

University of New England Furlough FAQs

We have attempted to answer questions that we expect many employees may have about the furloughs in this document. However, we understand that each employee's situation is unique, and that you may have other questions that are not answered here. Human Resources has established office hours for you to be able to call and speak to an HR representative. Those hours are: Monday, 1:00 to 4:00, and Tuesday through Thursday, 10:00 to 1:00.

What is a furlough?

A furlough is a temporary layoff from work with the intention of an eventual return to work. This is different from a situation where employees are permanently laid off.

If I am furloughed, am I guaranteed to return to my job?

The hope and intention is to have individuals who are furloughed return to their jobs. However, we are not able to guarantee when this will happen at this time, as there are still many unknowns regarding the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the University. Although we fully intend to return all furloughed individuals back to their previous positions, given the uncertainties we face, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Why is the University doing furloughs?

The harsh reality is that the COVID-19 pandemic has created an economic crisis, putting immense financial pressures on countless businesses and industries, as well as individual households. The University of New England, like many other institutions of higher education, has been significantly impacted. While we will not know the full extent of the financial impact on the University for some time, we do know now that it will be substantial. We need to take action to sustain our ability to provide a world-class education into the future. We are experiencing an unprecedented situation and no one knows how long it will last.

The University is taking a measured approach to furloughs to maintain the financial health of the University, and we are doing our best to achieve necessary cost savings while trying to retain employees.

Why am I being furloughed?

Everyone's position at UNE is valuable and contributes to our success and the success of our students. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted our operations, resulting in the temporary closing of some buildings, the loss of work for some positions, and the temporary closing of some clinics. Senior Administration made the difficult decision to furlough those employees who are not able to fulfill their responsibilities at the current time due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How long does a furlough last?

The exact length of the furlough is yet to be determined. The hope is to return employees to work when the University resumes normal operations.

Can I collect unemployment if I am furloughed?

Generally, yes, furloughed employees are eligible to collect unemployment. The Maine Department of Labor encourages individuals in unpaid status to apply for unemployment benefits. The State cannot inform an employee or employer if a person is unemployment-benefits eligible until the claim is filed since there are many requirements unique to each employee's situation. To learn more about unemployment and how to apply, please click on the following link: <https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/>

What happens to my benefits while I am furloughed?

Core Benefits and Leave Accruals

The University is making special arrangements regarding benefits during the COVID pandemic in recognition of the difficulties imposed for the affected employees. You will maintain your benefits during the furlough period. All furloughed employees will retain their current medical, dental, vision, basic life and disability insurance, and UNE will pay both the employer **and** employee portions of their insurance premiums, after any accrued vacation time is used and during the remaining unpaid furlough period. In addition, tuition remission benefits, vacation time, and, sick, floating, and personal leave accruals will continue while employees are temporarily furloughed.

Retirement Plan

During the furlough period, you will remain in active status in the 403(b) retirement plan. However, because you will not earn eligible wages during the furlough period, contributions to your retirement plan accounts will be suspended. If you return to employment, you may increase your individual deferral to "catch up," but the maximum employer match you can receive is limited to 8% of the wages you were paid over the year.

Flexible Spending Accounts

Unfortunately, IRS regulations require you to be an active employee to file expenses against your medical FSA and dependent care FSA. During the time you are furloughed, you are not considered an active employee; therefore, during the time of your furlough you are not allowed to make claims for expenses that arise while you are on furlough. However, if you return to active employment, you are able to contribute the amount you would have contributed to your medical FSA had you not been furloughed, and at that time you may submit medical claims that arose during your furlough. You are not able to submit claims for dependent care reimbursement that occur during the time you are not working.

Additional Life Insurance and Short-Term Disability

You may continue your Additional Life Insurance and Short-Term Disability coverages while on furlough. Simply submit a monthly premium check to HR for the premium.

CIC Benefit

Those individuals who are eligible to participate in the CIC educational benefit will still be able to utilize that benefit while on furlough.

Using Leave Time

Will I be able to use leave time (vacation, sick, personal) while on furlough?

As a furloughed individual, with the exception of sick time, you may choose to use your accrued FY20 leave time or apply for unemployment immediately. If you use your leave time, it may affect your unemployment compensation benefits. If you choose to use your earned unused vacation days you must notify Human Resources by emailing hr@une.edu by **Friday, April 24, 2020**.

Will I be paid for my accrued vacation leave if I do not use it?

No. Furloughed individuals are considered to be on temporary leave versus a complete separation from the University, you are not paid out accrued vacation leave.

When I return from furlough will I be eligible for the full amount of vacation, sick, personal and floating holiday leave?

During the period of this COVID-19 pandemic, UNE is modifying its policy regarding leave accrual. The modification will depend on the length of the furlough. If the furlough ends on or before August 31, 2020, the individual will receive the full amount of leave time. This will be re-evaluated if it is determined the furlough will last beyond August 31, 2020.

UNE Email

While I am on furlough am I expected to check and respond to emails, address work calls from my manager or colleagues who call me, and staying in contact with UNE?

If you are on a full furlough, you are not to do any work for UNE, which means not responding to email or returning calls from managers or co-workers. However, we will be communicating with you regarding your return to work status so please make sure to let us know if you would like those communications sent to your UNE email address or your personal email address.

UNE Equipment

Do I need to make arrangements to return my UNE property/equipment?

It is our hope that you will be able to return to your position. As such, we are not expecting you to return your UNE property/equipment at this time.