

DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program: Frequently Asked Questions

The following information is intended to provide an overview of DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program administrative procedures. Guidelines and policies are subject to change. Participants should consider the terms and conditions in their signed Program Agreement as authoritative.

Participation

Page

- Who is eligible to participate? 1
- Is selection into the program competitive? 1
- How do I apply to the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program? 1
- What are my responsibilities as a program participant? 1
- How do I use my Public Higher Education Fee Waiver? 1
- What if I have already used my Public Higher Education Fee Waiver for another course? 2
- How many classes do I have to take? 2
- Can I go full-time or part-time? 2
- Can I take online classes? 2
- Can I take summer classes? 2
- What happens if I drop or fail a class? 2
- Whom do I contact with questions or for additional information? 3

Payment

- What does the program pay for? 3
- Will this affect my financial aid from other sources? 3
- What is the payment process? 3
- How are payments made? 3
- When can I expect payment? 4
- What if I do not receive payment at the expected time? 4
- How much is the expense payment and what is it used for? 4
- Why do I see an account balance after having submitted all required paperwork? 4
- Is there other financial assistance for DCS employees wanting to attend graduate school? 4

Agreement

- What is the employment obligation to DCS upon completion of my degree? 4
 - What happens if I terminate my employment at DCS prior to receiving my degree? 5
 - What happens if I terminate my employment before completion of my contractual obligation to DCS? 5
-

Who is eligible to participate?

To participate, you must:

- (1) Be a full-time DCS employee.
 - (2) Have been employed for two consecutive years.
 - (3) Be in good standing with the Department. Must have received no disciplinary actions within the past three years to include written warnings, suspensions, demotions, or terminations.
 - (4) Received a Performance Evaluation within the past 12 months with a score of at least "valued."
 - (5) Have been unconditionally accepted into an accredited or in-candidacy MSW/MSSW program.
- For complete details, please see "Eligibility" on the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program Home Page.

Is selection into the program competitive?

Provided that you meet eligibility requirements and have been accepted unconditionally into an accredited or in-candidacy MSW/MSSW program, and have been approved by DCS regional leadership you qualify to participate in the program. Please note, however, that space could be limited by budgetary constraints. In this event, priority will be given to Case Manager 3s (CM3), Team Leaders (TLs), Team Coordinators (TCs), Deputy Regional Administrators (DRAs), and Regional Administrators (RAs).

How do I apply to the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program?

The information you will need to apply to the program is located under 'Forms and Information' on the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program Home Page. Please be sure to accurately complete and submit all application materials by the deadlines to avoid disqualification or payment delays.

What are my responsibilities as a program participant?

There are both academic and administrative responsibilities for program participants. General responsibilities are outlined as a part of "Eligibility Requirements" and "Program Guidelines" on the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program Home Page. For a detailed view of student responsibilities, please refer to the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program Agreement that participants sign as a part of inscription into the program.

How do I use my Public Higher Education Fee Waiver?

If attending a public in-state university, participants are **required** to submit a Public Higher Education Fee Waiver for each semester of aid received. Unlike other paperwork that is submitted directly to the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Specialist, this form is submitted directly to the university's Bursar/Business Office by the student. For the form and complete details on the procedure (including contact information), please see "Public Higher Education Fee Waiver" on the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program Home Page. Students attending private or out-of-state universities are not eligible to use this benefit. As a result, these students must personally pay for 3.0 hours each semester of aid received.

What if I have already used my Public Higher Education Fee Waiver for another course?

It is the responsibility of DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program participants to use their Public Higher Education Fee Waiver for each semester of aid received. In other words, program participants cannot take other classes using this benefit if enrolled in this DCS Tuition Assistance Program. If there is a rare instance that a DCS initiative requires a student participating in the Tuition Assistance Program to take another course (e.g., the Leadership Academy), special administrative procedures must be taken to provide financial support to the student. The student should notify the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Specialist as soon as possible if such circumstances apply.

How many classes do I have to take?

To participate and be eligible for aid through the program, students must take at least 4.0 credit hours. Dropping below this amount during the course of the semester will render a student ineligible for aid and DCS (1) will not be responsible for any tuition or fees incurred as a result of enrolling in or dropping from classes that semester and (2) reduce subsequent payments by the amount disbursed during the semester during which the student falls below the minimum enrollment requirement.

Can I go part-time or full-time?

The program supports either part-time or full-time attendance. In either case, participants must maintain the minimum enrollment requirement of 4.0 hours for each semester of aid received and participants are eligible to receive up to eight (8) semesters of aid.

Can I take online classes?

Participants can take online courses. Please note, however, that additional tuition and fees associated with the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP) are not covered. Participants can take these courses if available and appropriate, but they are personally responsible for paying their additional associated tuition/fees.

Can I take summer classes?

