

## ***Educational Assistance and Continuous Learning Policy (VCCS 3.10)***

### **I. Policy**

Patrick Henry Community College is committed to supporting educational opportunities for our employees with College support, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of the College. Contingent upon budgetary resources and pursuant to policies and procedures of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the College may provide support for employees to take classes that are directly job related, part of a degree program, and/or classes taken under the continuous learning program. This policy outlines eligibility requirements, payment options, procedures and guidelines for approval, tuition reimbursement information, and employee obligations under this policy. It should be noted that meeting minimum criteria does not guarantee approval for receipt of educational assistance.

### **II. Definitions**

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

Continuous Learning Courses are for credit courses offered at the College to employees at no cost. The courses may be job related or non-job related.

### **III. Limitations**

Educational assistance and/or continuous learning are limited to no more than a combined total of six (6) credit hours of course work per semester or twelve (12) credit hours per fiscal year per employee. The College President may approve course work in excess of these limits provided it is in the interest of the effective and efficient operation of the College.

### **IV. Educational Assistance Program**

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

A. Program Criteria: Requests for educational assistance must be for courses that are job-related or are part of a degree program. The course(s) taken must be in accordance with the employee's Professional Development Objectives (Faculty) or Employee Development Plan (Classified) listed on the Employee Work Profile (EWP) on file in the Office of Human Resources.

1. Job Related: Education or training related to employee's current position to meet one of the following objectives:

- (a) To provide training in the use of new or modified methods and equipment.
- (b) To provide training in skills and knowledge required by changes in the employees' current position.

2. Degree Requirement. Academic courses taken at regionally accredited institutions:

- (a) To enable qualified administrative 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 which will enhance job performance or support the College's mission.

#### B. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance

1. New Employees: New full time employees are immediately eligible to receive educational assistance for tuition and mandatory fees.
2. Grant Funded Employees: Educational Assistance is designed for employees who are expected to continue in State service for a period of time that will justify such assistance. Employees whose salaries are grant funded have no assurance that they will be employed by the College after the grant expires. Therefore, grant funded employees will not be eligible for educational assistance except in extraordinary circumstances.
3. This is a benefit for full time employees only and therefore it is intended to exclude students, adjuncts and part time employees from eligibility. Persons whose primary status with the College is as a student, or who serve in positions designated as student positions, adjuncts and part time employees are not eligible for reduced tuition under this policy.

#### C. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance That Includes Educational Leave With Full Pay, Partial Pay or Without Pay

1. Classified employees must have completed at least three (3) years of continuous service with the College.
2. Teaching faculty, counselors, and librarians should normally be eligible for, or have received a multi-year appointment.
3. Administrative and other professional faculty must have completed a minimum of three (3) continuous years of service with the VCCS.

#### Payment Options

The College may use the following payment options for educational course work:

- A. Reimbursement: Employees pay the required tuition and fees and are reimbursed for the costs when the course is completed and appropriate documentation submitted.
- B. Up-front Payment-Promissory Note: The College may pay for the course at the time of registration. The employee and the College will execute a promissory note for the amount of tuition and mandatory fees prior to registration for the class. Payment for tuition will be transmitted to the institution by check.
- C. For all payment options, the course must be completed satisfactorily with a grade of "C" or better. For any up-front payment, if an employee fails to complete a class, or receives an unsatisfactory final grade, the College must initiate repayment provisions immediately.

## Procedures

### A. Procedures Applicable to All Educational Assistance Applications

1. If an employee is pursuing a degree, he or she must attach to the request for educational assistance documentation of acceptance into the degree program and a copy of the program's course requirements. Employees must attach a copy of their Professional Development Objectives (Faculty) or Employee Development Plan (Classified) listed on the Employee Work Profile (EWP) on file in the Office of Human Resources and explain how the requested assistance furthers that plan.
2. If an employee is pursuing a degree, he or she must attach to each annual request for educational assistance documentation that the employee is satisfactorily progressing toward completion of the degree.
3. The employee must submit his or her final grade or training certification and receipt for payment to the Human Resource Office within 30 calendar days of the end of term. Failure to submit a final grade or proof of training and payment to the Human Resource Office may result in loss of future educational aid eligibility. The Human Resource Office will then inform the Business Office that the requirement has been satisfied.
4. The employee must inform the Human Resource Office if he or she fails to complete the course(s) or meet the minimum grade requirement. The Human Resource Office will then inform the Business Office. The Business Office will then establish a receivable, credit the expense account(s) of the College, and, in conjunction with the employee, coordinate tuition repayment. Failure to inform the Human Resource Office of these events will result in loss of future educational aid eligibility.
5. If an employee decides not to enroll in a course under this policy after receiving permission to do so, the employee must notify the Human Resources Department, the immediate supervisor and the supervising dean or vice president. If the employee desires tuition assistance for an alternative course, a new Educational Assistance Request must be completed according to the normal application procedures.
6. Prioritization of Requests. The following criteria will be used to determine competitive selection and approval of requests. Preference will be given to:
  - (a) Full-time faculty and staff employees pursuing a degree and who have an approved professional development plan on file;
  - (b) Full-time faculty and staff who have an approved professional development plan on file and who wish to take courses or training directly related to the employee's job responsibilities;
  - (c) Courses or training critical to the needs of the College;
  - (d) Distribution of previously awarded educational aid (in order to balance support among employees and departments); and
  - (e) Commitment of employee to share the costs for the courses or training.

