

**MSU Extension  
Tuition Assistance Program  
Master's, Doctorate or Terminal Degree Candidates**

**PURPOSE**

The success of MSU Extension programming is a direct function of the quality of the organization's employees. The interaction between MSUE staff members and clients has an enormous influence on program outcomes. A critical consideration for MSUE is the continued professional development of its staff members.

The purpose of this Tuition Reimbursement Program is to encourage eligible MSUE academic staff members to complete a master's, doctoral or terminal degree in a subject matter area relevant to Extension, with financial assistance from MSUE.

The Tuition Assistance Program is a separate and distinct program and does not replace the study leave policy in any way.

**ELIGIBILITY**

Applicants and/or participants in this program must:

- Be employed as an MSUE academic staff member at least half-time FTE and currently receiving a paycheck from MSU Extension.
- Maintain satisfactory job performance by attaining a "meets" or "exceeds" expectations rating on their annual performance reviews, prior to being accepted into the program and consistently, each year, while in the Tuition Assistance Program.
- Be pursuing their first master's, doctorate, or other terminal degree.
- Have an approved professional development plan that includes identification of the degree being sought and a projected schedule for completion.
- Pursue the requested degree with an accredited institution.
- Have been accepted into a degree program that is relevant to MSU Extension and part of a planned, approved program of study. (Note: If final, written acceptance has not been received from the institution, employee may make application for participation with the understanding that any approval and/or reimbursement will be contingent upon proof of acceptance.)
- Be committed to remaining with MSU Extension for at least one year following the most recent reimbursement of tuition and/or fees.
- Complete and submit the required tuition assistance application for participation and associated documents, in a timely manner.
- Satisfactorily complete all class requirements, maintain at least a 3.0 average on a 4.0 system (the equivalent of a B average or better), and sustain the minimum enrollment requirements delineated in the approved application.
- Submit timely, electronic tuition reimbursement requests with supporting documentation.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

This tuition assistance program is specifically designed to help MSUE academic staff members complete their first master's, doctorate or other terminal degree by subsidizing tuition and fees. Other associated expenses – such as travel, meals, lodging and books – will not be reimbursed by this program. Participants may consider requesting funds to cover a portion of the related expenses through the MSU Extension Professional Development Endowed Fund.

Tuition reimbursement is provided for classes taken within a preapproved degree program, at an accredited institution. (Accreditation as determined by the [U.S. Department of Education](#).) Should it be deemed necessary, proof of accreditation may be required and will be the responsibility of the applicant. Tuition and fee reimbursement will be provided only after evidence of successful completion is presented.

Tuition reimbursement is limited to \$5,000.00 per fiscal year. All classes must appear in the degree plan. Successful completion of all classes – those for which MSUE reimbursement is received as well as those outside of the reimbursement, but part of the degree program – is expected for continuation in the MSUE Tuition Assistance Program. This ensures successful pursuit of the approved degree plan.

The program is not an entitlement. No staff member is guaranteed initial or continued participation simply by virtue of being a staff member.

Participants in this Program are expected to be committed to at least one year of service with MSUE, following the date of their last use of the program.

## **PREPARATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Discuss the prospect of pursuing a master's or doctorate degree with your Institute Director or, for those on the Organizational Development Team, your campus administrator. Be prepared to discuss how you will manage your workload while engaged in formal coursework, conducting a research project, and writing your thesis or plan B paper.

Review the entire policy for the Tuition Assistance Program and be sure to have all of your questions addressed.

Identify the degree program you intend to complete and the accredited institution from which the degree will be obtained. This step includes choosing a course of study, making application to the institution, and being accepted into the degree program.

## **APPLICATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Applications for the Tuition Assistance Program are reviewed, and participants are selected twice each year. These Application Periods relate to when applicants are planning to begin their master's or doctoral degree program. Those **planning to begin their program during (or request reimbursement for) a:**

- **Summer** or **fall** semester, must **apply by the preceding March 1<sup>st</sup>** or
- **Spring** semester, must **apply by the preceding September 1<sup>st</sup>**

The [MSU Extension Tuition Assistance Program Application for participation](#) is available on the HR OD Site and must be submitted via email to [msue.hr@msu.edu](mailto:msue.hr@msu.edu). Applications must include the following:

- A description of the degree program, a list of course requirements and planned coursework.
- A detailed plan of classes and a timeline for completion. The timeline must include associated research and writing and defending the thesis, plan B paper, or dissertation.
- The applicant must provide proof that this plan has been approved by an [accredited](#) college or university and is relevant to MSU Extension.
- A tuition reimbursement cost projection must be included in the application, using cost data appropriate to the granting institution.
- A projection of how the MSUE Tuition Assistance Program will be used, in conjunction with other funds, for completion of the degree.
- Verification of acceptance into the degree program. (If applicant is unable to provide this electronically, it must be mailed to MSUE Human Resources when the application is submitted.)
- An email requesting an electronic signature and comments will be sent to the participant's supervisor(s). Participants are encouraged to contact these people by phone to request that they respond quickly.