Yes. Program requirements as well as tuition/approved fee/expense payments are identical regardless of the term—fall, spring, or summer.

What happens if I drop or fail a class?

The program will not pay a second time for any course. Students must maintain academic standards as set forth in their Program Agreement.

Whom do I contact with questions or additional information?

Please direct inquiries to your academic program of study to your university. If you have questions about the requirements or guidelines of the DCS MSW/MSSW Tuition Assistance Program, please contact:

Department of Children's Services
Tuition Assistance Program
c/o Brittany Buchanan – Program Specialist
UBS Tower
315 Deaderick Street, 7th Floor
Nashville, TN 37243
OR scan and email to:
IV-E_Tuition.EI-DCS@tn.gov

What does the program pay for?

The program pays for tuition/approved fees for a part-time or full-time graduate student pursuing an MSW/MSSW degree according to his or her university's published fee schedule. For students attending private universities, there is a tuition/fee "cap" based on the highest rate of public in-state universities, and these students are responsible for paying any tuition/fees that exceed this cap. Participants attending private universities are also personally responsible for paying 3.0 hours each semester of participation. Not covered are additional tuition/fees associated with the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP) courses and fees associated with general undergraduate courses not to the pursuit of the MSW/MSSW degree.

Will this affect my financial aid from other sources?

The tuition/approved fee/expense payments issued to you through this program will form a part of your overall financial aid package. Your university financial aid office will consider all sources of funding available to you and will not allow combined sources to exceed the cost of your attendance. This might mean that the level of funding you expect to receive from this program or from other sources could be adjusted. It is recommended that you consult with your university's financial aid office for specific information regarding your personal circumstances.

What is the payment process?

Program participants receive two types of payment: tuition payments and expense payments.

Tuition/approved fees: Each semester, a letter is sent to participants' universities requesting that their tuition/fees be billed to DCS rather than to the student. This request is issued upon receipt of the program participant's complete class schedule for the term and current documentation (e.g. grades from previous semesters and the DCS Approval form); it serves as confirmation of attendance and secures participants' class schedule. Later, approximately mid-way through the semester, universities will bill DCS for tuition/approved fees (note: until the university bills DCS for your tuition/approved fees

and those are paid, you might see a balance on your account). To ensure timely payment, please take care to register early and submit all paperwork to the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Specialist.

Expense payments: The said letter authorizes the release of an expense payment to the student's university account. This authorization must be processed by accounting/billing services of the student's university. Usually, expense payments are posted to the student's within 4 weeks of authorization. To ensure timely payment, please take care to register early and submit all paperwork as requested by DCS.

How are payments made?

All payments (tuition/approved fee and expense payments) are made directly to the student's university and credited to his or her university account.

When can I expect payment?

If a student registers by the deadlines listed under "Important Dates" and all documentation has been received by DCS (e.g., class schedule, grades, expense approval form), the expense payment should be posted to the participant's student account within 4 weeks of payment authorization. Failure to register and submit paperwork by the deadlines posted could result in delayed payments. Tuition/approved fee payments are not made until later in the semester when the university bills them to DCS.

What if I do not receive payment at the expected time?

As federal law prohibits the release of specific account information to parties other than the student, participants should contact their university's Bursar's Office.

How much is the expense payment and what is it used for?

The expense payment is intended to provide financial support for non-tuition/fee expenses associated with participation in the program—e.g., living expenses, travel, and textbooks (there is not a separate payment associated with any of these expenses). Please contact the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Manager for the current amount.

Why do I see an account balance after having submitted all required paperwork?

You might see a balance on your account well into each semester. Your tuition/approved fees are not actually paid until later in the semester when your university bills DCS. Until your university receives the check from DCS, you might see this balance (see "What is the payment process?" above).

What is the employment obligation to DCS upon completion of my degree?

Upon graduation, students will owe the Department 6 months of employment per semester of aid received.

What happens if I terminate my employment at DCS prior to receiving my degree?

If a student terminates his or her employment with DCS before receiving his or her degree, he or she will owe the Department the amount expended on his or her education to that point (tuition/approved fees/expense payments) or an employment period of six (6) months for every semester of aid received (up to 24 months).

What happens if I terminate my employment before completion of my contractual obligation to DCS?

If a student terminates his or her employment with DCS before completing his or her employment obligation, he or she will owe to DCS the amount expended on his or her education (tuition/approved fees/expense payments) on a prorated basis. For example, if a student received \$25,000 in aid for six (6) semesters, for example, his or her employment obligation would be 24 months. If this student terminated employment after having served only 12 months of that obligation, he or she would owe \$12,500 to the Department and it would be repaid according to an agreement between DCS and the student. Failure to abide by the terms of this repayment plan will result in the case being turned over to and money pursued by collections or the State Attorney General, depending on the amount owed.