



Smith County Personnel Policy

SUBJECT: BENEFITS

TITLE: 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 Smith County to provide a program for tuition reimbursement to employees. The Commissioners Court believes that the County, the employee, and the taxpayers will benefit by expanding 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 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. POLICY (Course Eligibility)

- A. Courses meeting the following criteria are eligible for reimbursement:
1. Relates directly to the duties of the position currently held by the employee;
 2. Enhances job effectiveness/performance and is not offered in-house;

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3. Relates to the duties of a position to which the employee may reasonably be expected to advance within the County; or
 4. Is offered by an accredited junior college, college, university, or technical or trade school.
- B. The Tuition Reimbursement Program is for tuition costs only and does not provide reimbursement for any fees, books or supplies.
1. Tuition costs are reimbursed on a percentage basis contingent upon the employee's final grade using the following schedule:

<u>Undergraduate and all Graded Courses</u>	<u>Graduate</u>
100% for a grade of A	100% for a grade of A
75% for a grade of B	75% for a grade of B
50% for a grade of C	0% for a grade of C or below
0% for a grade of D or below;	
 2. Courses taken on a pass/fail basis must be passed and are reimbursed at 50% of the course cost.
- C. A **maximum of seven (7) credit hours per semester** and **fifteen (15) credit hours per calendar year** may be submitted for reimbursement. Tuition costs will be reimbursed based on the tuition cost for a Texas resident attending the University of Texas at Tyler, taking similar courses.
- D. An employee will not be eligible to repeat courses for which he/she has previously received a tuition reimbursement, except for courses in which the content changes substantially and for which the institution itself grants credits for subsequent completion, such as a seminar for college credit.
- E. Review, "CLEP," and auditing courses are not eligible for reimbursement.
- F. The Tuition Reimbursement Program does not cover entrance or qualifying exams such as the ACT, SAT, GMAT, GRE, or LSAT.
- 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.

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IV. POLICY (General)

- A. All regular full-time County employees who have completed one year of continuous service with Smith County--unless made ineligible by the rules below--are eligible to participate in the Tuition Reimbursement Program (TRP).
- B. Employees receiving financial assistance from other sources such as GI Bill, Veteran's programs, scholarship, grants, student loans, or other subsidies are eligible for the TRP, but reimbursement can only be applied to the amount not covered by other sources of financial aid. Employees who fail to report alternative sources and amounts of financial aid on the application may be liable for return of the reimbursement award.
- C. The completion of a course does not obligate the County to promote the employee to a higher pay range or different position. The benefits derived from the successful completion of course(s) may be considered when opportunities for advancement occur.
- D. Any employee who resigns or is terminated (voluntarily or involuntarily) prior to completion of a course shall not receive a 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 a course is available during and after or before regular working hours, the employee should attend the course after or before working hours. If the approved course is available during work hours only, the following procedure may be applied:
 - 1. With prior approval of the Elected Official/Department Head, the employee may use vacation leave, personal leave, leave without pay, or compensatory time in order to attend the class;
 - 2. Work schedules may be rearranged with prior approval of the Elected Official/Department Head; and
 - 3. The County will not compensate employees, or make allowances for tardiness resulting from participating in the TRP.
- G. Approval will be granted only for specific courses for the current semester. Any course changes made at registration should be submitted to the Director of Human Resources within ten (10) days of the registration date for re-approval.

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- H. Tuition reimbursement funds are appropriated on a fiscal year basis. Funding approved by the Commissioners Court for the fiscal year beginning October 1 of each year will apply to education courses beginning subsequent to that date.
- I. All grade reports and receipts will be held until the final cut-off date for submission at the end of the semester (see VII, D.). A total budget impact will be calculated for the semester.
- J. Reimbursement for courses at a private institution will be limited to an amount equal to what the cost would have been at the University of Texas at Tyler for similar courses for a Texas resident (see III, C).
- K. Employees of grant programs will be eligible for the same tuition reimbursement rate as County employees whose positions are established in the General Fund. Tuition reimbursement for these employees will be allocated from their funding source, provided the grant recipient is able to budget this funding. There will be no fiscal impact to the County since other funding sources will pay for the tuition reimbursement of employees of grant programs.