## B. Educational Assistance Without Leave and Without Pay

1. **Submission and Approval of Requests:** Employees must request education assistance prior to July 31 for assistance for the following fiscal fall semester and prior to October 15 for the following spring semester. Requests must be submitted on the VCCS-16, and signed by the employee, the employee's supervisor and dean, the employee's vice president, and the College President.
2. Justification for educational assistance must be attached to the educational aid request form (VCCS-16). Employees pursuing a specific degree or certificate should submit the entire program of study for approval as part of the Employee's Professional Development Objectives (Faculty) or Employee Development Plan (Classified) listed on the Employee Work Profile (EWP) on file in the Office of Human Resources
3. When budgeted funds are exhausted, no further requests will be approved.
4. **Degree Required Courses:** If the class is part of a degree requirement, the employee must submit documentation of acceptance to a degree granting program that is regionally accredited. For classes not part of a degree program, the course must be job-related as determined by the employee's vice president.
5. **Courses Taken During Normal Work Hours**
  - (a) Classified employees are required to adjust their work schedule to fulfill their normal work hours per week. Adjustments may take the form of reducing an employee's work week, increasing the number of hours worked, requiring use of annual, compensatory, or overtime leave, or VSDP family and personal leave (for VSDP participants).
  - (b) Faculty are required to ensure that courses do not conflict with teaching and College responsibilities.

## C. Educational Assistance With Leave and Full Pay or Partial Pay

1. **Submission and Approval of Requests:** Employees must request education assistance prior to July 31 for assistance for the following fall semester and prior to October 15 for the following spring semester. Requests must be submitted on the VCCS-16, and signed by the employee, the employee's supervisor and dean, the employee's vice president, and the College President. The request must identify the length of time and the amount of pay being requested.
2. When budgeted funds are exhausted, no further requests will be approved.
3. Justification for educational assistance must be attached to the educational aid request form (VCCS-16). Employees pursuing a specific degree or certificate should submit the entire program of study for approval as part of the Employee's Individual Development Plan with the VCCS-16.
4. **Establishing Base Pay:** The base salary utilized to compute the full or partial pay shall be the salary in effect on the last workday prior to the period of educational leave. The base will be adjusted for merit increases at the time the increases become effective for all state employees.

5. Effective date: The effective date to be used when placing nine (9)-month faculty on educational leave with or without pay shall normally be the first day of the fall or spring semester in which the leave begins. For other employees, it will be the last day worked before the leave period starts.
6. For educational leave, the College and the System Office will prepare a letter stating the terms and length of the employee's leave. It will address the effect of the leave period on salary, benefits, retirement, and the timeframe to notify the College /System Office of the employee's return to full-time employment.
7. Length of Educational Leave: Educational leave with or without pay is limited to twelve (12) months. An extension of twelve (12) months may be granted by the College President.

### Promissory Notes

- A. Promissory Note Required: Employees receiving up-front educational assistance for a course or for a leave with pay must execute a promissory note for the total amount of salary to be paid and/or costs paid by the State. The note will be executed on the first day of the leave and interest will begin to accrue on the date study is terminated.
- B. Continuation Requirements
  1. Any employee receiving educational assistance may be required to sign a continuation agreement.
  2. Up-Front Payment for Educational Assistance: Employees will be required to work a minimum of an additional six months for assistance received.
  3. Leave With Pay: Employees will be required to work a period twice that of the leave period.
- C. Repayment Provisions
  1. If an employee does not successfully complete a course but remains employed within the VCCS, reductions in the employee's salary will be initiated to recover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. The repayment schedule, not to exceed six months, will be initiated immediately.
  2. An employee who does not return to the College, or resigns prior to the completion of the promissory obligation, will 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 six months of the employee's last day of employment.
  3. If an employee accepts employment with another Virginia state agency, a release from the promissory note may be obtained, providing that the employing institution reimburses the College in full.

## **V. Continuous Learning Program**

### Eligibility Requirements

Full-time instructional faculty, administrative/professional faculty, full-time classified employees, wage employees, and adjunct faculty may take continuous learning courses. Wage employees must be employed during the term for which they are requesting a course. Wage employees whose primary status is as a student are not eligible for this program. This is an employment benefit and therefore it is intended to exclude students from eligibility.

### Program Requirements

Employees may take continuous learning courses only at the College. Courses included in this program must be offered by the College and may be part of degree program or for professional development.

### Procedures

- A. **Submission and Approval of Requests:** Employees must request continuous learning prior to the semester in which the course is to be taken. Requests must be submitted on the PHCC-16 Continuous Learning Form and signed by the employee, the employee's supervisor and dean, and the employee's vice president.
- B. **Courses Taken During Normal Work Hours**
  1. Classified employees are required to adjust their work schedule to fulfill their normal work hours per week. Adjustments may take the form of reducing an employee's work week, increasing the number of hours worked, requiring use of annual, compensatory, or overtime leave, or VSDP family and personal leave (for VSDP participants).
  2. Faculty are required to ensure that courses do not conflict with teaching and College responsibilities.

## **VI. Exceptions**

Exceptions to the above guidelines will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and should come through the appropriate supervisor, appropriate chain of authority, up to and including the President. When eligibility requirements are waived, an explanatory justification statement approved by the College president shall be attached to the VCCS-16 or PHCC-16 and maintained in the Human Resources files.