

**SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

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**HR004.00 Tuition Assistance Program Policy and Procedures**

**EFFECTIVE:** July 1, 2008

**APPLIES TO:** All South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) Workforce Members

**POLICY**

This policy sets forth the guidelines under which employees of the Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) may apply to be reimbursed for educational expenses associated with tuition and associated fees. The Department's Office of Human Resources will administer the Tuition Assistance Program in accordance with the guidelines and procedures of this policy. All eligible employees will be granted equal access to the Tuition Assistance Program regardless of age, race, religion, gender, national origin, disability, or political affiliation in accordance with Federal and State law.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Tuition Assistance Program is to allow employees of the Department to enhance their education in order to build a stronger workforce in support of the Department's mission.

**4.01 Eligibility**

- A. Only employees in full time equivalent, temporary grant and time-limited project positions with at least one year of satisfactory service with the Department may be eligible for tuition assistance.
- B. Tuition assistance will only be provided to employees who attend accredited institutions of higher learning offering courses within South Carolina and are

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accepted for admission to those institutions. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) must recognize the institutions of higher learning. *Appendix A* provides the listing of regional accrediting bodies for colleges and universities in the United States that are recognized by the CHEA.

- C. Courses must be directly related either to the employee's position, a position within the Department to which the employee could reasonably attain, or a part of a planned degree program in a field specifically related to the overall mission of the Department. **To apply, the employee should complete the Tuition Assistance Application and Agreement in its entirety.**
1. Upon application, the employee must provide the following additional information:
    - a. A detailed justification as to how the course directly relates to their current job requirements or to career development opportunities within the Department;
    - b. A copy of the course description and/or how it relates to the relevant degree program; and
    - c. A copy of the course schedule for the relevant academic term.
  2. Courses must be taken for academic credit but do not have to be taken toward the completion of a degree. Undergraduate and graduate courses are both eligible for assistance through this program. Courses of study could include web-based courses or distance learning programs as long as the institution is accredited and the courses are offered within South Carolina.
  3. The Department has the sole discretion to determine whether a course is job related or enhances the performance or promotional potential of an applicant.
- D. Employees must be in good standing with the Department for no less than one year to be considered for the program. An employee who is in progressive discipline, a warning notice of substandard performance or similar circumstances is not eligible to participate in this program.
1. Any employee who has received a disciplinary action or placed under warning notice of substandard performance will not be eligible to receive tuition assistance for two years from the date of the action.

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2. Any employee who has been approved for tuition assistance and subsequently receives disciplinary action or placed under a warning notice of substandard performance will not receive tuition reimbursement for the course currently enrolled. In addition, the employee would not be eligible to participate in the Tuition Assistance Program for two years from the date of the action.
- E. Employees who are in leave without pay status are not eligible for the Tuition Assistance Program. Employees who are approved for tuition assistance and subsequently enter into a leave without pay status due to a temporary disability, Family Medical Leave, Military duty, or Worker's Compensation may continue to participate through the academic term in which they entered into leave without pay status.
- F. Tuition assistance is not available to employees receiving allowances including but not limited to monetary allowances such as the G.I. Bill (officially titled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944), scholarships, grants-in-aid, or work-study programs from any other official sources. Student loans or other programs that require money to be paid back will not disqualify employees from eligibility for tuition assistance. Acceptance of tuition reimbursement through this program when receiving other forms of assistance is grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.

### 4.02. **Scheduling**

- A. Employees who participate in the program are required to work the normal number of hours in their regular workweek. The workweek for full-time employees shall not be less than thirty-seven and one-half (37.50) hours per week. Employees must work at least thirty (30.00) hours per week to be eligible for the program.
- B. Employees are encouraged to schedule classes during off-duty hours, whenever possible. When a class cannot be scheduled during off-duty hours, the supervisor, at their discretion may accommodate or adjust the employee's schedule. Such adjustments must not interfere with the services of the Department.
1. Employees must obtain written approval in advance for an adjusted work

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schedule.

