

Policy No. 3-22

Subject: Educational Assistance and Continuous Learning

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Division	Policy Manager	Administrative Supervisor	Reference
Human Resources	Vice President of Instruction and Student Services	Vice President of Instruction and Student Services	VCCS Policy Section 3.10

I. POLICY

It is the policy of Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) to provide the opportunity for employees to enroll in courses at VHCC with the cost of tuition and fees waived and to receive educational assistance funding for courses not provided by VHCC.

II. PERTINENT INFORMATION

- A. The College encourages professional growth and development by annual evaluations, self-assessment, and the development of individual professional development plans. VHCC ensures that all employed constituent elements of the College, including staff, adjunct, administrative, and teaching faculty have access to regular and continuing professional growth and development opportunities.
- B. VHCC promotes professional growth and development in a variety of ways, such as: special funding (as recommended by our Professional Development Committee); appropriate technologies and technical support; recognition and expectation of professional development (as noted on annual evaluations); special programs (leave with pay, faculty in residence, etc.)
- C. In consultation with their supervisor(s), employees develop a plan for their own professional growth. The objective of VHCC's professional development is to maintain and nurture committed and vital faculty, staff, and administrators who are skilled in various areas of expertise and focused on providing quality education and services to the students in our service region. Employees requesting continuous learning funds and/or professional development funds must document the request and receive supervisor's approval in advance of submitting the request.
- D. Faculty, administration, and staff assume the responsibility for their individual growth and development. This effort is self-directed to enhance teaching/learning and the other services provided for students.
- E. Colleges and the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) invest in faculty and staff professional development by supporting visible opportunities for faculty, administration, and staff throughout their career for the purpose of enhancing institutional effectiveness in each community college.

- F. Faculty, administration, and staff professional development efforts are intended to maintain professional competence in disciplines and services to maintain institutional vitality, to foster organizational development, to improve morale and performance, to provide innovative instruction, to address individual professional needs, and to achieve institutional objectives.
- G. Allocation of funding by the VCCS augments the commitment of resources by the College and the individual.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Adjunct Faculty: designated individuals employed to teach less than a full load on a semester-by-semester basis.
- B. Administrative/Professional Faculty: designated individuals employed primarily in support, supervisory, or managerial roles at VHCC.
- C. Classified Staff: employees who occupy positions that are listed in the Commonwealth's Compensation Plan, and who are covered by the Virginia Personnel Act as found in Chapter 10, Title 2.1 of the Code of Virginia, once they have completed the probationary period.
- D. Degree Requirement: academic courses taken at regionally accredited institutions:
 - 1. 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/System Office.
 - 2. To enable classified employees to complete degree programs which will enhance job performance or support the College/System Office mission.
- E. Educational Assistance: 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.
- F. Full-time Teaching Faculty: designated individuals employed in classroom instruction at VHCC.
- G. Job Related: education and training related to the employees' current position to meet one of the following objectives:
 - 1. To provide training in the use of new or modified methods and equipment.
 - 2. To provide training in skills and knowledge required by changes in the employees' current position.
- H. Wage Employees: employees not covered by the Virginia Personnel Act (also referred to as hourly, P-14, or WE-14 employees). Generally, these positions are non-exempt for the purpose of overtime compensation, and are limited to an average of 29 hours per week and 1,500 hours per year.

IV. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. Educational Assistance for Courses Not Provided by VHCC
 - 1. Program Criteria: Requests for educational assistance that are for job-related courses or are part of a degree program will be prioritized. These courses must also be approved by and documented in advance by the employee's supervisor.
 - 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/System Office mission.
2. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance
 - a. Full-time employees, including full-time teaching faculty, are eligible immediately after hire to receive educational assistance for tuition and mandatory fees.
 - b. Adjunct faculty and wage employees are not eligible for educational assistance under this section.
 - c. Colleges may elect to have new employees sign a promissory note.
 - d. This is an employment benefit and therefore it is intended to exclude students from eligibility. Persons whose primary status with the College is as a student, or who serve in positions designated as student positions, are not eligible for reduced tuition under this policy.
 3. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance that Includes Educational Leave with Full Pay, Partial Pay or Without Pay
 - a. Eligible employees should have completed at least three (3) years of service with the VCCS.
 - b. For independent research, dissertation, or thesis work, taken during the course of employment at VHCC, eligible employees may receive a maximum of six (6) semester hours or the equivalent of tuition assistance funding.
 4. Exceptions to Eligibility Criteria for Educational Assistance and Educational Leave
 - a. The College President may waive these eligibility requirements in the interest of the effective and efficient operation of the College.
 - b. When eligibility requirements are waived, an explanatory justification statement approved by the College President shall be attached to the VCCS-16 and maintained in the College files.
 5. Reimbursement:
 - a. Employees pay the required tuition and fees and are reimbursed for the costs when the course is completed and appropriate documentation submitted.
 - b. The course must be completed satisfactorily with a grade of “C” or better.
 6. Educational Assistance Without Leave
 - a. Submission of Requests:
 - 1) Employees must request education assistance prior to the start of class.
 - 2) Requests must be submitted on the VCCS-16 Form and signed by the employee and appropriate supervisors.
 - 3) Employees are required to submit the VHCC Professional Growth and Development Funds Form by the deadline established each fall.
 - 4) All information required on the form must be provided to be considered, including the supervisor’s signature.
 - b. 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.
 - c. For classes not part of a degree program, the course must be job- related as determined by the supervisor.

