

CHAPTER 16

TUITION ASSISTANCE

The Tuition Assistance Program promotes the City's goals of improving customer service and investing in the workforce. The City provides financial assistance to employees who take job related, City career enhancing credit courses at accredited, degree-granting schools and institutions of higher learning. The Tuition Assistance Program does not provide assistance for staff development training or continuing professional education. There is nothing in this policy intended to change or modify the at-will status of City employees or to create or confer expectation of continued employment to any employee

15.01 GENERAL INFORMATION

- (a) The program is available to regular, full-time employees to improve qualifications in their present position and to prepare them for more responsibility with the City of Glen Rose. This policy does not apply to employees in their new-hire probationary period or when subject to disciplinary probation.
- (b) The City will reimburse specific expenses for college-level education courses, GED preparation, and certifications that provide additional expertise to City employees. This policy does not cover classes, certificates or licenses that are required by the employee's present position or that would be considered ordinary training. These types of expenses should be covered by the Department's training budget, at the Department Head's discretion.
- (c) This policy is not an expressed or implied guarantee of benefits. All requests for reimbursement made through the Tuition Assistance Program will be considered on a first come first serve basis. Initial payment and continuation of such benefits is dependent upon budget funding availability and class approval.
- (d) Benefits may be temporarily suspended or permanently terminated at any time, upon the determination of the City Administrator, based on the availability of funding.
- (e) Employees are not guaranteed additional salary consideration or promotion for the completion of courses paid for by the City of Glen Rose.

15.02 DEFINITIONS

- (a) A course or educational program is a class of instruction taught at or by an accredited college, university, or trade school recognized by one of the accrediting agencies listed in Section 15.05 (c).
- (b) A tuition assistance participant is an eligible full time employee who has submitted a Tuition Reimbursement Application and been approved. (Refer to Requirement Section for eligibility requirements).

15.03 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF COLLEGE CREDIT COURSE WORK

- (a) The benefit is available to regular, full-time employees who have completed the probationary period and have no recorded policy violations within the one hundred eighty (180) days prior to the beginning of the class(es) for which registration is being sought.
- (b) Employees may apply for Tuition Assistance prior to the expiration of the probationary period, as long as the first day of class does not occur prior to the employee's one (1) year anniversary or the end of disciplinary probation.
- (c) Employees must sign a formal agreement, in which the employee agrees to remain employed by the City of Glen Rose for two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, or the employee will be responsible for paying all or part of reimbursement of Tuition Assistance funds back to the city as determined by the City Administrator.

15.04 PROCEDURES/RULES

- (a) The City Administrator will make the final decision regarding any situation not addressed within this policy.
- (b) All courses reimbursed under this program must be taken on the employee's own time. Course work may not be done on City time or using City equipment. If a class is only available during an employee's normal work hours, the employee may request a flexible schedule from the Department Head. A memorandum outlining the employee's flexible work schedule must be signed by the employee, approved by Department Head and forwarded to the Human Resources Department with a completed Tuition Education Assistance Program Application. When there is a conflict between classes and the employee's job responsibilities, the job responsibility must come first. Flexible schedules shall not cause any undue

hardship to the department or the City in any way. Approval for participation in the tuition assistance program does not guarantee the ability to take course during normal work hours.

- (c) Employees are to provide formal proof of the courses they are taking or have taken for the purposes of education assistance.
- (d) Employees who are receiving Tuition Assistance at the time of an injury, whether work related or non-work related, are expected to continue with school during the absence, unless the physician documents that they are unable to do so. If it becomes necessary for the employee to withdraw or take an incomplete for the course, they will have one hundred (100) days following the date of return to full duty to re-enroll and satisfactorily complete the course. Exceptions may be made if the course is not available during that time frame. If not, the employee will be liable for returning any advance monies they received for the semester they did not complete.
- (f) Dropping of a class(es) at any time is not acceptable. An employee who drops a class will not be eligible for Tuition Assistance for twelve (12) months after the initial drop date. The employee will be responsible for paying back City funds used for a dropped class through payroll drafts within ninety (90) days.

