

Approved:

Effective: June 15, 2016
Review: July 8, 2019
Office: Human Resources
Topic No.: 250-050-005-h



Department of Transportation

TUITION PAYMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL COURSES

AUTHORITY:

Sections 20.23(3)(a), and 334.048(3), Florida Statutes (F.S.)

REFERENCES:

- 110.105(1), 110.1099(1), and 1009.265(1), F.S.
- Topic No. 250-010-003, Nonstandard Work Schedule Approval
- Topic No. 375-040-020, Procurement of Commodities and Contractual Services
- Topic No. 350-080-300, Receipt Processing
- DMS Guidelines and Procedures for the Tuition Free Course Program. (Guidelines can be obtained from the Human Resources Office.)

STATEMENT OF POLICY:

This procedure describes methods of payment or reimbursement of tuition expenses associated with educational courses when such courses are considered beneficial to the Department of Transportation (Department). Tuition for educational courses is paid or reimbursed for courses that improve an employee's efficiency in his or her current position only. This procedure does not apply to employees seeking full-time enrollment in a college, university, vocational school, or training academy.

SCOPE:

This procedure is applicable to all full-time Career Service, Selected Exempt Service (SES), and Senior Management Service (SMS) employees currently employed by the Department and who meet the outlined requirements.

BACKGROUND:

There are frequent occasions when it is in the Department's best interest to provide part-time or short-term educational opportunities to employees. As a result, the Department may pay or reimburse tuition for courses to improve an employee's efficiency in his or her current position.

(Refer to **Section 1009.265(1), F.S.** or the Department of Management Services' website (http://www.dms.myflorida.com/workforce_operations/human_resource_management/for_state_hr_practitioners/benefits)

for more information regarding the Tuition Waiver Program. Managers are reminded that the Tuition Waiver Participation Form requires the signature of the Director of Human Resources, or designee.) The Tuition Waiver Program allows full-time state employees up to six credit hours of tuition free courses per semester at state universities and community colleges on a space available basis.

The intent of this procedure is not to pay or reimburse tuition for courses required solely for an employee to obtain a college degree. In addition, the State Comptroller's Office determined that State agencies may not:

- Pay or reimburse tuition for courses in order for an employee to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities he or she needed to qualify for the position for which they were hired; or
- Pay for courses intended to prepare an employee for another position inside or outside of the Department.

The payment or reimbursement of tuition expenses associated with educational courses may be authorized under the following conditions:

- (a) The supervisor requires an employee to attend an educational course;
- (b) A need is identified for groups of employees to attend a contracted educational course; or
- (c) An employee requests and receives approval in advance for reimbursement of tuition expenses upon completion of an approved educational course.

In order to qualify, educational courses must be provided by fully accredited public institutions that are recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or other accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Government. Authorized institutions include accredited vocational or technical schools, community or junior colleges, and public universities. Schools that provide correspondence courses must be accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission.

DEFINITIONS:

APPROVAL AUTHORITY: Director level managers provide the approval authority for all tuition payments or reimbursements unless otherwise designated by the appropriate SMS Manager. Approval authorities are encouraged to refer all questionable payment or reimbursement requests to the Department's Deputy Comptroller of Disbursement Operations or to the Director of Human Resources prior to granting approval for tuition payment or reimbursement.

"C" AVERAGE: A grade of 2.0 in a 4.0 system.

CERTIFICATE COURSE: Any course offered by an accredited school that provides students with a certificate of completion instead of a grade report.

CONTRACTED GROUP COURSES: Commonly post-secondary educational courses contracted for on or off site delivery to a group of students. This does not include courses associated with the Certified Public Managers program, continuing professional education courses, or certain technical training courses which may also be provided by contracted training entities.

DEPARTMENT: The Florida Department of Transportation.

EDUCATIONAL COURSES: Commonly post-secondary courses that are designed to improve an employee's efficiency in his or her present position.

EMPLOYEE: Any full-time Career Service, Selected Exempt Service, Senior Management Service or trainee status employee.

TUITION: The fee charged to enroll in an approved educational course.

1. TUITION PAYMENT WHEN A SUPERVISOR REQUIRES EDUCATIONAL COURSES

- 1.1** The tuition for an approved educational course required by a supervisor will be paid only if the course is designed to improve an employee's efficiency in his or her present position.
- 1.2** In addition to tuition, the Department will pay for the required lab fees, books, course materials, and any other costs directly related to the course prior to the class start date.
- 1.3** All course books and materials become the property of the Department upon the employee's completion of the course. Books and materials will be maintained in the employee's present work space for use in the present position. If the employee separates from the Department, or is transferred or promoted into a new position with the Department, books and materials will remain in the present work space for use by the future employee assigned to that position.
- 1.4** The Cost Center Manager, or designee, will monitor the employee's completion of the course and obtain a copy of the grade report or official course completion certificate from the employee.
- 1.5** The employee must provide the immediate supervisor with a copy of the official grade report or the official course completion certificate within ten (10) working days following receipt of the grades or certificate from the institution.

- 1.6 Failure to complete a course for any reason will be recorded in the employee's official personnel file. Exceptions include involuntary reassignment of the employee by the Department or the employee dropping the course prior to the school's drop/add date.
- 1.7 The employee's required attendance at a course required by a supervisor is to be considered hours worked.

