



Approving University Official(s): Office of the Provost and Office of the Senior Vice President, Finance and Business

Responsible Office: Office of Human Resources

Effective date: July 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021

Next review date: This policy will be reviewed and may be modified in accordance with state and local guidelines

POLICY ON COVID-19 ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines, protocols, and standards for providing flexible and alternative work arrangements upon request for faculty and staff who are asked to return to in-person campus work activities, or who support ongoing academic research, continuously or intermittently between July 1 and March 31, 2021. It is intended to mitigate the risks of spread of COVID-19 through upholding the University's commitment to providing maximum flexibility for remote work and other alternative work arrangements for those individuals affected directly or indirectly by COVID-19. This policy applies to all active status (not currently on leave or furlough) University faculty and staff, regardless of benefits-eligibility status. This policy does not apply to students; graduate students with on-campus responsibilities should consult with their school and/or The Graduate School for flexible or alternative arrangements.

The policy recognizes that the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the ability to return to campus may manifest in ways other than a confirmed positive diagnosis, such as:

- illness of minor and/or adult dependents;
- inability to access reasonably safe public transportation options;
- inability to secure child or elder care.

As stated elsewhere, the [disclosure of any positive diagnosis](#) or required self-isolation should be handled through Risk Management.

All schools and units are required to create and implement a plan according to the [Return to Campus guidelines](#) which identify essential roles and services, including scheduling and density protocols. These plans will be developed in consultation with Central Administration. To the extent that a school- or unit-level return-to-campus plan adequately covers an employee's need for scheduling or flexibility, the provisions of this policy need not apply. This policy is intended to address situations in which an employee requires additional flexibility. In such circumstances, this policy will govern the process for requesting, reviewing, and approving or denying these requests.

This policy aligns with the [Core Responsibilities](#) outlined to the campus community.

This policy does not cover requests for accommodations for disabilities or pregnancy, nor religious accommodations. For any such accommodations refer to existing policies and procedures, such as section 4.4 of the [Staff Handbook](#) or page 23 of the [Faculty Handbook](#), and to the [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#) administered by the [Office of Equity](#).

Audience

This policy applies to all active status (not currently on leave or furlough) University faculty and staff, regardless of benefits-eligibility status, who are asked to return to work physically on our campuses on a continuous or intermittent basis or are planning to do so. The University expects all supervisory employees, including managers, Principal Investigators, Vice Presidents, and Dean's offices, to familiarize themselves with, abide by, and support the terms of this policy.

Policy Guidelines

It is expected that schools and units will provide flexible scheduling and remote working arrangements to meet required reduced density in the workplace as directed by the Return to Campus plan. These scheduling and remote work arrangements are not covered by this policy and should not follow the workflow or documentation process described herein.

All schools and units should provide the maximum reasonable flexibility to individuals who request individualized remote or alternative work arrangements (which include scheduling and density arrangements described in a school's or unit's Return to Campus plan, as noted above) due to the negative impact of COVID-19.

Such flexible work options could include, but are not limited to:

- Allowing any faculty or staff member to work remotely
- Allowing a faculty member to:
 - take a scheduled leave early;
 - team teach for Fall Quarter;
 - reschedule teaching responsibilities to a later quarter;
- Allowing temporary job-sharing arrangements for staff
- Allowing non-exempt employees to fulfill their scheduled hours through a non-standard work schedule
- Reducing service obligations for faculty during the 2020-21 academic year

The items listed above are not intended to be an exhaustive list of which flexible work options should be made available to a school's or unit's faculty and/or staff. However, in the absence of a compelling reason to the contrary, the requests for flexible work arrangements including the items offered above should be strongly considered, provided that the essential work of the school or unit can still continue.

Staff and faculty with situational or health conditions which prevent them from returning to campus in person to perform onsite work activities should be provided the opportunity to develop proposals for reasonable alternative work arrangements in coordination and cooperation with their supervisory unit. Staff and faculty with any of the [health conditions](#) identified by the CDC to increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 may of their own volition, but should not be expected to, return to in-person work activities during the period covered by this policy.

Supervisors should offer flexibility in work assignments and work schedules so that individuals with flexible and alternative work arrangement requests are able to continue to work remotely if possible. Unit HR Business Partners and the Office of the Provost are available to consult with unit and department leaders about what flexible work options are available or may be tailored to the particular situation.

In developing alternative work arrangements, supervisors should not default to a redistribution of duties, if necessary, to individuals with lesser authority in the unit. For example, teaching responsibilities of a tenured faculty member should not be redistributed to non-tenured faculty members, to postdoctoral

trainees, or to graduate students, unless that is deemed, after considering availability of skills and resources, the best course of action. All arrangements should be fashioned with care and intention to ensure that work responsibilities are assigned equitably.

Denials of flexible work or alternative work arrangement requests for COVID-19 related impacts should be considered as the exception during the effective period of this policy. The University's [Policy on Non-Retaliation](#) applies to requests under this policy. This policy does not provide job protection, and faculty and staff remain eligible for position elimination and other employment actions for reasons unrelated to this policy. A denial of a request may be appealed using the established processes and grounds for appeal under the terms of the [Staff Handbook](#) and the [Faculty Handbook](#).

