

EWU FAQ ON WFSE MANDATORY FURLOUGHS

Eastern Washington University and the Washington Federation of State Employees negotiated an MOU effective September 1, 2020, which authorized mandatory temporary furloughs to allow for more flexibility in maneuvering budgetary shortfalls at the University due in large part to declining enrollment, changes in state tuition policies, changes in state funding policies, and the uncertainty created by the Global COVID-19 pandemic. Effective November 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021, the University is implementing the mandatory temporary furloughs which require full-time classified employees to take the equivalent of one day per month (8 hours) of furlough time during this period, pro-rated for employees working less than full-time, but more than half-time (i.e. A “furlough day” for employees working five (5) hours per day would be five (5) hours). The complete MOU may be located online at: <https://in.ewu.edu/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2020/10/MOU-%E2%80%93-Temporary-Furlough-Layoffs-and-VRSI-Plan.pdf>.

The following FAQ is designed to provide further guidance regarding the implementation of the mandatory furloughs:

1. Question:

Can I take mandatory furlough days for my co-workers or friends, so they don't have to?

Answer:

No – While you may volunteer to take additional furlough days beyond the mandatory ten days, all eligible employees must personally take their designated mandatory amount of furlough days.

2. Question:

Who is exempt from the mandatory furloughs for classified employees?

Answer:

Employees are exempt from the mandatory furloughs for classified employees if they:

- They work less than half-time (< 50%)
- They are paid \$53,000 per year or less, as of September 1, 2020
- They are temporary, hourly employees represented in the WFSE Bargaining Unit
- They work in a position that support 24/7 coverage or where legal minimum staffing levels exist, so that shifts lost to furlough days would have to be made up by other staff (i.e. Campus Police, Rozell Steam Plant operators)
- Hold a position that is cyclic or has been previously reduced (i.e. from 12-months to 10-month) due to a reduction-in-force action in the past year.

3. Question:

Are classified employees required to take their mandatory furlough days in increments of one day per month, or do they have flexibility regarding when they can use the time?

Answer:

Classified employees have flexibility regarding how they use their mandatory furlough days. Supervisors may approve requests from employees to use their mandated furlough time as:

- A series of partial days (i.e. 2 hours per day for 40 workdays) or
- More than one day per month (i.e. 2 days per week for five weeks).

Please note: Depending on when employees take their “furlough days,” and the amount taken in each pay period or month, it will affect employees’ paychecks in different ways (i.e. taking them all at once, instead of spread out over 10-months).

4. Question:

I am interested in the “Voluntary Temporary Layoff” provisions included in the MOU, but if I volunteered for this, would I be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits?

Answer:

EWU does not determine employee eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits. The Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) administers the State’s unemployment insurance program, and makes those determinations. Should an employee choose to apply for unemployment insurance, EWU will cooperate with the process and not unreasonably oppose their application’s approval. For more information about unemployment insurance, and eligibility, visit: <https://esd.wa.gov/unemployment>.

5. Question:

I work less than full-time at the University, but more than half-time (50%). Do I have to take a mandatory furlough?

Answer:

Yes, however the amount of mandatory furlough time employees are required to take will be prorated. For example, an employee whose workday is eight-hours must take eight hours for a “furlough day.” Employees whose workday is five hours must take five hours for a “furlough day.”

6. Question:

I am interested in the Voluntary Retirement/Separation Incentive included in the MOU between EWU and WFSE. Where can I find more information about this program?

Answer:

The University will be sending out more information on or about October 30, 2020. Eligible employees will be able to request retirement or separation packets from the Human Resources Benefits Office for a limited time beginning on November 2, 2020. The Voluntary Retirement/Separation Incentive program provides a twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) incentive to **eligible** employees to separate employment or retire from the University. Not all employees/positions will qualify for the program, approved by the WA State Office of Financial

Management (OFM). For more information, or to see if you are eligible, please contact the EWU Benefits Office by phone at (509) 359-2488 or by email at benefits@ewu.edu.

7. Question:

My position was previously reduced below 12-months, as part of the recent reductions in force. Do I have to take a mandatory furlough?

Answer:

No. If an employee's position was previously reduced, it is not subject to the furlough. If employees have questions about whether this provision applies to them and their position, they may contact their department's HR Associate.

8. Question:

Can I take a furlough day right before a paid holiday, to make the holiday break a little longer?

Answer:

Yes, with supervisory approval. However, employees who are on Leave Without Pay (LWOP) status for a full day prior to a holiday are NOT ELIGIBLE for holiday pay. An employee must be in paid-status for at least one-half (1/2) hour on the last scheduled workday immediately preceding a holiday to be eligible for holiday pay. The use of approved paid vacation qualifies employees for being in paid status.