The application for participation in this tuition assistance program must be reviewed and approved by the individual's Institute Director, MSU Extension HR Director and the Director or Associate Director of MSU Extension prior to the applicant submitting a tuition reimbursement request.

## **APPLICANT SELECTION PROCESS**

The application will be reviewed by the MSU Extension HR Director and the Director or Associate Director of MSU Extension, and the applicant will be notified about the decision within 90 days of the application submission deadline.

Each applicant for the program will be evaluated and selected on the basis of their application, a determination that they meet eligibility requirements, the priorities set by MSU Extension for participation, and the availability of funds. If the application is not approved, feedback will be provided, and the applicant may choose to resubmit an application at the next Application Period.

The following selection criteria may change over time as necessary adjustments are made, as

determined by the MSU Extension HR Director and the Director or Associate Director of MSU Extension:

- Electronic application is submitted in a timely and complete fashion.
- Supervisor has endorsed participation.
- Stated eligibility requirements are met.

In the event there are more applications than funds available to support them, the MSU Extension HR Director will review the applications with the Director or Associate Director of MSU Extension, for final approval.

Meeting all eligibility and selection criteria, an individual may participate in the Tuition Assistance Program for the completion of the approved degree for up to five academic years of study.

Any significant changes in an approved degree program must be communicated in writing to the MSU Extension Human Resources office. The MSUE Human Resources Director will review these changes, discuss with the appropriate Institute Director as needed and communicate in writing whether the changes are approved. Approval for the degree plan change must be obtained in advance of requesting reimbursement. Minor changes in a class (e.g., substitution of a different class that meets one component of the degree requirements) must be noted on the tuition reimbursement request.

Upon acceptance into the program, MSUE HR will contact the successful applicant with a specific SharePoint folder where all documentation will be saved for the duration of participation.

## **REIMBURSEMENT OF TUITION/FEES**

An approved participant may request reimbursement for tuition, registration fees and laboratory fees only. The participant will not be reimbursed for books, exams, travel or any other costs.

The maximum tuition reimbursement is \$5,000.00 per fiscal year in which it is paid. This amount will be reviewed annually. Classes and fees shall be reimbursed at the actual cost, but not more than the cost of a comparable course offered at Michigan State University, if the degree is being pursued from another institution, and not more than the maximum reimbursement amount.

Request for reimbursement must be submitted **within 90 days** of the last day of the class. The reimbursement process is two steps:

1. The submission of the tuition reimbursement form, via email to [msue.hr@msu.edu](mailto:msue.hr@msu.edu).
2. Provide proof of payment and documentation of successful completion of class by saving it in the specified SharePoint folder. If electronic documentation of successful completion is not available, supporting documents must be sent to the MSU Extension Human Resources office. This documentation must include the name of the student, the name (and, preferably, the seal) of the educational institution, the course name, dates attended, and grade achieved. Proof of successful completion of each class being taken as part of the approved degree plan must be submitted, even if it is not a class for which tuition reimbursement is being sought. This ensures successful pursuit of the approved degree plan.

Only classes preapproved as part of the degree plan are eligible for reimbursement.

*Special Circumstances* - A special circumstance exists for a deferred grade. Up to two years are allowed for submission of evidence of successful completion in this circumstance.

Reimbursement is delayed until the grade is given and is accountable to the year the person was enrolled. For deferred grades specific to thesis work, reimbursement is delayed until the thesis is defended, within the five academic year parameter described above.

If a participant is receiving financial aid in the form of grants or reimbursement from other sources (this does not include student loans that must be repaid), that amount must be disclosed on the Application. In evaluating the amount to be reimbursed, the financial aid amount will first be applied to expenses not covered by the Tuition Assistance Program and then applied to eligible reimbursement amounts.

An employee whose employment is terminated while enrolled in an approved class may be eligible for reimbursement for that class. If an employee is terminated due to a reduction in the workforce, they will be reimbursed upon successful completion of the class, as defined in this policy. An employee who, prior to completing a class, voluntarily leaves MSU Extension or is terminated for cause or because they failed to meet performance expectations will not be reimbursed.

Any reimbursement amount over the IRS tax limit for tuition assistance is subject to appropriate taxation.

Every effort will be made to reimburse the employee as soon as possible, following the timely submission of all necessary documentation and electronic request for reimbursement.