2. TUITION PAYMENT FOR CONTRACTED EDUCATIONAL COURSES

- 2.1 A group contract may be executed when several employees are approved to attend the same educational course that may be delivered on or off-site. **Procedure No. 375-040-020, Procurement of Commodities and Contractual Services** provides guidance on how to procure and pay for such contracts.
- 2.2 Contracted courses will be paid only if the course is designed to improve the employees' efficiency in their present positions.
- 2.3 Employees must receive authorization to attend the course from their immediate supervisor and obtain approval from a director level manager, or designee. Participants must provide justification for attending the contracted course by completing and signing **Form No. 250-050-05, Educational Reimbursement Program**. The form must also be signed by each employee's immediate supervisor and director level manager, or designee.
- 2.4 Each employee must have completed 12 months of continuous service with the Department in order to participate in contracted educational courses.
- 2.5 The contract between the Department and the course provider may include course materials and books, or may be limited to tuition only. The person administering the contract shall make this determination.
- 2.6 All course books and materials purchased through the contract become the property of the Department when the group completes the course. Books and materials will be maintained in the employees' present work spaces for use in their present positions. If any employee separates from the Department or is transferred or promoted into a new position, books and materials will remain in the present work space for use by future employees assigned to that position.
- 2.7 Cost Center Managers, or their designees, will monitor each employee's completion of the group course and obtain a grade report or a copy of the official completion certificate from every employee.
- 2.8 Every employee must provide his or her immediate supervisor with a copy of the official grade report or the official completion certificate within 10 working days following the receipt of the grades or certificate from the institution.

- 2.9** Failure to complete the course for any reason requires the employee to repay the tuition costs to the Department within three (3) months of the date of withdrawal. A lump sum payment must be submitted to the District Finance Office or the Department's Office of the Comptroller as required in ***Procedure No. 350-080-300, Receipt Processing***. Exceptions include involuntary reassignment of the employee by the Department, or the employee dropping the course prior to the schools' drop/add date.
- 2.10** Class time for employees required to attend a contracted educational course is considered hours worked. Approved voluntary attendance by an employee is not considered hours worked unless the group course was pre-approved as such. If an employee has at least one (1) year of full-time continuous service and volunteers to take a contracted group course which the supervisor determines will benefit the Department, the employee should be granted an adjusted work schedule in accordance with ***Procedure No. 250-010-003, Nonstandard Work Schedule Approval***.
- 3. ADVANCE APPROVAL OF TUITION REIMBURSEMENT UPON COURSE COMPLETION**
- 3.1** Employees may be reimbursed for tuition expenses when approved courses improve the employee's efficiency in his or her present position.
- 3.2** To qualify, employees must:
- Have completed 12 months of continuous service with the Department; and
 - Complete and sign ***Form No. 250-050-05, Educational Reimbursement Program***, attach supporting course documentation (such as a course catalog), and submit the form and documentation to his or her immediate supervisor for approval.
- 3.3** The employee's immediate supervisor and director level manager, or designee, must also sign ***Form No. 250-050-05, Educational Reimbursement Program***, approving the employee's request and state how the course will improve the employee's efficiency in his or her present position. This must be done prior to the employee attending an approved course.
- 3.4** Employees may request to attend up to two (2) courses per semester, quarter, or term but approval is dependent upon cost center resources. Tuition reimbursements will be made from the employee's cost center, however, other appropriate cost centers may be considered for approval if resources are not available
- 3.5** Course substitutions will not be accepted unless approved in advance by the employee's immediate supervisor and cost center manager.
- 3.6** Employees who withdraw from a course for ANY reason, other than involuntary

reassignment by the Department, will not be reimbursed.

- 3.7** The employee must maintain a grade of "C" (2.0) or better, or a passing grade for a pass/fail grading system, in order to receive reimbursement.
- 3.8** If the approved course requires monitoring of the employee for any reason, the employee's immediate supervisor, or designee, will be responsible.
- 3.9** The employee must furnish the Cost Center Manager an official grade report or official completion certificate within thirty (30) days after the term ends in order to be eligible to receive reimbursement of the tuition.
- 3.10** In order to apply for tuition reimbursement, the employee must complete **Form No. 350-030-01, Individual Reimbursement Voucher for Expenses Other Than Travel**. The form must also be signed by the Cost Center Manager, and submitted to the Disbursement Operations Office, or appropriate District Fiscal office, with copies of:
- (A) A paid receipt from the institution confirming the amount of tuition paid;
 - (B) The employee's official grade report or official certificate of course completion; and
 - (C) Completed **Form No. 250-050-05, Educational Reimbursement Program**, with the course schedule attached.
- 3.11** Approved voluntary participation by an employee is not considered work hours. If a course is available only during work hours, management may consider adjusting the employee's work schedule in accordance with approved Departmental policies and procedures.
- 3.12** Reimbursement shall be for course tuition only and shall not include costs for books, course materials or any other incurred costs. Books and materials purchased by the employee shall remain the property of the employee.

4. TRAINING

None.

5. FORMS

The following forms are available from the Department's Forms Library:

Form 250-050-05, Educational Reimbursement Program

Form 350-030-01, Individual Reimbursement Voucher for Expenses Other Than Travel