

# Tuition Benefits, Educational and Training Opportunities

**Policy Type:** Administrative

**Responsible Office:** VCU Human Resources, Division of Finance and Administration

**Initial Policy Approved:** 12/01/1993

**Current Revision Approved:** 10/6/2022

## 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) for academic credit at an institution other than VCU.

### **Tuition Benefit**

A benefit to pre-pay costs required to complete an approved educational course(s) for academic credit 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 Organizational Effectiveness.

## **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:**

To be eligible for the educational benefits and training opportunities provided for in this policy, employees must be salaried faculty, university and academic professionals, classified staff, and post-doctoral scholars employed at 75% FTE or greater. Employees must also be

- 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., employee's salary) from university-controlled funds within the institution.
- d. Post-doctoral scholars employed at VCU through a sponsored visa must comply with all visa and sponsor regulations and confirm eligibility with VCU's Global Education Office prior to submitting the tuition benefit application.

## 2. Ineligible Employees:

Hourly, wage, 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 benefits or tuition reimbursement.

### Work Hours:

1. One course (up 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, may take the course during non-work hours, or may opt to take the course on-line in an asynchronous format (if available). A maximum of six credit hours may be taken during a semester. 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 for academic credit at the university. The tuition benefit covers the costs of standard undergraduate and graduate tuition and mandatory fees (except the student transition fee). Mandatory fees are available at [Mandatory fees - Student Financial Services - Virginia Commonwealth University](#). 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, including tuition differentials, program-specific fees including the undergraduate program fees, course-specific fees, books, supplies, or English language courses. Tuition and fees are available in the [Estimate your tuition and fee calculator](#). See the 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 (up to three credit hours) may be taken during work time, up to a maximum of six credit hours per semester.
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:
  - a. If the employee's position is "exempt," the manager may adjust the employee's work schedule to achieve a normal workweek.
  - b. 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, take the course during non-work hours, or may opt to take the course online in an asynchronous format (if available).

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 reviewing the Tuition Benefit page and submitting the [Tuition Benefit Application](#). The application in DocuSign will be forwarded to the manager/department head, who approves or denies the request prior to registration. If an ineligible employee is granted tuition benefits 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.** The employee submits the Tuition Benefit Application via DocuSign for approval by the manager/department head.

**Step 2.** If the employee withdraws before the end of the semester or session (as determined by the university's academic calendar), 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 the tuition benefit process for employees whose primary appointment is as an instructional adjunct faculty member:

1. Adjunct faculty may enroll in one course for academic credit under the tuition waiver benefit (one to three credit hours) after they have completed teaching courses equivalent to nine credit hours.
2. An adjunct faculty tuition benefit must be used within the three-semester period immediately following completion of teaching 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 benefits 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. Participation in the adjunct tuition benefit program is by application using the [Adjunct Faculty Tuition Benefit Application](#) available via DocuSign, 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 employee is granted tuition benefit by their department, the department is responsible for the cost of tuition and fees and will be charged accordingly.
6. If the adjunct withdraws before the end of the semester or session (as determined by the university's academic calendar), receives a grade of less than "C," or fails in a pass/fail course, the adjunct is responsible for repaying the cost of tuition and fees for tuition-waived courses in which they were enrolled.

### **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:

- a. Not offered at VCU (classroom or online);
- b. Directly related to the employee's job; and
- c. 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 submits 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.

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

This benefit is available for a maximum of one year to eligible employees who:

- a. Have been employed by the university for at least one year;
- b. Are in good standing with the university, as determined by the appropriate manager/department head, and
- c. 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 or
- d. Have been accepted into a fellowship, training program, or other prestigious professional/educational opportunity that will advance knowledge in a primary job function and is in the institution's best interest.

Note that while Educational Leave is available to all benefits-eligible employees regardless of the funding source of the employee's salary, any compensation during an ELOA must be paid using non-grant funds. 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, if the leave will be compensated, VCU HR completes the calculation of salary and repayment terms for inclusion in an Educational Leave Agreement and Promissory Note as referenced in the Educational Leave section in the [VCU Leave Guide](#).

**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 predetermined 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.

## Forms

1. [Application for Tuition Benefits](#)
2. [VCU Tuition Benefit Application for Adjunct Faculty](#)
3. [VCU Tuition Reimbursement/Certification Form](#)
4. [Study Research / Educational / Sloan Leave](#)

## Related Documents

1. VCU Policy - [Working @ VCU: "Great Place" HR Policies](#)
2. [VCU Policy - Study Research Leave](#)
3. [VCU Leave Guide](#)
4. [Educational Opportunities Guidelines](#)
5. DHRM Policy 5.05 - [Employee Learning and Development](#)
6. DHRM Policy 5.10 - [Educational Assistance](#)
7. DHRM Policy 4.10 - [Annual Leave](#)
8. DHRM Policy 4.15 - [Educational Leave](#)
9. DHRM Policy 4.55 - [Traditional Sick Leave](#)
10. [Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#)

## Revision History

Approval/Revision Date	Title
January 16, 2009	Educational and Training Opportunities

August 21, 2012	Educational and Training Opportunities
December 19, 2014	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.
August 06, 2015	Educational and Training Opportunities
October 6, 2022	Minor Revisions

## FAQ

- 1. What is the difference between tuition benefit and tuition reimbursement?**  
The tuition benefit is for VCU courses; tuition reimbursement is for courses taken at educational institutions other than VCU. With tuition benefit, VCU's standard tuition and fees are waived. With tuition reimbursement, the employee pays the institution and then is reimbursed by the department 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"?**  
The tuition benefit program allows an employee to take one course per semester (up to three credit hours) during work hours. Engaging in the course is considered "time worked," and the topic of the course does not have to be work-related. However, when an employee uses the tuition reimbursement program, the course must be work-related, as determined by the sponsoring department.
- 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. Please review the estimate of your tuition and fees calculator at the Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success website for additional information.
- 5. How many credit hours can an employee take with this benefit?**  
An employee employed by the university at .75 FTE or greater can take a total of six credit hours per semester, and one course (three of those six credit hours) may be taken during work hours with manager approval.



**6. How do I know the tuition benefit has been applied to my course at student accounts?**

You will receive an email from [stuacctg@vcu.edu](mailto:stuacctg@vcu.edu) with a billing statement and a link to your account. You may check your account at that link to verify funds have been applied.

**7. How long do I need to be actively employed before I can apply for the tuition benefit?**

You are immediately eligible to apply for the tuition benefit upon your hire date.

**8. If I leave employment at VCU, do I have to reimburse the university for my tuition benefit?**

If the employee 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 course that the university has paid for, the employee is responsible for repaying the cost of tuition and fees for tuition-waived or tuition-reimbursed courses in which the employee was enrolled.

**9. Is there an appeal process if I am charged for tuition and fees?**

The appeal process for billing or refunds is available through Student Financial Services.

**10. If I've been approved for an Educational Leave of Absence without pay, do I need to complete an Educational Leave Agreement and Promissory Note? No, the agreement / promissory note is only required for those compensated while on leave.**