

**NC DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND POLICIES AND PROCEDURES  
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

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<b>Section:</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Post-Secondary Training</b>
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### **College and University Training**

College and university training may be sponsored for those eligible individuals having a vocational outcome that requires college or university training. Financial eligibility is not required for tuition and required fees although comparable benefits must be used when available. College and university training may be purchased only from colleges and universities approved or accredited by an appropriate state or national accreditation agency.

### **Tuition, Fees, Books, Supplies and Maintenance**

Note: These figures are amended annually.

State agency financial assistance for tuition and required fees for undergraduate students in 2024-2025 is limited to \$4,497 per semester or \$8,994 per academic year, or the actual cost, whichever is less. Assistance for tuition and required fees for graduate students in 2024-2025 is limited to \$7,350 per semester or \$14,700 per academic year, or the actual cost, whichever is less. All registered students taking six or more credit hours will be charged for insurance unless a waiver is completed. The health insurance fee can also be paid if the student does not have any other comparable insurance benefit. Some universities charge this fee separately.

Books and supplies will be limited to \$1,000 per academic year and \$225 for each summer school session without regard to economic need. However, if an undergraduate or graduate student has completed the financial need survey and is income eligible and their required books and supplies exceed the academic year/summer limits, the student may receive additional financial assistance after the student has applied all available financial aid/comparable benefits. Please note that the \$1,000 limit is for the academic year, so the exceptions will most likely not be needed until the spring semester.

Maintenance is a supportive service and may be provided to cover the individual's basic living expenses such as food, shelter and other basic subsistence expenses that are in excess of the normal expenses of the individual and are necessary for the individual's participation in academic training. Maintenance is not intended to pay for those living expenses that exist irrespective of the individual's involvement with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Rather, maintenance is a limited service designed to assist the

individual with meeting the additional costs incurred while participating in a VR program. Individuals must be financially eligible and comparable benefits must be used when available. For 2024-2025, maintenance for room and board for undergraduate students will not exceed actual cost or up to \$7,166 per academic semester or \$14,332 for the academic year. Maintenance for room and board for graduate students for 2024-2025 will not exceed actual cost or up to \$10,358 per academic semester or \$20,716 for the academic year. Rates for summer school will be approved on a case-by-case basis.

The VR Area Supervisor will review and approve any justified exceptions. These decisions will be sent to the Chief, Rehabilitation Field Services for review.

If an undergraduate or graduate individual is choosing to live off campus and DSB is providing monthly maintenance payments, transportation to and from campus will not be paid. However, if a student is living off campus because on-campus housing is not an option, DSB can support transportation expenses to and from campus.

### **Payment for Training at Out-of-State or Private institutions**

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) gives preference to in-state public vendors for post-secondary training. If an individual chooses to attend a private college or university or an out-of-state college or university, DSB sponsorship for tuition and required fees will be limited to the same amount listed for North Carolina in-state sponsorship. All colleges or universities must be approved and used by that state's VR program. Financial eligibility is not required for tuition and required fees although comparable benefits must be used when available.

### **Comparable Services and Benefits**

Individual must apply annually for all comparable benefits, financial aid and available educational grants using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). The individual must provide a copy of the awards/denial notification letter to the agency, which must be placed in the individual's case record. If the individual does not provide the agency with an award/denial letter from the educational institution prior to the end of the first semester, the agency will discontinue financial support until such time that this information is provided to the VR counselor.

Pell Grant and/or other federal/state aid (excluding merit awards) must be used for the purchase of tuition and fees, books, supplies, computers, software, assistive technology, room, board, and related training materials in order to demonstrate maximum effort to utilize comparable benefits prior to using agency funds.

If an individual has defaulted on a Title IV loan, the individual must work out some satisfactory means of clearing up the default before the agency can support any current training. The individual must provide documentation of payment to the vendor at a rate approved by the institution. In view of the flexibility in repayment plans, the individual may not have attempted to make arrangement to postpone repayment. If a true

hardship case occurs where the individual has limited or no financial resources available and cannot work out a satisfactory repayment agreement, assistance may be appropriate. The VR field services chief will review and approve any agency assistance in these situations.

Requirements to use comparable benefits do not apply if the determination would interrupt or delay:

- The progress of the individual toward achieving the employment outcome identified in the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) (On-Line DSB-4005b-VR-Individual Plan for Employment with instructions) of the individual;
- An immediate job placement; or
- The provision of such service to an individual at extreme medical risk.

These exceptions must be approved by the VR field services chief.

### **Academic Year and Length of Program**

Individuals in training programs shall maintain a full academic load as defined by the educational institution. Generally, 12 hours per semester is considered a full academic load with six hours per summer school session.

For undergraduate studies, the agency will provide support for up to ten (10) semesters for the attainment of a baccalaureate degree. For graduate studies, the agency will provide support for no more than one semester beyond the specified time frame identified in the institution's publications for the particular program at the time the student enters the program.

