



**Revision Responsibility:** Executive Director of Human Resources

**Responsible Executive Officer:** President

**Source/Reference:** [TBR Guideline P-130](#)

## **PURPOSE**

To identify the educational assistance programs available to Columbia State Community College employees for the purpose of career (job related) development as well as individual professional development, to establish funding limits for the programs and procedures for accessing the funds and programs.

## **POLICY**

Financial support for educational activities for eligible employees may be available through the following programs. Complete eligibility information, criteria, conditions, and benefits provided under each program are described in TBR Guideline P-130.

### **I. Fee Waiver Program**

The Fee Waiver Program, outlined in TBR Guideline P-130, is not subject to Columbia State funding availability.

- A. The program is available for regular and temporary, full-time and part-time employees of the College. (See paragraph I.E. for part-time employee provisions.)
- B. Enrollment is limited to available space with the intent that a tuition-paying student shall not be denied enrollment by an employee using a fee waiver. (Note: Employees must verify and comply with admission and enrollment policies of the institution to be attended.)
- C. This program is to be used prior to other forms of educational assistance, including the Tuition Reimbursement Program.
- D. This program can be utilized for one (1) credit course, not to exceed four (4) credit hours, graduate or undergraduate, which includes maintenance fees, registration fees, tuition, debt service fees, technology access fees, online course fees, RODP fees, and service charges.
  - 1. There is a limit of one course (normally for-credit, but available for audit) per term and a maximum of four (4) terms per year. (For the purposes of the Fee Waiver Program, a term is defined as any period of time in which a student may receive a grade for completion of a course.)

2. Employees are responsible for special course fees, books and supplies, application fees, applied music fees, lab fees, off-campus facility fees, parking fees, traffic fines, and similar fees.
  3. Fees will not be waived for programs for which part-time or course-by-course enrollment is prohibited as determined by the institutions, or where costs exceed regular for-credit courses. Examples include, but are not limited to, programs of law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine.
- E. Fee Waiver for Part-time Employees
1. Definitions of Employment Categories
    - a. Regular Part-Time Employees: All personnel ( exempt, academic, and non-exempt) who are employed on a continuing basis, expected to exceed one year, and who have a regular work week of less than 37.5 hours, or who are scheduled to carry less than a full teaching load or its equivalent. Regular part-time employees include part-time MODFY (modified fiscal year) employees. Regular part-time employees are eligible for prorated benefits.
    - b. Temporary Employees: All personnel whose initial period of appointment or expected service is less than one year. This definition should not be confused with employees who are designated as probationary employees, who may be regular full-time or part-time employees, and who are entitled to all leave benefits of such employees.
    - c. Student Workers: All personnel whose primary purpose for being at the institution is to be enrolled in an academic program of the institution.
  2. Eligibility
    - a. Regular and temporary employees are eligible for waiver if considered to be active.
    - b. Part-time faculty are eligible for fee waivers for Columbia State courses.
    - c. Temporary employees employed by a staffing firm or agency and student workers are not eligible for fee waiver.
  3. Enrollment Requirements for Eligible Employees
    - a. The employees may utilize the fee waiver to enroll in one (1) course per term at Columbia State, not to exceed four (4) credit hours or 120 clock hours.
    - b. The employee must satisfy all admission requirements of the College.

- c. The employee is responsible for fees, other than maintenance fees, associated with their enrollment and attendance.

4. All other provisions of the Fee Waiver Program shall apply to this section.

## II. Columbia State Professional Development Process

The following programs outlined in TBR Guideline P-130 are programs provided by Columbia State as professional development and are subject to Columbia State funding availability. All assistance programs under this category must be job related.

### A. Faculty and Staff Tuition Reimbursement Program

The purpose of the program is to encourage employees to develop skills and knowledge.

1. The program is designed to provide assistance for employees who take credit courses in a degree program while continuing work responsibilities.
2. The program should be used in an employee's pursuit of a degree that is judged by the College, in its sole discretion, to be beneficial to the Institution.
3. The Columbia State program is designed to provide maintenance or tuition-related fees for a maximum of six (6) credit hours per term, with a maximum of four (4) terms per year.
  - a. Tuition-related fees may include maintenance fees, registration fees, tuition, debt service fees, technology access fees, online course fees, RODP fees, service charges and incidental fees payable at the time of registration.
  - b. Employees are responsible for required deposits, special course fees, books and supplies, application fees, applied music fees, lab fees, off-campus facility fees, parking fees, traffic fines, and similar fees.
4. Maximum reimbursement for any course is determined by the prevailing rates for tuition and maintenance fees for regular courses at the Tennessee public institution attended. Reimbursement for other than Tennessee public postsecondary institutions will not exceed the highest current semester hour rate for a comparable program offered by a Tennessee public institution.

