

# **Tarrant County**

## **Tuition Reimbursement Program**

### **I. Purpose**

In order to enhance the qualifications and improve the productivity of County employees, motivate employees to improve their job-related knowledge and skills, and encourage the hiring, retention and promotion of qualified, well-trained personnel, it is the policy of Tarrant County to provide a program for tuition reimbursement to eligible employees. The Commissioners Court believes that the County, the employee, and the taxpayers will benefit from expanding employees' educational, professional, and vocational development under appropriate circumstances.

### **II. Scope**

The Tuition Reimbursement Program is designed to encourage County employees to improve their skills and job performance by enrolling in post-secondary courses which are related to their assigned responsibilities. The program is subject to the availability of funds as appropriated by the Commissioners Court through the annual budget process.

### **III. Administration**

- A. The Director of Human Resources, under the supervision of the County Administrator, shall supervise the implementation of this program, including implementation of all necessary forms for the administration of the Tuition Reimbursement Program.
- B. Tuition reimbursement funds will be appropriated on a fiscal year basis. The Director of Human Resources shall attempt to ensure the availability of funds throughout the year. As such, the Director of Human Resources shall take into account the need to reserve funds for subsequent semesters as part of the decision to approve or reject an application. Funding approved by the Commissioners Court for the fiscal year beginning October 1, will apply to educational courses beginning subsequent to that date. The Director of Human Resources may approve requests for reimbursements that exceed the amount appropriated for tuition reimbursement.

### **IV. Guidelines**

- A. All regular full-time non-probationary County employees -- unless made ineligible by the rules below -- are eligible to participate in the Tuition Reimbursement Program. Employees must complete the initial probationary period as defined by Civil Service Rules. Subsequent probationary periods resulting from an employee transfer to another department will not affect eligibility to participate in the tuition reimbursement program (i.e. the initial probationary period satisfies the policy requirement.)

An employee can register for a course prior to the completion of the probationary period if the first day of class occurs on a date that is at least 180 days after the employee's hire date.

- B. Employees receiving financial assistance from sources such as GI Bill, Veteran's programs, scholarships, grants, or other subsidies are eligible for the Tuition Reimbursement Program; however, reimbursement will be limited to those amounts not covered by these sources.

Student loans are eligible for reimbursement under this policy.

- C. The completion of a course or a degree does not obligate the County to promote the employee to a position with a higher pay grade or to a different position. The benefits derived from the successful completion of coursework may be considered by the hiring authority when opportunities for advancement do occur.
- D. Any employee who resigns, is terminated (voluntarily or involuntarily), or retires prior to completion of a course shall not receive tuition reimbursement.
- E. Elected Officials are not eligible for tuition reimbursement.
- F. The County is under no obligation to allow employees to take a course during work hours. If the approved course is available only during work hours, the following procedure may be applied:

1) With prior approval of the Elected Official or Department Head, the employee may use vacation leave, personal leave, or leave without pay in order to attend the class.

2) Work schedules may be rearranged with prior approval of the Elected Official or Department Head.

3) The County will not compensate employees, or make allowances for tardiness resulting from participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program.

- G. Applications will be approved for specific courses for the current semester/term. Any changes in course schedule should be submitted within ten (10) days of the registration date.

Employees enrolled in special programs (such as cohorts) having a fixed schedule of coursework, may submit one application along with a schedule of classes at the beginning of the program. A degree plan must also be included. Special programs tuition will be reimbursed according to the published University of Texas @ Arlington graduate tuition rate schedule.

- H. All grade reports and receipts may be held until the final cut-off date for submission at the end of the semester. A total budget impact will be calculated for the semester. When the amount of the tuition reimbursement requests exceeds the available resources, the available funding will be divided by the number of approved applications. Reimbursements will be made on a pro-rated basis.
- I. Reimbursement for courses at private institutions will be limited to an amount equal to the tuition rate charged by the University of Texas at Arlington for a Texas resident.

- J. The Internal Revenue Service has established an annual limit on the amount of tuition reimbursement funds that may be earned without taxation of employee income. When this limit is exceeded, income tax will be deducted from the employee's pay. It is the responsibility of the employee to track income derived from tuition reimbursement.

**V. Course Eligibility**

- A. Courses which meet the following criteria will be eligible for reimbursement.
- 1) Relates directly to the duties of the position currently held by the employee; or
  - 2) Enhances job effectiveness/performance; or
  - 3) Relates to the duties of a position to which the employee may reasonably be expected to advance within the County; or
  - 4) Is required for -- or may be used to meet the requirements for -- a degree in a subject directly related to a job or position that is included in Tarrant County's Table of Organization; and
  - 5) Is offered by a regionally accredited junior college, college, university, technical, or trade school. This includes courses offered virtually (online).
- B. A minimum grade of "C" in undergraduate courses or "B" in graduate courses, is required in order to receive reimbursement.
- C. A maximum of eight (8) courses per calendar year may be submitted for reimbursement.
- D. An employee will not be eligible to repeat courses for which he/she has previously received tuition reimbursement except for courses, such as a seminar for college credit, in which the content changes substantially and for which the institution itself grants credits for subsequent completion.
- E. Review, audit, and continuing education courses are not eligible for reimbursement. Continuing education courses for which a letter grade is awarded are eligible for reimbursement.
- F. Seminars, review, or continuing education courses which result in professional certification are not eligible for reimbursement.
- G. Courses offered via internet access from accredited colleges, universities, and trade schools will be eligible for reimbursement if all other qualifying criteria are in place. The course must be completed within the allotted semester.