2. Supervisors may choose to work with the employee to allow them to adjust schedules, use an alternate work schedule, or use annual leave to accommodate class schedules.
3. Leave without pay and sick leave may not be used as an option to accommodate course attendance.
4. The employee's work schedule may be changed at any point by the supervisor for cause to include, but not limited to, changes in personnel requirements, changes in work demands, changes in supervision, disciplinary actions, or failure to adhere to the agreed schedule.
5. The Work Schedule Agreement Form must be completed and approved by the supervisor before an employee begins an adjusted work schedule. A copy of the employee's relevant class schedule should be attached to the Work Schedule Agreement.
6. Educational activities cannot be performed during work hours or interfere with work activities. Equipment and/or supplies of the Department are not to be used to work on course assignments including but not limited to computers, printer, copier, paper, pencils, e-mail, etc.

### **4.03 Program Provisions**

- A. Tuition and lab fees will be reimbursed up to \$2,000 per fiscal year (July 1 through June 30) or a maximum of three courses per fiscal year whichever is lower. Tuition Assistance may be provided for no more than six credit hours per academic term per employee or twelve credit hours per fiscal year per employee. This is always contingent upon the availability of funds and the number of applicants each term.
- B. Books, application fees and other lab fees are not reimbursable unless the Department requires the employee to take the course.
- C. Labs assigned credit hours as part of a required class are considered one course with the class for the purposes of this program.
- D. Reimbursement is limited by the availability of funds and is not guaranteed by

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approval of course(s).

- E. An employee of the Department who participates in the Tuition Assistance Program must remain in the employ of the Department for one calendar year after the most recent effective date of the reimbursement payment.
  - 1. If an employee leaves the Department for any reason, voluntarily or involuntarily, before the allotted time period has been worked, the employee will be responsible for repayment of the entire tuition assistance reimbursement made within their last calendar year of employment.
  - 2. Any employee, who leaves employment of the agency voluntarily or involuntarily and does not reimburse the Department for the reimbursement amount, will be turned over to the credit bureau for enforcement of collections.
- F. Employees are required to responsibly comply with the policies and procedures of the Department in order to participate in the Tuition Assistance Program.

### **4.04 Procedures**

- A. All requests for tuition assistance must be in writing on the Tuition Assistance Application and Agreement to the Department's Office of Human Resources **no less than fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the beginning of the course.**
- B. The Department's Office of Human Resources will not accept applications after the deadline of fifteen calendar days prior to the beginning of the course.
- C. Applications will be approved for one academic term at a time and will be considered in order of receipt.
- D. All applications are subject to approval by the Department's Director of Human Resources or designee. Denials may not be appealed, grieved or reconsidered. Denial of tuition assistance may include but is not limited to staffing, budgetary considerations, lack of job relevancy, poor performance, or disciplinary action.
- E. Participation in the Tuition Assistance Program will **not** be subject to appeal or review outside the Department. Selection will be non-discriminatory and contingent upon the information presented.
- F. Prior to submission to the Office of Human Resources, employees must ensure

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the Tuition Assistance Application and Agreement is complete, including all supporting documentation and all supervisory approvals.

1. Employees must sign the contractual agreement portion of the application stating their understanding of the requirements and obligations of the program before consideration.
  2. Before the application is submitted to the Department's Office of Human Resources for consideration, it must be pre-approved by the employee's supervisor and Bureau Chief.
  3. Employees must submit a description of the coursework with an explanation or justification as to the relevant nature of the subject matter to their position.
  4. The forms must be completed in detail and the required signatures obtained before the request will be considered. All forms are located on the Department's intranet and available to all employees twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
- G. The employee will be informed by e-mail when the application is approved. The employee may then register for the course and pay the tuition fees or payment.
- H. In order to receive reimbursement for coursework, employees must submit official proof of a passing grade and official receipts for tuition and other fees to the Department's Office of Human Resources.
1. Employees must earn a grade of "C" or above for undergraduate courses and "B" or above for graduate courses. Courses taken on a pass/fail basis must be passed. An original grade report must be submitted to the Office of Human Resources no later than thirty (30) calendar days after completion of the course.
  2. A receipt of payment to the respective institution must be submitted to Human Resources to receive a reimbursement.
  3. Employees must be able to verify they have received no additional monetary allowances as mentioned above.
  4. Employees who drop a course are required to notify the Director of Human Resources or designee. Dropped or withdrawn courses are not eligible for reimbursement.