5. Reimbursement for concentrated or accelerated programs at public or private institutions will be limited to the prevailing graduate fee rate for a comparable program within a Tennessee public institution.
6. Satisfactory completion of coursework must be demonstrated to receive the reimbursement and to remain eligible for additional assistance.
7. Reimbursement will be provided for credit hour cost only. Thesis, dissertation, or research work that extends beyond the applicable credit hours allowed by the institution for that work will not be reimbursed.
8. After completion of a course or courses, the employee shall be required to continue full time employment at the College for no less than twelve (12) months from the date of the reimbursement. An employee who chooses voluntary separation will be required to fully reimburse the institution for the remaining balance of this commitment.
9. To receive future reimbursement, the employee must satisfactorily complete all course requirements. A grade of incomplete or withdrawal is not considered satisfactory completion. If satisfactory completion is not attained, the employee must pay for and satisfactorily complete the same number of hours before again being eligible for the program.

**B. Employee Audit/Non-credit Program**

1. This program is designed to provide course or maintenance fees only for an employee who takes job-related courses based on:
  - a. Audit of a for-credit program if not eligible for the Fee Waiver Program
  - b. Job-related, non-credit basis
2. Designated to pay maintenance or tuition-related fees at a Tennessee public institution for audit, job-related, non-credit hours while continuing work responsibilities.

**C. Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program for Faculty or Exempt Staff**

1. This Program is intended to serve as a means of career development as well as individual development. The GIA Program shall be available to eligible employees when the College, in its sole discretion, determines that the proposed courses of study will enhance the value of the employee to the College. This program is dependent upon the availability of funds at the College.

2. A grant-in-aid shall be awarded on the basis of demonstrated need for further academic development of an employee which, as part of an approved Educational Assistance Plan, provides new skills and/or abilities that will ultimately benefit the College. To secure approval for this program, written justification must be submitted to and approved by the President of the College.
3. Grant-in-aid normally will be limited to employees working toward the doctorate or other terminal degree.
4. Grant recipients must be placed on an approved leave of absence and enroll as full-time students in credit courses except where less than full-time status is needed to complete the program.
5. No grant-in-aid shall be awarded for a period longer than twelve (12) months.
6. Employees interested in this program should closely examine all provisions of the program at TBR Guideline P-130.

III. Terms for Award of Educational Assistance for Faculty and Staff

- A. Educational Assistance is limited to a maximum of one (1) for-credit course, not to exceed four (4) credit hours, under the Fee Waiver Program and a maximum of an additional six (6) credit hours per term under the Columbia State Tuition Reimbursement Program. An employee may utilize the programs a maximum of four (4) terms per year, with a term as defined by the College. An employee may enroll in more than one course during the summer as long as the summer terms in which the courses are to be taken do not overlap.
- B. In counsel with, and approval of, their supervisor, the number of courses should be limited as job performance is paramount and must receive priority. Courses should be scheduled first during other than normal work hours if available. Employees may, with the approval of their supervisor, take a class during their lunch hour if it is not otherwise available. An employee will be required to use annual leave for any time or have approval for an alternative work schedule to allow for time away from work that exceeds the employee's normal lunch period.
- C. Continued eligibility for educational assistance for employees is contingent on continued satisfactory academic progress in coursework, as well as consistent and continued acceptable job performance.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **I. Programs Administered Under TBR Guideline P-130**

Employees interested in one of the Educational Assistance Programs must comply with the following procedures:

#### **A. Employee Educational Assistance Plan**

1. Employees who intend to request educational assistance must submit for approval an Employee Educational Assistance Plan for the upcoming academic year (Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters) by April 15 of the calendar year. A new education plan and form must be submitted each year.
2. Once submitted and approved, the new plan will supersede any previous plan.
3. Employees who do not submit a plan for the following academic year will be eligible for participation in the Employee Fee Waiver Program.
4. Employees who intend to seek completion of a certification or degree program and apply for a “Degree-Related Salary Increase” upon successful completion of the certificate or degree program, should complete and submit for approval the Certification/Degree Advancement Request to establish eligibility for, and the amount of, a salary increase for obtaining an additional degree (see [Columbia State Policy 05:25:00](#)).

#### **B. Columbia State Professional Development Process**

1. Once an Educational Assistance Plan is approved by the President, appropriate forms for each semester must be submitted for approval prior to the start of the semester, and in accordance with each specific TBR guideline of the program through which enrolled.
2. Criteria to consider for granting educational assistance will include:
  - a. Additional academic development or training/retraining that will allow the individual to meet an identified College need.
  - b. The course or program provides academic/professional development required by the individual to remain qualified for his or her current job.
  - c. The course or program directly enhances ability to perform job.
  - d. The course or program contributes to career or professional development.

