Introduction

The Appalachian College Association sustains a tuition discounting program for graduate-level programs among participating member institutions to encourage greater educational attainment and professional development among its members’ faculty and staff and to furnish its qualified undergraduate students enhanced and more affordable opportunities to achieve their educational goals while remaining in the Central Appalachian region.

To these ends, each year member institutions that offer graduate education select the academic programs and levels of tuition discounts provided qualified applicants from ACA institutions. The levels of discount may vary between three categories of potential students: ACA full-time faculty seeking terminal degree credentials; all other ACA member institution full-time employees (including faculty seeking other degrees); and students who have completed an undergraduate degree from an ACA member institution. Institutions have the option of holding decisions on discounts for admitted students until a specified date to ensure existing full capacity is not met by full-paying students. Accordingly, in any given year, the institution may cap the total number of discounts given so as not to exceed desired capacities in the specific program.

Faculty Seeking Terminal Degrees
One of the most important components in ensuring sustainable and high-quality academic programs among ACA schools is the hiring and ongoing development of terminally qualified faculty across the institution’s curriculum. This need among our colleges and universities becomes even more prevalent as our institutions expand increasingly into graduate education and into academic areas in which location of terminally qualified faculty can prove to be more difficult. The growing diversity of academic program offerings among ACA institutions provides an excellent opportunity to collaborate in ways that both serve member institution needs and reduce costs for our faculty seeking this important professional development and credentialing opportunity. Furnishing pathways to degree completion in more affordable ways provides benefit to the individual faculty member, to the particular ACA college or university, and collectively to the quality of education in Central Appalachia. Given these important and broader institutional purposes, the discount rate for these students may be greater than the other two categories.

Any faculty member who seeks a graduate degree through this discount program must abide by all employment requirements at her/his home institution, e.g., leave policies, number of credits allowed to be taken per term, obligations for continued employment post-graduation, etc…. Any applicant for a graduate program must meet all admissions criteria for the institution furnishing the academic program and must abide by all policies and procedures governing students at the institution. The individual member institutions (home and host schools) are wholly responsible for ensuring adherence to relevant policies and procedures.

ACA Institutions’ Full-Time Employees
Graduate tuition discounts from participating institutions and programs are also available to any full-time employee of an ACA member institution. Any employee who seeks a graduate degree through this discount program must abide by all employment requirements at her/his home institution, e.g., leave policies, number of credit allowed to be taken per term, obligations for continued employment post-graduation, etc…. Any applicant for a graduate program must meet all admissions criteria for the institution furnishing the academic program and must abide by all policies and procedures governing students at the institution. The individual member institutions (home and host schools) are wholly responsible for ensuring adherence to relevant policies and procedures.

Students with Degrees from ACA Institutions
Among participating member institutions and/or programs, students who are completing or who have previously completed an undergraduate degree from a member college or university and who meet all other requirements for admission to the host institution’s program will receive a discounted rate on tuition in participating programs.
The Components of the Program

The Appalachian College Association sustain centrally the policies and procedures related to the tuition discount program. Additionally, through its website and social media, it promotes these opportunities with faculty, staff, and students among member schools. It keeps current on its website a database of all participating schools, including listings of specific options from each. The ACA will coordinate with the Council of Chief Academic Advisors (CCAO) regarding ongoing assessment of the program and any future changes in policies or procedures.

Each participating member institution manages as normal all admission matters between school and applicant. The member institution is responsible for reviewing and updating with the ACA its level of participation in the discount program each year. Each summer, the ACA notifies member institutions of its window of opportunity to adjust discounts, to add or remove participating programs, and/or to change waiting list policies or deadlines. The updated discount rates are then promoted in the subsequent annual admissions cycle and take effect in practice in the next year’s summer term. If the member school does not furnish any adjustments by the stated deadline, the approaches and deadlines used in the previous admissions cycle remain in effect.

Individual institutions that offer graduate degrees determine whether and to what extent they wish to participate in the ACA discount program. An institution’s willingness to furnish any part of its degree offerings to ACA faculty, staff, and/or students at discounted amounts is purely voluntary, and a school may determine to withdraw wholly or in part from the program at the designated time each year (normally in the late summer).

The institution offering the degree program will communicate with the potential student’s home institution to determine proper eligibility for discounted tuition. In cases of ACA member full-time employees seeking admission, the provider institution is responsible for confirming eligibility for discounted tuition with the student’s home institution.

Any persons who begin a provider’s program and remain in good standing will be allowed to continue at the initially determined discount rate (even if the program discount is removed in proceeding years). If the member institution decides to increase its discount rate for the program in a subsequent year, it is fully the decision of that institution whether it increases the discount for any current students in the discount program. However, once a student enters in the program at a specific discount rate and remains in good standing as a continuing student under the institution’s policies, s/he may not have the initial discount rate reduced or removed. (Conversely, the host institution possesses no obligation to re-admit a student under a previous discount rate or if the program has been discontinued.)

Member institutions may specify certain programs for which a discount rate would only be available if there is excess capacity in the cohort of students entering the program. (This would be most likely in programs with strict caps on the size of the cohort, or in which market demand often meets or exceeds an institution’s capacity for the program.) In these cases, members may opt not to furnish discounts at all, or they may also set a date in which they will review availability of spaces (normally toward the end of the annual admissions cycle for the specific program) in which these students may be drawn from a waiting list to fill the cohort to chosen capacity (at the established discount rate). Each institution sets this deadline date based upon internal needs and expectations. Due to the greater costs associated with thesis or dissertation hours, schools may exempt these credits from the general discount policies. (These exceptions are noted on the list of participating programs and discounts.)

Faculty, staff, and students entering an ACA graduate program under the discount model are wholly responsible for payment of tuition and other expenses and are expected to abide by the admissions and matriculation policies and procedures of the institution in which they are seeking degree. The ACA discount applies only to tuition rates (and not to any additional fees that may be connected with the program), and it may not be combined with any other discounts a specific institution may furnish students in its graduate programs. In certain cases, a faculty or staff member’s home institution may coordinate with the degree-providing school regarding payment of tuition and fees. The ACA does not directly participate in this component of the program. The entering student is expected to follow all provider institution policies, procedures, and timelines. Likewise, ACA member employees are expected to abide by the policies related to these matters at their home institutions.