This policy will be reviewed periodically and may be modified at any time. It will be reviewed later in the year for consideration of discontinuation/extension following the March 31, 2021 identified expiration date.

Policy Implementation Protocol

The protocol for implementing this policy follows the below steps in sequential order. It is expected that any denial of flexible or alternative work arrangement requests for COVID-19 related impacts should be considered as the exception during the effective period of this policy.

Step 1

Staff and faculty seeking accommodation based on their own medical, disability or other protected basis should contact the [Office of Equity](#) and follow the [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#) to request an accommodation.

It is expected that schools and units will provide flexible scheduling to meet required reduced density in the workplace as directed by the Return to Campus effort. These scheduling and remote work arrangements are not covered by this policy and should not follow this policy's workflow or documentation process.

Staff and faculty seeking flexible or alternative work arrangements for other reasons related to COVID-19 are covered by this policy and should complete the [COVID-19 Alternative Work Arrangement request form](#). Supporting documentation may be required in connection with such requests. Staff requests will be routed to the Office of Human Resources, and faculty requests will be routed to the Office of the Provost for initial intake and review. The request will be shared with the individual's school or unit leadership for consultation and decision.

All requests will be considered in the context of arrangements made for similar requests across other University units or departments and in compliance with the University's commitment to providing maximum flexibility for remote or alternative work arrangements for those individuals negatively affected by COVID-19, while balancing a unit's or department's business needs.

Step 2

If a flexible or alternative work arrangement is granted, the requestor's supervisor will inform the requestor. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to:

- a) provide an agreed-upon flexible work arrangement for as long as is reasonable given the demands of the role and the needs of the individual and unit
- b) document said arrangement and share it with the Office of Human Resources and, in the case of faculty, with both the Office of the Provost and the Office of Human Resources (see Policy Contacts below).

If, upon the consultation outlined in Step 1, the unit or department determines that the requested flexible or alternative work arrangement cannot be granted, the unit or school leadership should inform the Office of Human Resources in the case of staff or the Office of the Provost in the case of faculty of their intent to deny the request. The Office of Human Resources or the Office of the Provost will review the request and consider factors such as the nature of the work performed by the requestor and the record of decisions on comparable requests across the University, as well as the operational needs of the unit or department. The Office of Human Resources or Office of the Provost will consult with the requestor's unit or department leadership to ensure comparable requests are handled equitably across the University. If appropriate and feasible, options such as alternative work arrangements, enhanced technology support for a unit, modified schedules, the COVID-19 Temporary Leave of Absence Program, reduced work hours, and/or shared work responsibilities will be discussed as possible solutions to meet both the unit's and requestor's needs. If a flexible or alternative work arrangement can be offered, then the requestor's unit or department leader will document and inform all relevant parties as outlined in the above paragraph.

Step 3

If, under the consultation steps outlined under Steps 1 and 2, the unit leadership and the Office of Human Resources or the Office of the Provost determine that a flexible or alternative work arrangement cannot be offered, then the unit or department will direct the requestor to other existing policies or processes that may be applied to their situation.

Policies that are available include, but are not limited to, existing University policies such as [Family Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) provisions or an [Unpaid Personal Leave](#).

In addition, in response to the unusual and anticipated temporary accommodation needs due to COVID-19, the University will provide a new COVID-19 Temporary Leave of Absence Program, which will apply to circumstances not covered under FMLA. This is an opt-in program offering the employee the temporary option of taking a leave of absence. This program has the following benefits and limitations during the leave of absence:

1. The University will pay the employer portion of the employee's medical premiums and basic life insurance premiums.
2. The employee will not receive any portion of their salary or other benefits, including the accrual of sick or vacation time.
3. The employee's position is not guaranteed should the University determine that the position is no longer required (unless prohibited by law or contract).
4. The program is available only for active employees who have positions that it has been determined cannot be performed remotely or accommodated through other flexible or alternative work arrangements.

Consequences of Violating this Policy

It is expected that all schools and units will follow the guidelines and requirements of this policy to encourage the consistent and fair application of flexible work arrangements for faculty and staff across the University. For this reason, all supervisory employees, including managers, Principal Investigators, Vice Presidents, and Dean's offices, are required to follow the reporting and flexible work arrangement requirements, including the mandatory reporting of any denied requests. The consequences of failure to comply will follow the guidelines in the applicable [Staff Handbook](#) or [Faculty Handbook](#).

Related Information

Phased Return to Campus plan: <https://www.northwestern.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-updates/campus-return/index.html>

Return to Campus Policy: <https://www.northwestern.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-updates/campus-return/policy/index.html>

Campus occupancy expectations, by employee type and return to campus step: <https://www.northwestern.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-updates/campus-return/steps/index.html>

The University's [Policy on Non-Retaliation](#) applies to requests under this policy.

The University's [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#).

Contacts

Office of Human Resources: HRBP@northwestern.edu

The Office of the Provost: facultyrecords@northwestern.edu

History

Policy Effective Date: July 1, 2020

Revision Date: December 2020