

Title: Advanced Degree Reimbursement

Date: 2005

Grand Valley State University strives to hire faculty and staff with academic degrees and other qualifications appropriate to their positions. Occasionally, the University may hire faculty and staff whose field qualifications or professional experience makes them attractive candidates despite the lack of an advanced degree. Such individuals may be encouraged to seek an advanced degree, if that is the standard for their position. Appointing officers should consider whether faculty members who are hired with the expectation that the university will support attainment of an advanced degree should be placed into a non-tenure-track position until a significant portion of the advanced degree is completed. University financial support for an employee seeking an advanced degree, however, is made on a situational basis and is neither a right nor a benefit.

Undertaking a doctoral program in particular represents a significant effort in time, energy, and resources. An employee who contemplates pursuing such a program needs to understand that fulfillment of job responsibilities will continue to take precedence. Therefore, University financial support for pursuing a Ph.D. or another necessary advanced degree is awarded infrequently and then only under the following conditions:

1. The appointing officer must show the appropriate vice president that the acquisition of the additional degree is standard for the position the person holds or for which the person is under consideration.
2. The appointing officer must demonstrate to the appropriate vice president that individuals are pursuing the advanced degree in the discipline in which the employee works or a related discipline to that, or that the acquisition of the degree will help the university address a shortage of terminally qualified individuals in that discipline or area. Normally, the degree being sought will be that required in the discipline in which the employee works. Thus, for example, a faculty member in the College of Nursing should not expect support for a degree in education.
3. The appointing officer must prepare for the appropriate vice president a written plan detailing how the unit will cover the employee's work when the employee is not on campus. If the individual is not currently an employee of the university, the plan must indicate whether or not hiring the individual is conditional upon acceptance into an appropriate degree program.
4. The appointing officer must set the amount, if any, of the reduction in salary the employee will receive if there is a reduction in the employee's work load.
5. The details of the arrangement must be reduced to a formal agreement and signed by the employee, the appointing officer, and the appropriate vice president. At a minimum, the agreement must address the following:

- a. The amount the University agrees to reimburse the employee for tuition. The amount can cover the costs in part or in full, and it can be up to, but not in excess of, GVSU's doctorate tuition for the same year.
- b. The total number of credit hours the university will reimburse during the program of study and the number of credit hours per year the employee will carry. The University may reimburse for up to 18 semester credit hours per year.
- c. The amount, if any, of indirect support the University may also provide (release from certain duties, release from service, etc).
- d. The total amount of time the employee has to successfully complete the Ph.D. or necessary advanced degree.
- e. For faculty, the way in which completion of the degree will factor into workload and planning and any tenure or promotion process, since for some employees completion of the degree may occur at the time of a tenure or promotion decision. For instance, what evidence beyond the dissertation will be counted as "scholarship?"
- f. The ways in which the employee will document timely progress toward the Ph.D. or necessary terminal degree (e.g., showing his/her grades to the appointing officer each semester, and when the employee is ABD, having the dissertation chair send confirmation of progress to the appointing officer at specified intervals).
- g. The amount (or how the amount will be determined) that the employee will be obligated to reimburse the University if one of the following occurs:
 - i. The employee withdraws from the advanced degree program;
 - ii. The employee fails to complete the advanced degree within the agreed upon time;
- h. The obligation, following completion of the degree, that the employee will provide the University with one year of full time service for each 15 semester credit hours of tuition paid for by the University.
- i. The condition that if the employee leaves the University before completing the years required under 5.h. above, the employee agrees to reimburse the university for the required years that were not served. The amount to be reimbursed is calculated by multiplying the total amount of tuition paid by the University by the proportion of unmet year's obligation to total years of obligation.
For example, the university pays tuition for 75 credits with a total cost of \$39,375. The obligation from (h.) would then be $75/15 = 5$ years. If the employee leaves after three years, two years would be remaining and the reimbursable amount would be $\$39,375 \times 2/5 = \$15,750$.