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5. No reimbursements will be considered without proper completion of the application prior to the start of the coursework and complete verification of course completion with the passing grade.
- I. Tuition assistance will be provided after a course is completed and is subject to availability of funds.
- J. Only funds authorized within the grant or time-limited project may be used to pay a temporary grant or time-limited project employee's salary and benefits. Approval for the Department's tuition assistance program for those employees is subject to funding availability.
- K. The Tuition Assistance Program will only assist in the cost of a course and lab fees. The cost of books, equipment, supplies and other fees will not be paid.

### **4.05 Responsibilities**

- A. An employee of the Department who participates in the Tuition Assistance Program must remain in the employ of the Department for one calendar year after the most recent effective date of the reimbursement payment.
  1. If an employee leaves the Department for any reason before the allotted time period has been worked, the employee will be responsible for repayment of the entire tuition assistance reimbursement made within their last calendar year of employment.
  2. Should a temporary grant or time-limited position lose funding, tuition reimbursement may not be approved.
  3. Any employee, who leaves employment of the agency voluntarily or involuntarily and does not reimburse the Department for the reimbursement amount, will be turned over to the credit bureau for enforcement of collections.
- B. The application for tuition assistance, with the signed agreement, must be submitted and approved by the Department's Office of Human Resources no less than fifteen (15) calendar days before the start of the course or academic term.
- C. If an employee drops the course or receives a grade less than a "C" on an undergraduate course or a "B" on a graduate course, no reimbursement will be

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made for the course.

- D. An official copy of the course grade must be submitted no later than thirty (30) calendar days after course completion. Late submission of grades forfeits reimbursement for the coursework.
- E. Resources received from the Tuition Assistance Program may be subject to Federal and State taxes. Each employee who receives tuition assistance is responsible for reporting any such tax consequences.
- F. Employees who terminate employment for any reason voluntarily or involuntarily before receiving previously approved tuition reimbursement under the program will not receive the reimbursement.
- G. This policy cancels and supersedes the Tuition Assistance Policy issued on October 24, 2002. All applications for tuition assistance submitted on or after July 1, 2008 will be administered in accordance with this policy.
- H. This policy was developed in accordance with the guidelines provided by the South Carolina Budget and Control Board's Office of Human Resources.

### **4.06 Definitions**

- A. Full Time Equivalent Employee - Any person in the service of an agency in a full time equivalent position who receives compensation from the agency and where the agency has the right to control and direct the employee in how the work is performed.
- B. Office of Human Resources - An office of the Department responsible for personnel administration for full time equivalent employees, temporary grant employees, state temporary employees, interns, and volunteers.
- C. Temporary Grant Employee – A full-time employee who does not occupy a full time equivalent position and is hired to fill a position specified in and funded by a federal grant, public charity grant, private foundation grant or research grant and who is not a covered employee. Temporary grant employees are expected to comply with the Department's policies and procedures, failure to do so will be cause for appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

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- D. Time-Limited Project Employee - A full-time or part-time employee who does not occupy a full time equivalent position who is hired to fill a position with time-limited project funding approved or authorized by the appropriate State authority, and who is not a covered employee. Time limited project employees are expected to comply with the Department's policies and procedures, failure to do so will be cause for appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

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### APPENDIX A

**The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognizes the following Regional Accrediting bodies for colleges and universities in the United States. Tuition reimbursement will be provided for schools that meet accreditation by these bodies.**

#### **Regional Accreditation:**

- **Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools:** (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, U. S. Virgin Islands, Central America, Europe, and the Middle East)
- **New England Association of Schools and Colleges:** (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East)
- **North Central Association of Colleges and Schools:** (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Navajo Nation, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, south Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and International locations)
- **Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges:** (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington)
- **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools:** (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin America)
- **Western Association of Schools and Colleges:** (California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Palau, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Marshall Islands, and other Australasian locations)