V. ADMINISTRATION

- A. The Director of Human Resources, herein after referred to as “Director,” under the supervision of the Commissioners Court, shall supervise the implementation of this program.
- B. The Director shall devise all necessary forms for the administration of the TRP. Employees shall submit the application form along with 1) a copy of the course description from the class syllabus, 2) a copy of the employee’s current job description, 3) a description of the employee’s career goals and how the course directly relates to those goals, and 4) copy of the school calendar published by the school showing the starting and ending dates for the semester requested, and 5) a degree plan if applicable.
- C. The Director shall endeavor to notify applicants prior to the deadline for regular registration concerning the status of their application. The Director will bring any issues resulting from unanticipated circumstances to the attention of Commissioners Court members for their consideration.
- D. The employee is responsible for registering for a course and paying all fees in accordance with the rules, regulations and deadlines of the institution.
- E. Only approved course(s) taken during the current semester will be eligible for reimbursement. Reimbursement will be made at the end of each semester for the course(s) of study completed by an employee who meets the reimbursement criteria.
- F. Upon completion of approved course(s), the employee must submit to the Director 1) a copy of a grade slip or other appropriate proof of grade, and 2) a copy of the bill showing the fees paid.

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The employee will be responsible to submit any additional information if requested by the Director. No payment will be made unless the employee has furnished the evidence of having successfully completed the course within the due date set by the Director. Since each school has a different completion date and grade submission date for the semester, calendar submission dates will be issued for all paperwork as stipulated in this policy (see section VII).

- G. After the Director has determined that an employee is eligible for reimbursement, a request for reimbursement in the form of a check request shall be submitted by the Director to the Auditor for certification of available funds and payments. The Auditor will prepare the reimbursement for the employee.
- H. Employees in grant funded departments must have the approval of the Grant Administrator and Auditor for the courses to be funded. The Human Resources Department will notify grant-funded departments upon receipt of an application.
- I. Employees may request blank applications/forms and a copy of the policy in e-mail format. However, all required support documentation (see V., B) must be mailed with the forms to the office in accordance with the required deadlines. E-mailing the forms will not constitute a completed application without support documentation.

VI. ELIGIBLE FEES AND EXPENSES

- A. The TRP will reimburse only the eligible employee's direct tuition fees if the approved course is successfully completed and is contingent upon available funds.
- B. Other fees and expenses are expressly 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.

VII. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS, GRADE REPORTS, AND RELATED DOCUMENTATION (Before and After the Semester)

- A. All application forms and support documentation (see V., B above) must be submitted to the Human Resources Department in the Smith County Courthouse Annex Building prior to the last day of timely registration according to the college's or university's guidelines. Should the calendar due date fall on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, the cut-off date will roll to the next regular business day by 5:00 p.m.
- B. Students will be required to provide a copy of the school calendar as published in the institution's catalog or calendar of events. The first day of class for the semester as published

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will be considered the beginning date, regardless of the day of week the courses meet during the semester.

- C. Receipts/Proof of payment for tuition must be itemized by the school showing tuition, fees, etc. separately.
- D. Submission of receipts and grades will be due no later than thirty (30) days after the conclusion of the course. Should the calendar due date fall on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, the cut-off date will roll to the next regular business day by 5:00 p.m.

VIII. REIMBURSEMENT RATES/SCHEDULE

- A. The Director, or designee, will identify the published tuition rates for graduate and undergraduate hours as of September 1st for the University of Texas at Tyler. Students will be reimbursed at these rates or the rates of their own institution, whichever is less. However, if it is necessary to prorate funds, reimbursement may be less, (see IV, H.).

The reimbursement rate is subject to change as rates change or as adjustments need to be made per section IV, G, and H, of the Tuition Reimbursement Policy.

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