

Piedmont Virginia Community

Section VIII – Human Resources/Personnel Policy

VIII – 3.0 Educational Assistance Policy

Policy #:	VIII - 3.0
Effective:	July 1, 2019
Revised:	September 2024
Responsible Dept:	Office of Human Resources

1. PURPOSE

This policy establishes guidelines for educational assistance to support PVCC employees' educational and continuous learning goals.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Educational assistance is neither a guaranteed benefit nor an entitlement of employment at PVCC and is limited by the availability of fund.

3. DEFINITIONS

- **Educational (tuition) assistance:** financial support for approved job-related educational courses, professional certifications, licenses or the acquisition of degrees. Educational courses are offered by external institutions and may include other Virginia community colleges. The financial support shall consist of all or a portion of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. PVCC will fund the first 1/3 of the cost of Fast-forward-eligible certifications.
- **Continuous Learning Courses (Opportunity Knocks)** are credit courses offered at PVCC to employees at no cost (tuition assistance). The courses need not be job-related.

4. PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Continuous Learning Benefit/Tuition Assistance (Opportunity Knocks)

Courses for tuition assistance through the Continuous Learning Benefit (Opportunity Knocks) must be credit courses offered by PVCC. If an employee does not complete a class or receives an unsatisfactory /failing final grade, repayment options shall commence pursuant to the Educational Assistance Policy.

A. Eligibility

- New and current full-time employees, hourly employees with three (3) months of service, and adjunct faculty with one (1) semester of service are eligible to apply for tuition assistance under the Continuous Learning Benefit.
- Adjunct faculty are eligible to apply for tuition assistance for courses taken in any

semester in which they have an active teaching assignment.

- This is an employment benefit and, therefore, is intended to exclude student employees and work-study students from eligibility. Persons whose primary status with PVCC is as a student or who serve in positions designated as student positions are not eligible for Continuous Learning Benefit under this policy.

B. Number of hours

- Eligible employees may take a maximum of six (6) credit hours per semester tuition-free. Additional credits will be paid for by the employee.
- Private instruction (such as vocal or instrumental) is not included.
- Employees not pursuing a degree may not displace regularly enrolled students in any class section. Class sizes will not be increased to allow for employee enrollment. Employees may not register until the first week of class unless they are pursuing a degree.

C. Approval Procedure and Application Deadlines

- Employees must complete the Opportunity Knocks request form and submit it to the immediate supervisor. The immediate supervisor should review requests carefully and consult with Human Resources on eligibility. The approval process proceeds from the immediate supervisor to the appropriate president's staff member. Once approved, the Opportunity Knocks requests are sent to Human Resources. A Human Resources representative will notify the employee that the request has been approved.
- Employees must submit completed request forms to Human Resources by no later than one week in advance of the class start date.

D. Registration

- Employees may register for courses only after receiving notification from Human Resources that the request has been approved. Employees may not register until the first week of class unless they are pursuing a degree.
- Employees will follow PVCC registration guidelines.

E. Documentation

- PeopleSoft will track the courses taken for reporting requirements.
- Opportunity Knocks requests will be maintained in the employee's personnel file.

4.2 Educational Assistance Programs

Meeting eligibility requirements does not guarantee approval for receipt of educational assistance.

A. Program Criteria

1. Requests for educational assistance must be for courses that are job-related or are part of a degree program:
 - Job Related. Education or training to develop knowledge or skills in a new or existing

area of responsibility.

- Degree Requirement. Academic courses taken at regionally accredited institutions that culminate in the granting of a degree.
 - To enable qualified administrative, professional, and teaching faculty to attain advanced degrees to maintain established standards of the college or meet needs that the college has authorized.
 - To enable classified employees to complete degree programs that enhance job performance or support the college's mission.

B. Employee Eligibility for Educational Assistance

1. Full-time classified staff and teaching, professional, and administrative faculty are eligible for financial educational assistance under the policy.
2. Under this policy, new employees have a one-year waiting period for financial educational assistance unless it is in the college's interest that the employee pursue the degree, and the president approves an exception.
3. Educational assistance is an employment benefit; therefore, it is intended to exclude student employees and work-study students from eligibility. Persons whose primary status with PVCC is as a student or who serve in positions designated as student positions are not eligible for financial educational assistance.