- H. To qualify for doctoral course reimbursement, an employee must document and affirm the selection of a County career path which requires doctoral coursework completion. Doctoral course reimbursement requests will be reviewed and approved by the Director of Human Resources.
- I. Standard course credit hour values will be one hour, two hours, three hours, or four hours. Courses taken at institutions using variations of these standard values require translation into a standard value before reimbursement is calculated.

## **VII. Reimbursement Rates/Schedule**

- A. The Director of Human Resources or designee, will establish tuition rates for graduate and undergraduate hours as of September 1 each year based on rates charged by the University of Texas at Arlington. Students will be reimbursed at these rates or actual rates, whichever is less. If it becomes necessary to prorate funds, anticipated reimbursement will be reduced.

Reimbursement is calculated based on credit hours registered at the beginning of the semester. Flat rate charges are deemed to include tuition and fees; consequently, tuition costs will be calculated and employees will be reimbursed for tuition only.

- B. Other fees and expenses are specifically excluded from reimbursement. These fees include, but are not limited to: Registration Fees, Late Fees, Change of Class Fees, Parking Fees, Books and Supplies, Transcript Fees, Deposits, Uniform Fees, Photo ID Fees, Health Insurance Fees, Room and/or Board, Laboratory or Other Similar Supplemental Fees, and Travel related expenses.
- C. The maximum reimbursement per employee will be based on the grade received. An “A” will result in 100% reimbursement, and a “B” will result in 80% reimbursement. For undergraduate courses, a grade of “C” will result in 70% reimbursement and no reimbursement for graduate courses. Grades below “C” will not be reimbursed.
- D. Grades other than standard letter grades (such as P or S) are not acceptable for reimbursement. It will be responsibility of the employee to have the grade translated into a standard letter grade (A, B, C) by the professor. E-mail correspondence from the professor should come from a recognized college/university e-mail account. Failure to obtain a standard letter grade will result in no reimbursement.
- E. Reimbursement for non-traditional terms (6, 8, 10 weeks as an example) will be reimbursed as outlined in Section VII.

## **VIII. Applications and End of Term Documentation**

### **Before the Term**

- A. The application form and supporting documentation must be submitted to the Human Resources Department at 100 E. Weatherford Street, Fort Worth, Texas. Applications and supporting documentation must be submitted no later than the beginning date of the term. The first day of class is considered the beginning date. Should the calendar due date fall on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, the cutoff date will roll to the next regular business day, 5:00 p.m.
- B. Employees shall submit the application form, including a description of the employee's career goals and how the course directly relates to those goals or how the course will enhance the employee's skills / knowledge. Employees must submit: 1) a copy of the course description from the class syllabus or college catalog, 2) a document showing the starting and ending dates and ending dates for the class, and 3) a copy of the employee's current job description. The employee's job description may be omitted from applications subsequent to the first application, unless the employee changes positions. If that occurs, a new job description must be included with future submissions.
- C. Employees pursuing a degree will submit a degree plan with the first application. Courses listed on subsequent applications must match those on the degree plan.
- D. The Director or designee shall notify applicants concerning the status of their application. A denial of an application may be appealed to the County Administrator.

### **End of the Term**

- A. Receipts or Proof of payment for tuition must be itemized by the school showing tuition, fees, scholarships, grants, etc. separately. Credit card and other receipts showing lump sum amounts are not acceptable. The tuition rate will be determined by the University of Texas @ Arlington tuition rate schedule. This rate will be established by September 1 each year and remain at that rate for the fiscal year.
- B. Submission of receipts and grades will be no later than thirty days following the last class date. Should the due date fall on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, the cutoff date will roll to the next regular business day, 5:00 p.m.
- C. Documents submitted for reimbursement must be legible and clearly show the grade and the amount of the tuition. It is the responsibility of the employee to assure that these documents are legible and printable.
- D. Failure to submit required documentation by the deadline dates will disqualify the employee for reimbursement for that term.

## **IX. Revocation of Benefit**

Employees who terminate their employment with the County within two years of the last class day of the course(s) taken shall reimburse the County for those course(s) upon termination of employment. The amount owed will be withheld from the employee's final payroll disbursement in an effort to fully reimburse the County. Such withholdings will be made and may result in the net pay being zero. If there remains an outstanding balance, the County will pursue the remaining amount in the form of a promissory note. Unresolved balances will be referred to the Criminal District Attorney's Office for further action.

Employees whose jobs are eliminated while participating in tuition reimbursement shall not be subject to the Revocation of Benefit clause.