- d. Course Limits:
 - 1) Employees should normally be limited to no more than six (6) credit hours of course work per semester.
 - 2) The College President may approve course work in excess of six (6) credit hours provided it is in the interest of the effective and efficient operation of the College.
 - e. 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) Non-exempt classified employees: For non-exempt classified employees, time spent in classes during normal work hours is considered hours of work for computing any overtime liability.
 - 3) Faculty are required to ensure that courses do not conflict with teaching and College responsibilities.
7. Educational Assistance with Leave and Full Pay or Partial Pay
- a. Submission of Requests: Employees must request in writing education assistance with paid or unpaid leave at least one semester prior to the start of the leave. The request should identify the length of time and the amount of pay being requested.
 - b. Establishing Base Pay: The base salary utilized to compute the 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.
 - c. 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. For other employees, it will be the last day worked before the leave period starts.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Leave with Pay: Employees will be required to work a period twice that of the leave period.
 - f. 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.
8. Repayment Provision
- a. An employee who does not return to the College which granted the leave with pay, 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.

- b. If an employee accepts employment with another Virginia state agency, a release from the continuation agreement may be obtained, providing that the employing institution reimburses in full by IAT at VHCC.
- B. Educational Assistance for Courses Provided by VHCC (Continuous Learning)
- 1. Course Offerings
 - a. Courses provided under this section must be offered by VHCC and may be a part of a degree program or for professional development.
 - b. Employees who wish to take courses for personal satisfaction may still apply for educational assistance but will not receive priority funding. Additionally, enrollment in personal satisfaction courses shall only occur if there are available seats not currently occupied by students.
 - c. Workforce development courses (courses for which semester credit hours are not awarded) are not eligible under this section.
 - 2. Eligibility
 - a. Full-time instructional faculty, administrative/professional faculty, full-time classified employees, wage employees, and adjunct faculty may take Continuous Learning courses.
 - b. Adjunct faculty must be under contract during the term for which they are requesting a course.
 - c. Wage employees must be employed during the term for which they are requesting a course.
 - d. Wage employees whose primary status is as a student are not eligible for assistance under this section. This is an employment benefit and therefore it is intended to exclude students from eligibility.
 - 3. Program Requirements
 - a. VHCC employees may take continuous learning courses with the cost of tuition and fees waived only at VHCC. Partnership courses are not eligible.
 - b. Employees are responsible to adhere to current academic and registration policies.
 - c. Courses provided under this section must be approved in advance by the employee's supervisor. No more than six (6) credit hours may be taken in a semester including the summer session.
 - d. Twelve-month salaried employees, with the supervisor's prior written approval, may enroll in one 3 credit hour job-related class each semester during regular work hours. Additional classes require an adjustment to the work schedule to fulfill the normal work hours per week.
 - e. The President may approve more than 6 credit hours for the effective and efficient operation of the College.
 - f. An employee who earns a grade of "D", "F", "W", or "U" may not receive continuous learning benefits without the approval of the President.
 - g. An employee who earns a grade of "D", "F", "W", or "U" a second time in any subsequent attempt, whether repeating or taking a different course, may be responsible for paying the cost of the course tuition and fees to the College.

V. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

- A. The College President has the authority and delegates to the President's Cabinet

the responsibility to establish procedures to meet the requirements of this policy.

APPENDIX

VI. RELATED STANDARDS, LEGAL CITATIONS, OR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- A. VCCS Policy 3.10

VII. OPERATING REQUIREMENTS

- A. For educational assistance funding with courses taught at VHCC, the Continuous Learning Request Form must be completed and submitted to the Office of the Vice President of Instruction and Student Services.
- B. For educational assistance funding with outside courses (not taught at VHCC), requests for Professional Growth and Development funds are solicited and submitted annually to the Professional Development Committee for recommendation, contingent on funding in that fiscal year.