C. Financial Assistance

1. Requests for financial assistance must be submitted for each semester.
2. Financial assistance will be limited to six (6) credit hours per semester.
3. The college will support employees on a reimbursement basis for the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for successfully completed coursework as follows:
 - (a) The college will pay the actual cost up to a maximum of \$500 per credit hour for graduate courses and \$250 per credit hour for undergraduate courses.
 - (b) The maximum amount for financial assistance is \$5,250 per year (for the fall, spring, and summer semesters combined). This amount will be modified if IRS taxability limits change.
 - (c) No assistance will be provided for expenses other than tuition and mandatory fees (i.e., no assistance is provided for books, supplies, travel, or other related costs). Mandatory fees are included in the annual financial assistance limit.
4. Financial assistance will be awarded on a reimbursement basis, subject to:
 - (a) The satisfactory completion of the course. Satisfactory completion requires a "C" or higher grade for undergraduate courses and a "B" or higher grade for graduate courses. If a letter grade is not awarded for an undergraduate or graduate credit course, the designation of "Passed" is sufficient.
 - (b) Submission of the grade report, and
 - (c) A paid receipt verifying the cost to the employee.

D. Approval Procedure and Application Deadlines

1. Employees must complete the PVCC Educational Assistance Request form to request approval from their immediate supervisor for educational assistance. The immediate supervisor should review requests carefully and consult with the Human Resources Department on eligibility before approving the request.

Supervisors then forward requests to the appropriate president's staff /Cabinet member and President for approval.

2. Completed forms, including anticipated courses and costs, should be forwarded to Human Resources **no later than the following dates:**

- **Fall Semester: July 1**
- **Spring Semester: December 1**
- **Summer Semester: May 1**

Any course or cost changes following submission of the form should be shared with Human Resources as soon as possible.

Employees are limited to not more than six (6) credit hours of coursework per semester for educational assistance. The president may approve coursework over six (6) credit hours, provided it is in the interest of the college's effective and efficient operation.

3. The employee must submit documentation of acceptance to a degree-granting program, including the entire program requirements, from an accredited institution if the class is part of a degree requirement.
4. The course must be job-related as determined by the immediate supervisor for classes not part of a degree program.
5. The approval process goes from the immediate supervisor to the appropriate president's staff member to the president. The immediate supervisor and president's staff member decide whether to make a recommendation to the president for approval of the request. If a recommendation is not made, the reason must be stated.
6. The college will notify the employee in writing of the costs to be covered. The Human Resources Department will return copies of the requests and related documentation to employees. The original documents will be maintained in the employee's personnel file.

*** Note: Submission of the Educational Assistance Request Form does not indicate approval. You will receive written notification upon approval of the request.**

7. Educational and training commitments should be reflected in the annual performance planning and evaluation documents agreed to by the supervisor and employee each year.

E. Work Hours

1. Courses may not be taken during work hours if available during the employee's non-work hours.
2. For courses offered only during work hours, the employee's supervisor can approve or

disapprove the course or require that it be taken outside of work hours. If courses are approved during work hours, the employee must use appropriate leave or, if approved by their supervisor, flex their weekly work hours to make up the time.

3. For non-exempt classified employees, time spent in classes during regular work hours is considered hours of work for computing any overtime liability unless leave is used.
4. Faculty are required to ensure that courses do not conflict with teaching and college responsibilities.

F. Payment

Employees pay the required tuition and fees and are reimbursed for the costs when the course is completed, and appropriate documentation is submitted.

G. Additional Conditions

1. Employees receiving educational assistance for a degree/award or educational professional plan are required to repay the pro-rata portion of the cost if they leave employment at PVCC within one (1) year of course completion.
2. For employees receiving tuition assistance for a PVCC course, no repayment is required upon termination of employment.

H. Taxes

Consistent with current IRS guidelines, educational assistance reimbursements for expenses up to \$5,250 in a calendar year are not taxable.

5. EXCEPTIONS

Exceptions to this policy will be made only by the president.