



TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

No. **03-06**

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(Rev. 17 Nov 2006)

Authorized by

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These Administrative Procedures accompany Commission Administrative Practice 2-31: Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), effective November 17, 2006. These Administrative Procedures outline the responsibilities of the departments and employees, the program criteria and eligibility requirements, and the application process for the Tuition Assistance Program. These Administrative Procedures were first implemented October 15, 2003. The Procedures were updated July 29, 2005, to clarify program requirements and the application/review process for use of the tuition benefit. These Procedures were updated November 17, 2006, to implement higher tuition reimbursement maximums.

Criteria for Tuition Assistance Program

- A. The Commission provides tuition assistance for courses based on the following criteria:
1. "A" priority is assigned to courses taken that enable employees to perform more effectively in their present jobs. A course that meets these criteria will be funded first.
 2. "B" priority is assigned to courses taken that prepare employees for career development or different responsibilities in the Commission. A course that meets these criteria will be funded second.
- B. Tuition assistance is available to Merit System career employees. On a semester/session basis, employees may request either the full fiscal year maximum amount or a partial amount (total requests not to exceed the fiscal year maximum) for which they are eligible. While employees are permitted to request per semester/session, the maximum fiscal year benefit for which they are eligible, such requests shall be considered in conjunction with budgetary limits established by the departments for the semester/session. Total fiscal year request may not exceed the total maximum amounts established for a fiscal year.

The current fiscal year maximums that may be available to employees are as follows:

- ❖ Full-time Merit System career employees may receive up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for fiscal year 2007, one thousand one hundred dollars (\$1,100) for fiscal year 2008, and one thousand two hundred dollars (\$1,200) for fiscal year 2009.
- ❖ Part-time Merit System career employees may receive up to five hundred dollars (\$500) for fiscal year 2007, five hundred fifty dollar (\$550) for fiscal year 2008, and six hundred dollars (\$600) for fiscal year 2009.

Responsibilities

- A. Department Heads or designees are responsible for:
1. Approving tuition assistance applications;
 2. Designating whether the course is "A" or "B" priority and noting the priority on the form;
 3. Assuring that tuition assistance requests are approved consistent with Administrative Practice 2-31;
 4. Funding the individual applications for the tuition assistance;
 5. Assuring that check requests are prepared for approved applications for tuition assistance;
 6. Indicating on the Application for Tuition Assistance form whether the check is to be made payable to the educational institution, or directly to the employee as reimbursement for the tuition costs already paid by the employee;
 7. Monitoring the activities of the Tuition Assistance Program on a regular basis, including the expenditure of the program funds; and
 8. Reporting to the Executive Director, annually, the level of participation in the program during each fiscal year.
- B. Supervisors are responsible for:
1. Reviewing applications for Tuition Assistance;
 2. Making a recommendation to approve or not approve the applications; and
 3. Forwarding recommendations to the Department Head or designee.
 4. Initiating recovery of Tuition Assistance funds when repayment is required pursuant to the Administrative Practice and Procedures for the Tuition Assistance Program.
- C. Employee participants in the Tuition Assistance Program are responsible for:
1. Completing the Application for Tuition Assistance and submitting all copies to the supervisor for recommendation in time to meet the required deadline dates (see "Application Process" below);

2. Reporting course grades to the Department Head or designee by submitting official transcripts within sixty (60) calendar days of the end of the semester or session; and
3. If applicable, repayment of tuition for courses as outlined in these Administrative Procedures and as stated in the executed (signed) CONTRACT AGREEMENT.
4. Understanding that tuition assistance received as authorized by Administrative Practice 2-31: Tuition Assistance Program may have individual tax implications under the Internal Revenue Codes.

D. The Finance Department is responsible for:

1. Receiving and processing check requests from department to fund the Tuition Assistance Program.
2. Conducting internal audits to measure compliance with the Tuition Assistance Program.

E. The Department of Human Resources and Management is responsible for:

1. Ensuring that use of the program is consistent with Practice 2-31: Tuition Assistance Program and these Procedures.
2. Receiving the Application for Tuition Assistance along with the course grades from the departments, and filing these in the employee's personnel file.

Eligibility Requirements

A. Eligible employees may be approved to participate in the program on the condition that the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The employee's educational objectives must be compatible with the purposes of the program;
2. Funds must be available; and
3. If applicable, the employee must successfully complete (with proof of a passing grade) any previously department-funded TAP Courses, and repay any funds expended for incomplete or failed courses, unless the refund is waived by the Department Head.
4. Courses must be taken during off duty hours to prevent interruption to the Commission's work program. In certain instances, the Department Head or designee may grant administrative leave to permit employee attendance at a course during work hours.