Two summer school sessions of six (6) or more hours will equal one semester.

The VR area supervisor will review and approve any justified exceptions to any of these conditions. These decisions may be sent to the VR field services chief for review.

### **Satisfactory Academic Progress**

Individuals will be expected to maintain a 2.0 grade point average each semester (on a 4.0 scale) or the grade point average (GPA) standard established by the educational institution for degree requirements. Individuals must provide the VR counselor with copies of the grades for each semester and placed in the base record.

Agency sponsorship will be withdrawn for an individual whose grade point average falls below the established standard of 2.0 or the GPS standard established by the educational institution for two consecutive semesters or quarters. The VR counselor must notify the individual of the pending loss of agency assistance at least one semester before terminating assistance. The individual then has one grading period to improve the GPA to an acceptable level. Failure to maintain the prescribed academic

standards will mean the loss of agency assistance with tuition, fees, books, Interpreter Services (interpreter), maintenance, and other authorized services directly related to the course of study. If the individual continues in the educational institution under his own sponsorship and brings his GPA to the established standard or 2.0, the individual may again be considered for sponsorship through this agency. In the event an individual is put on probation by the agency, this information will be shared with the financial aid office.

### **Remedial Courses**

Remedial courses needed to fulfill any academic deficiencies will be limited to one semester of agency sponsorship for eligible individuals. The VR area supervisor must approve any exceptions beyond one semester.

### **Community College/Vocational Training**

DSB gives preference to in-state public vendors and the DSB Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (RBC). Individuals may receive agency sponsorship for vocational training outside of programs offered in undergraduate, graduate and professional schools. An individual who is participating in such a program must maintain grades of standards of performance commensurate with the standards established by the institution or trainer for satisfactory completion of the training program within an established time frame. The agency will not sponsor an individual in a vocational training program for more than one additional unit of time as defined by the particular institution or trainer in order to complete the program.

Financial eligibility is not required for tuition and required fees although comparable benefits must be used when available. Financial assistance is limited to the actual N.C. rates for tuition and fees for the community college system. For other vocational training, agency financial assistance is limited to the actual cost of the program. Care should be taken in evaluating the programs in relation to the individual's overall vocational needs. In the event that an individual is placed on probation by the agency, this information will be shared with the financial aid office.

Individual shall be encouraged to attend technical or community colleges in their local communities when the course of study is available. This will result in prudent financial management. If the individual selects a feasible course of study that is not offered in the home community, maintenance should be treated in accordance with the policy for individual attending a N.C. in-state public college or university. If the course of study is available in the local community, no increased maintenance for room and board will be available to the individual.

The VR area supervisor will review and approve any justified exceptions. These decisions may be sent to the VR field services chief for review.

## **Graduate Training**

Graduate training may be sponsored for those individuals who require this level of training to enter a vocational outcome and if such training was planned prior to the individual's senior year in the undergraduate school. Financial eligibility is not required for tuition and required fees although comparable benefits must be used when available. Agency financial assistance is limited to the rate established by the agency for college and university training in a North Carolina public university.

Individuals under our sponsorship for graduate or professional programs must maintain a grade point ratio commensurate with the standards established by the educational institution they are attending for degree requirements. Agency sponsorship will be withdrawn from an individual in graduate or professional programs whose GPA falls below the standards established by the educational institution for degree requirements for two consecutive semesters or quarters. If the individual continues in the educational institution under his own sponsorship and brings his cumulative GPA to the standard established by the educational institution, the individual may again be considered for sponsorship. In the event that an individual is placed on probation by the agency, this information will be shared with the financial aid office.

The VR area supervisor will review and approve any justified exceptions. These decisions may be sent to the VR field services chief for review.

## **Distance Learning**

Distance Learning is available for many of the types of training sponsored by the division. The coursework may be internet based curriculum, computer based tutorials, correspondence training or a combination of these with intermittent attendance to a campus. The programs may vary greatly in the interactivity and the structure provided to the student.

Successful distance learning students generally:

- a. are self motivated with the ability to structure their own tasks,
- b. have a compelling reason for completing the course,
- c. have difficulty coming to campus and
- d. comfortable with the technology or means of communication required for the program.

In addition, the following questions should be addressed when considering a distance learning program:

- Does the distance learning program offer all courses necessary to complete the degree?
- Are distance learning students required to go to campus?
- What are the technology requirements of the courses?
- Does the program provide academic and career counseling and placement assistance?
- What are the time frames for completing the courses?
- division may sponsor individuals enrolled in licensed or accredited distance learning program when such programs are not available through traditional on-campus program, or when the individual has a disability-related issues that prevent him or her from participating in an on-campus program. However, most students benefit from the structure and support of a traditional classroom.
- division will not consider programs in which the entire package or curriculum must be purchased initially. The area vocational rehabilitation supervisor must approve distance learning programs. This does not include individual classes that are distance learning as part of a traditional campus-based program.

For questions or clarification on any of the policy contained in these manuals, please contact the local district office.