits) per semester taken at other educational institutions provided that the course(s) is:

- Not offered at VCU (classroom or online);
- Directly related to the employee’s job; and
- Taken for academic credit

Below are the steps in the approval process for tuition reimbursements:

**Step 1.** The employee completes the [Tuition Reimbursement/Certification Form](#) and submits it to the manager/department head for approval prior to registering for a class.

**Step 2.** The manager/department head verifies the employee’s eligibility, the availability of departmental non-federal grant funds and that the course is not offered online or in the classroom at VCU and approves, if appropriate.

**Step 3.** Upon completion of the course with a grade of “C” or better or a “pass” in a pass/fail course, the employee submit the Tuition Reimbursement Certification Form with the receipt and grade to the department for processing the reimbursement. The department submits a personal reimbursement via the Chrome River system and selects the "Employee Tuition" account code. The use of this code enables Accounts Payable to exceed the $2,000 limit for personal reimbursements. A copy of the reimbursement form is also sent to VCU HR Learning and Development.

**Educational Leaves of Absence (ELOA) with One-Half Pay or Without Pay**

This benefit (regardless of the funding source of the employee’s salary) is available for a maximum of one year to eligible employees who:

- Have been employed by the university for at least one year;
- Are in good standing with the university, as determined by the appropriate manager/department head; and
- Have been accepted into an approved course of study at an accredited institution of higher learning where the planned course work is job-related or in the institution’s best interest.

Requests for an ELOA should be submitted at least six months in advance. Employees do not accrue annual, sick, university or holiday leave while on an ELOA. Existing leave balances are retained for use upon the employee’s return from ELOA. Consult VCU Human Resources (VCU HR) for assistance.

Below are the steps in the approval process for an ELOA:

**Step 1.** The employee submits a written request for ELOA to the manager/department head for director/dean review/approval. The request for leave should include a copy of the school’s acceptance for study and a recommendation from the manager/department head and director/dean...
provided there are sufficient department funds and the reimbursement is paid with non-grant funds and staffing;

**Step 2.** The request is then forwarded to the appropriate vice president for review and approval of the ELOA, with or without pay.

**Step 3.** Upon approval of the request, VCU HR completes the calculation of salary and repayment terms for inclusion in an Educational Leave Agreement and Promissory Note.

**Step 4.** The manager/department head and the employee sign the Educational Leave Agreement and Promissory Note. In signing the agreement, the employee commits to either return to employment with the department from which the leave was taken for a period equal to at least twice the period of absence or to reimburse the actual salary paid during the leave (regardless of funding source of the employee's salary) plus a pre-determined interest rate. Completion of the agreement also ensures continuation of benefits.

**Step 5.** The leave agreement is forwarded to the appropriate vice president for final signature.

**Step 6.** The manager/department head notifies VCU HR if the employee terminates employment prior to completing the service payback requirement. VCU HR will work with the employee on a repayment schedule.

**Learning Opportunities**

The University offers a variety of learning opportunities through various entities on campus. It is important that employees research to find the best opportunities for them. Please visit [Talent@VCU](http://www.talent.vcu.edu) for more information. Employees must obtain approval from managers to attend learning opportunities internal and external to the university.

**Forms**

1. VCU Application for Virginia In-State Tuition Rates
2. VCU Educational Leave Agreement and Promissory Note
3. VCU Tuition Reimbursement/Certification Form
4. VCU Tuition Benefit Application and Fact Sheet For Full-time Faculty, University and Academic Professionals and Classified Staff
5. VCU Tuition Benefit Application for Adjunct Faculty

**Related Documents**

1. VCU Policy: [Working@VCU: “Great Place” HR Policies](http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/hrpolicy/pol4_10annlv.pdf?sfvrsn=2)
2. State Policy 4.10, Annual Leave
3. State Policy 4.15, Educational Leave
4. State Policy 4.55, Sick Leave
5. State Policy 5.05, Employee Training and Development
http://web1.dhrm.virginia.gov/itech/hrpolicy/pol5_05.html

6. State Policy 5.10, Educational Assistance

7. VCU Policy: Study-Research Leave

8. White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) - Uniform Administrative Requirements Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards; Final Rule
https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/12/26/2013-30465/uniform-administrative-requirements-cost-principles-and-audit-requirements-for-federal-awards

Revision History

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<td>January 16, 2009</td>
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<td>December 19, 2014</td>
<td>Educational and Training Opportunities: Revision due to White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) -- uniform guidance for all awards issued on or after December 26, 2014 for state and federal reimbursement of tuition or remission to be in compliance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 06, 2015</td>
<td>Educational and Training Opportunities</td>
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FAQ

1. **What is the difference between tuition benefit and tuition reimbursement?**
   Tuition benefit is for VCU courses; tuition reimbursement is for courses taken at educational institutions other than VCU. With tuition benefit, the cost is foregone upfront. With tuition reimbursement, the employee pays and then receives repayment of the cost after the course has been successfully completed.

2. **Does a course have to be work-related to be taken during work hours and considered as “time worked”?**
   No. The one course (three credit equivalent) an employee may take during work hours and considered as “time worked” does not have to be work related.

3. **How does a non-exempt employee record hours in RealTime for a course taken during work time?**
There is no special coding or category in RealTime for recording hours under these circumstances. Time off for taking a class during work hours is reported as regular time worked.

4. **What is not included as a covered tuition benefit?**
   Any program fee that is not considered to be a standard fee associated with the cost of the undergraduate or graduate tuition of the credit class. Examples of fees that are not included in the tuition benefit include, but are not limited to, books, supplies, and course fees.