5. Employees receiving Veterans Administration or other governmental educational benefits for a given course of study are ineligible to receive duplicate benefits under the Tuition Assistance Program. Employees eligible for governmental educational benefits are urged to use those resources. The Commission will pay the difference between the amount of benefits due from such government educational assistance programs and the total amount of authorized expenses, not to exceed the fiscal year maximum for which they are eligible.

Application and Approval Process

A. Application to Participate in the Tuition Assistance Program

1. The employee is responsible for selecting the appropriate courses and following the institution's admission procedures. Any commitment made to an education or training institution by an employee without prior approval of the Department Head is exclusively the employee's responsibility.
2. To apply, an employee must complete three (3) copies of the Application for Tuition Assistance form (sample copy attached); indicate a choice of method of payment for tuition assistance; attach the schedule of course fees and course description to the form; and, send all copies to their supervisor. The supervisor makes a recommendation to approve or not approve the request and forwards all copies of the form to the Department Head or designee.
3. The employee may select one (1) of the following methods for payment of tuition assistance.
 - a. A check that is made payable to the institution for the employee to present at registration.
 - b. A reimbursement check that is made payable to the employee who has paid the tuition. If this method is followed, the applicant must send their Department a copy of verification of payment.
 - c. A letter authorizing the institution to bill the employee's department for the tuition fee consistent with the appropriate fiscal year maximums, (see previous section titled *Criteria for Tuition Assistance Program*), only if the applicant cannot meet the walk-in registration date.
4. To allow sufficient time for the Department Head or designee to assess the application and course priority and for preparation of the tuition check request in time for registration, applications must be received by the Department by the following deadlines:

SESSION

Fall Semester (Fall Quarter)	August 1
Spring Semester (Winter/Spring Quarter)	December 1
First, Second or subsequent Summer Sessions	May 1

5. Employees will be notified by the Department Head or designee in writing if the application request has been approved or denied. Employees should receive this notification within one month of the deadline. If the request has been denied, the employee will be informed of the reasons for the denial. The Department Head or designee will forward one copy of the approved application request to the Finance Department, with supporting documentation, for processing, one copy of the approved application request will be returned to the employee accompanied by a check or a letter of intent from the Commission; and one copy will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

B. Submission of Grades to Department and Department of Human Resources and Management / Human Resources Division.

1. The TAP participant must submit their grade(s) to his/her Department Head or designee within sixty (60) days of completion of the course. The Department Head or designee will record and maintain the grades of the TAP participant. If a grade is unavailable for submission within the sixty (60) day period, the employee must submit proof of course completion (i.e., a letter from the intuition stating that the employee has completed the course) until the grade is obtained. Further funds will not be granted for other courses until the student has shown satisfactory completion of the course or repaid the Commission for funds expended. After grades have been submitted to the department showing satisfactory completion of a funded course, the Application for Tuition Assistance and grade must be forwarded to the Department of Human Resources and Management / Human Resources Division for filing in the employee's Official Personnel File.

C. Failing and Incomplete Grades and Withdrawals

1. An employee who fails or withdraws from a TAP-funded course shall be required to repay the Department for funds expended. In the case of failure or withdrawal, the Department Head may waive all or some portion of the repayment only if there are significant, documented extenuating circumstances. An employee who finds that it is impossible to continue in a TAP-funded course should follow the institution's prescribed course withdrawal procedure and immediately notify the Department of this action.
2. An employee who receives an "incomplete" in a course paid for under the Tuition Assistance Program will not qualify for subsequent funding until a passing grade is earned in the course or repayment is made to the Commission, unless such action is waived by the Department Head because of extenuating circumstances. [Note: An exception may exist in the case of an individual in graduate school preparing a thesis or dissertation. Under such circumstances, an "I" may merely indicate that preparation of the thesis is ongoing, and the "incomplete" rule described above does not apply.]

3. An employee who leaves the Commission before completion of a TAP-funded course or within one year after completion of a TAP-funded course will be required to repay the Commission for tuition assistance funds expended on the employee's behalf, unless waived by the Department Head. If an employee is required to repay the Commission, the Department Head will initiate whatever action is deemed appropriate to recover the expended funds.

D. Employee Liability

1. Failure to comply with any or all of the provisions of this Administrative Practice and contract agreement may result in one or more of the following:
 - a. Action by the Commission to recover all monies expended by the Commission for TAP- funded courses through payroll deduction, as appropriate;
 - b. Legal action by the Commission to recover expended monies by the Commission for employees who have left the Commission under the conditions described above; and/or
 - c. Disciplinary action by the Commission consistent with the Merit System Rules and Regulations' chapter on Discipline.

Attachment:
Application for Tuition Assistance Form