3. Courses for all employees should be scheduled at times other than during the employee's regularly scheduled work hours, unless the use of annual leave or an adjusted work schedule has been documented and approved by the supervisor prior to enrolling in the program.

## II. Application and Eligibility Provisions for TBR Guideline P-130 Programs

### A. Fee Waiver Program

1. Eligible employees wishing to utilize this program must complete the appropriate form and submit the form for approvals as required on the form.
2. After all required approvals have been secured, the employee must present the form to the institution to be attended, complying with the registration and admission requirements of that specific institution. (Note: Some institutions will accept only the form with original signatures, not a copy.)
3. Employees should communicate with the Business Office or Registrar of the institution to be attended regarding compliance with their specific policies and procedures for enrollment in a course using the Fee Waiver program.

### B. Faculty and Staff Tuition or Reimbursement Program for Professional Development

1. All regular full-time or part-time employees, continuously employed by Columbia State for at least six (6) months are eligible for this program. Regular part-time employees may receive a pro rata portion of assistance based on percentage of employment.
2. Employees wishing to participate in this program must have an approved Employee Educational Assistance Plan on file with the supervisor and the Human Resources Office. (Form available on ChargerNet)
3. The Employee Request for Tuition Reimbursement form should be completed and submitted for approval at least two (2) weeks prior to enrollment in a course. After all approvals have been secured, a copy of the form will be forwarded to the Business Office and the employee.
4. In order to process reimbursement for the cost of a course, within 60 days following successful completion of a course with a passing grade, the employee must submit a Request for Payment through the online purchasing system along with a receipt for payment of the tuition and fees, and a copy of the grade(s) for the course(s).
5. Participants in this program are generally required to pay for tuition and fees in advance and secure reimbursement after successful completion of the coursework.



C. Employee Audit/Non-credit Program

1. All regular, full-time, or part-time employees, employed by Columbia State for at least six (6) months are eligible for this program. Regular part-time employees may receive a pro rata portion of assistance based on percentage of employment.
2. Requests shall be submitted at least two (2) weeks prior to enrollment on the Employee Audit/ Non-credit Program form.
3. Course enrollment will be permitted on a "space available" basis. The enrollment is limited to available space with the intent that tuition-paying students shall not be denied enrollment by a student using the Employee Audit/Non-credit Program.
4. An employee can register only after the formal registration period ends, as defined by the institution to be attended.
5. This program is designated to pay maintenance or tuition-related fees for audit or job-related non-credit courses.
6. Courses should be scheduled at times other than during regularly scheduled work hours unless the use of annual leave or an adjusted work schedule has been documented and approved by the supervisor prior to enrolling in the course.

D. Faculty or Exempt Staff Grant-in-Aid Program

1. A regular full-time faculty or exempt staff member employed by the College for two or more years is eligible for the program.
2. Requests shall be submitted on a TBR Faculty or Exempt Staff Grant-in-Aid Program Recommendation form detailing the employee's academic objectives of the program along with the ultimate benefit to the College.
3. Approval for participation in the program is required by the President.





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*Revised: September 11, 1992; September 26, 1997 (titles updated); December 14, 1998 (deleted sentence regarding employees not being able to take classes during lunch period); September 7, 1999 (to reflect change in policy and procedures and new policy format); September 12, 2000 (Item IV added to section on Policy); August 13, 2001 (Veterans' program added as I.H., Fee Waiver for Employees 65 Years and Above renumbered I.I., Public Higher Education Fee Waiver for State Employees and Fee Discount for Dependent Children added as I.J and I.K. per TBR Guideline P-130, revised May 21, 2001); April 14, 2003 (deleted reference to amount to be awarded and funds available under Procedures, section I); February 29, 2012 (Updated policy and procedures to adhere to TBR Guidelines and current College policies and procedures, new policy format and updated titles); September 15, 2014 (Updated policy in line with TBR Guideline changes of Fall 2013; Added eligibility for part-time employees effective 7/1/2014; Updated links to TBR Guideline P-130; Removed reference to Educational Assistance for spouse and family discounts and created new Policy 05:18:01); Revised August 2019; updated, reviewed, accepted by Cabinet, approved and signed by the President May 2022. Revised August 2023; updated, reviewed, accepted by Cabinet, approved and signed by the President August 2023; Revised February 2025. accepted by Cabinet, approved and signed by the President February 2025.*