

Policy #1408
Degree Attainment Bonus

Date of Current Revision: August 2022
Responsible Officer: Director of Human Resources

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the situations and process by which university employees may receive a bonus for degree completion.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia section 23.1-1600; 23.1-1301. The board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

3. DEFINITIONS

Degree Attainment

Completion of an associate's, bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from an accredited university.

Degree Attainment Bonus

A lump-sum compensation that is outside of base salary or wages, awarded upon successful degree attainment.

Degree Attainment Date

The date that the degree is conferred by the college or university, as shown on an official transcript.

Electronic Transcript

An official transcript either sent electronically via email or via a hyperlink from which a transcript can be printed from an institution participating in the eScrip-Safe (or other approved third-party vendor) electronic transcript network.

Official Transcript

An official transcript is one that has been received directly from the issuing institution or is an original provided by the employee. It must bear the institutional validation (such as a seal, logo or letterhead), date and appropriate signature. Transcripts other than those described above in "Electronic Transcript" that are received and do not meet these requirements are not considered official.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all Administrative & Professional faculty and classified staff employed full-time at the university.

5. POLICY

In order to increase the degree completion rate among employees and to develop the university's human capital, the university will provide an employee degree attainment bonus when an employee completes a first associate's, bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree.

5.1 To be covered by this policy, applicants must meet the following conditions:

- Be a university benefits-eligible classified staff or A&P faculty member.
- Meet employment requirements prior to the date the degree is conferred.
- Be a university employee on the date that the payment is awarded.
- Attain an associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree on or after January 1, 2018 from a college or university with accreditation by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

5.2 The amount of the degree attainment bonus is:

- Associate's Degree: \$2,000
- Bachelor's Degree: \$2,000
- Master's Degree: \$2,000
- Doctoral Degree: \$3,000

5.3 The bonus is provided as a one-time lump sum payment.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Degree Completion

Employees must fully complete all requirements for an accredited degree program.

6.2 Application Completion

- Employees must complete the [Degree Attainment Bonus application](#). The application and official transcripts must be submitted to the employee's supervisor within three months of degree attainment date. Note: The Employee Recognition Nomination form should not be used to apply for a Degree Attainment Bonus.
- A Degree Attainment Bonus can be awarded even if the degree conferred does not directly pertain to the employee's career functions or current duties.
- The supervisor must review and sign the application and forward it, with the official transcript, to the divisional vice president for review and signature. Note: The division may require additional materials for review.
- Once the vice president's signature is obtained on the Degree Attainment Bonus application, the department, on behalf of the employee, must submit a supplemental ePAR form (with appropriate degree attainment level selected).
- Earning a Degree Attainment Bonus does not preclude the employee from being eligible for an In-band Adjustment (IBA). In situations where the earned degree pertains to the employee's career function(s), a supervisor can submit an IBA in addition to the Degree Attainment Bonus.
- Employees who complete a degree from an institution which is not accredited by a recognized United States Accrediting Organization must provide a written,

detailed credential evaluation or equivalency report prepared by a university-approved provider to meet documentation requirements.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

Employee, Supervisor, and Department responsibilities are outlined in the procedures.

Funds for the Degree Attainment Bonus shall be funded from the employee's departmental budget. If an employee begins degree attainment in one department and then works in another department when the degree is conferred, the department where the employee is working when the degree is conferred must fund the degree attainment bonus.

All departments, offices and employees that generate, receive, or maintain public records under the terms of this policy are also responsible for compliance with Policy [1109](#) (Records Management).

8. SANCTIONS

Violation of this policy or the procedures contained herein may result in a sanction commensurate with the violation.

9. EXCLUSIONS

Employees are not eligible for a Degree Attainment Bonus if the degree conferred is a requirement for the position held by the employee at the time of receipt of the degree.

The degree cannot be an additional degree of a type already held by the employee; for example, an employee would not be eligible for the incentive for attaining a second bachelor's degree or a second master's degree.

The degree must be at a higher level than a degree already held.

The degree bonus is not applicable to attainment of professional certifications.

Instructional faculty, adjunct faculty and wage employees are excluded from this policy.

10. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the president and is generally delegated to the director of human resources.

Previous version: June 2019

Approved by the President: October 2018