9. Question:

What is the impact on seniority dates for employees subject to mandatory furlough days?

Answer:

Time spent on mandatory OR voluntary furlough will NOT affect an employee's periodic increment date (PID) or seniority date. Seniority will continue to accrue as it always does while on furlough.

10. Question:

I work an alternate shift, consisting of four ten-hour days. Does this mean each of my "furlough days" will be ten-hours, when most everyone else's will only be eight-hours?

Answer:

No – The University recognizes that some full-time employee work schedules are more than eight hours in a day. In order to promote equity, the University has defined a "furlough day" as eight hours for this mandatory furlough, regardless of the length of an employee's actual work shift. During the term of the mandatory furlough (November 1, 2020-August 31, 2020 – ten calendar months) each full-time employee subject to mandatory furloughs must take at least eighty hours of furlough (ten days of mandatory furlough, based on an eight-hour day), prorated for those employees working less than full-time, but more than half-time.

11. Question:

My shift is ten hours, four-days per week (four 10's). If a "furlough day" is eight hours, what do I do for the other two-hours of my shift?

Answer:

Employees in this scenario have several options, all of which would require prior supervisor approval. The options are:

- Take eight hours of furlough, come in to work the remaining two hours of a shift;
- Take eight hours of furlough, take two hours of appropriate paid accrued time off (vacation, compensatory time);
- Take ten hours of furlough (entire shift), and decrease overall mandatory furlough time (80 hours) by ten; or
- Take incremental furlough leave to supplement shift (i.e. two hours of furlough – eight hours of shift, three hours of furlough – seven hours of shift, etc.).

Employees will work with their supervisor to develop a schedule that not only helps them meet the mandatory furlough time requirement, but also supports the University's continuity of operations.

12. Question:

How should I account for furlough days on my timesheet?

Answer:

Please report all furlough hours/days on your timesheet using the Leave without Pay – Furlough code.

13. Question:

How much time am I allowed to work during a week in which I take a furlough day?

Answer:

Employees must not exceed 40 hours during a week in which furlough time is used, including the furlough time, work time, paid leave or any combination of the three. For example:

- If an employee accounts for a 36-hour week, using work time, paid leave, or a combination of the two, the employee would only be eligible for four hours of furlough time for that week ($36 + 4 = 40$ hours).
- If an employee accounts for a 24-hour week, using work time, paid leave, or a combination of the two, the employee would be eligible to use up to 16 hours of furlough time for that week. ($24 + 16 = 40$ hours)

14. Question

Can I use paid or accrued leave in lieu of taking a mandatory furlough day?

Answer:

No – employees cannot use paid or accrued leave in lieu of the mandatory furlough day.

15. Question:

I finalized my original furlough schedule with my supervisor, but now I need to make changes to the original schedule. How can I do this? (Note: supervisor furlough plans should be completed by all eligible employees no later than mid-November).

Answer:

To change original furlough day schedules, employees must send a written request (with the changes) to their supervisor. The supervisor may deny the request due to operational needs. If the supervisor agrees with the proposed change, they will forward the request to the appropriate University Vice President for approval or denial. Please note: Proposed changes to an employee's furlough plan after finalization must be approved by the appropriate University Vice President (or designee) prior to implementation.

16. Question:

When must I take all of my mandatory furlough time by?

Answer:

Employees are required to complete all mandatory furlough time by August 31, 2021.

17. Question:

I have been given a mandatory furlough, but am interested in taking additional time off to help the University save money, which may ultimately help save additional jobs. Can I volunteer for more time off?

Answer:

Yes! Employees have the option to volunteer for additional furlough days, which are uncapped and count toward the mandatory furlough days. Employees also have the option to volunteer for a Temporary Layoff, for up to ninety (90) calendar days. Voluntary layoff is a job protected leave, meaning you will return to your regular work schedule and pay at the end of the layoff. You also have the ability to utilize accrued leave during the temporary layoff, so you can maintain your health insurance benefits. If interested in voluntary temporary layoff, please contact your supervisor.

18. Question:

Are new employees, hired after November 1, 2020, subject to the mandatory furlough?

Answer:

Yes, all classified employees who meet the eligibility requirements, who are employed with EWU between November 1, 2020 and August 31, 2021 are subject to mandatory furlough. Employees hired after November 1, 2020 will be subject to prorated furlough days (i.e. Hired February 2021, would be subject to seven (7) furlough days, rather than ten (10) furlough days.

19. Question:

I made less than \$53,000 on September 1, 2020, but I will be receiving an incremental pay increase soon that will put me beyond that amount. Am I subject to mandatory furlough?

Answer:

No, only employees making at least \$53,000 on September 1, 2020 are subject to mandatory furloughs. Employees who receive incremental pay increases subsequent to that date will not be subject to mandatory furlough.