15.05 COURSE CRITERIA

- (a) Course must be in the pursuit of a degree that is job related or would benefit the City as determined by the City.
- (b) The course must prepare the employee for change(s) in duties and responsibilities in current position or in preparation for a more advanced position.
- (c) The course must be taken from an accredited college or university. For the purposes of this policy, accredited shall mean an institution of higher education accredited by one of the agencies recognized by either the U.S. Department of Education (<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.aspx>) or The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (<https://www.chea.org/search-institutions>). Specialized courses not recognized by the Association may be considered if directly related to the employee's responsibilities or required in order to complete a degree plan (i.e. elective courses).
- (d) Employees must obtain a course grade equivalent to a C or better to be eligible for reimbursement. The City will not accept a pass or fail option. Reimbursement will

not be provided for classes not completed successfully. The entire cost of a failed class must be paid back to the City by payroll draft within ninety (90) days of the failed course.

15.06 APPLICATION INFORMATION

- (a) Employees are required to complete a Tuition Reimbursement Application and Tuition Reimbursement Agreement thirty (30) days in advance of the first day of the school term or starting course date. A copy of the course description from the school catalog, website, or course registration form will need to be attached to the application in order to be considered. Employees will be paid all of the eligible tuition and books at the beginning of the course.
- (b) Employees applying for assistance are eligible for a maximum of one thousand five hundred (\$1,500) per college semester or three thousand dollars (\$3,000) per fiscal year. Funds are payable only after all criteria are met in accordance with this policy. The City will pay one hundred percent (100%) of tuition and book costs as reflected on the fee and book receipts, up to the maximum. Supplies or any other expenses in connection with courses are not eligible for reimbursement.
- (c) It is the employee's responsibility to inform the Human Resources Department if he/she is receiving financial assistance by any other source. In the event of partial scholarships or grants, reimbursement will be calculated based on the actual expense to the employee. Failure to inform the Human Resources Department will result in disqualification from participation in the Tuition Assistance Program and may subject the employee to disciplinary action.
- (d) Any changes to a degree plan must be submitted and approved prior to registration.
- (e) Tuition Assistance will be paid only once for each approved course. The City of Glen Rose will not pay for course for which Tuition Assistance has already been received by the employee.
- (f) An employee will be eligible for tuition assistance for only one (1) associate degree and one (1) undergraduate degree. Any exception must be for the benefit of the City and would require the City Administrator's approval. A master's degree must be specifically applicable to City advancement and must be approved in advance by the City Administrator.

15.07 SERVICE REQUIREMENTS/REPAYMENT OBLIGATIONS

- (a) Requirements for continued service with the City after course completion are an assurance that the City will benefit from employee participation in this program. If an employee leaves City employment for any reason before a service requirement is completed the employee must repay to the City all of the tuition that was paid to the employee.
- (b) If the employee has worked less than two (2) years of the service requirement, the employee will repay to the City the full amount of the reimbursement payment made to the employee.
- (c) A two (2) year service requirement begins on the date the course for which reimbursement was obtained is completed. When additional courses for which reimbursement is obtained are completed a new additional two (2) year service requirement begins.
- (d) A service requirement is not an assurance of continued employment by the City. If a termination of employment occurs, voluntary or involuntary, and a repayment amount is owed by the employee, and the employee does not otherwise repay the amount, the employee agrees to have the repayment amount deducted from the employee's paychecks that are issued after the termination decision occurs. Any remaining balances owed to the City shall be paid immediately following notification to the employer.
- (e) Repayment of tuition assistance if employee drops or fails to complete the course prior to completion or obtains an average grade below C will be made by a payroll deduction. The employee will be responsible for paying back any used City funds within ninety (90) days.
- (f) Employees are not responsible for reimbursement to the City in the following circumstances:
 - (1) Position is eliminated due to a reduction in forces.
 - (2) Work shift changes initiated by management that prohibit the employee from completing course(s).
 - (3) The employee is involuntarily called to military service.

- (4) Other reasons which are determined to be out of the control of the employee, left to the discretion of the City Administrator.