



Office of the President

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To: UW System Chancellors, Provosts, CBOs, HR Directors, LL/PIOs, UW System Cabinet, UW System colleagues

CC: UW System Emergency Operation Center

Fr: UW System President Ray Cross 

Re: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preparedness Update

I wanted to share the following updates and information regarding the UW System's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UW System is committed to continuing to take all reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of its students, its employees, and its communities. This memorandum provides information to help you understand how you may continue to do the important work of your university, while also continuing to play a critical role in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Emergency Interim Policy Regarding Leave and Workplace Flexibility

We have developed an [emergency interim policy](#) implementing leave provisions and workplace flexibility options during the COVID-19 pandemic. This interim policy underscores our goal of making the health and safety of the UW System community our priority.

We also realize the challenge of maintaining continuity during this trying time while ensuring and protecting employee health and safety. The policy establishes standards for the continued pay and leave usage for certain UW System employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, including making up to 80 hours of leave available to employees unable to perform their assigned duties.

This policy applies to the following UW System employees: Faculty, Academic Staff, University Staff, Limited Appointees, Employees-In-Training, and Graduate Assistants (Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants and Program Assistants) and Temporary Employees. Student Hourly staff and UW-Madison employees, who are covered by a separate human resource policy, are not included in this policy.

Telecommuting/Teleworking

A critical method for us to continue preventing the spread of COVID-19 is social distancing, which is accomplished by minimizing human contact. As I have mentioned in a [previous communication](#), I have suspended the [Interim UW System Short-Term Telecommuting Policy](#) and delegated to supervisors the authority to approve work arrangements like telecommuting without the need for a written agreement as a way to expedite social distancing with UW System staff.

Your supervisor will continue to provide you further details related to your specific job duties, but the general principle is that you will perform fundamentally equivalent tasks while telecommuting. In other words, our work and responsibilities have not changed, even if the way we do our work is, temporarily,

changing. Feel free to reach out to your supervisor at any time for further guidance or questions via email.

Our UWSA Human Resources Department has provided the **attached document** and tips below as resources for managers and staff as they navigate through these initial steps.

Plan and manage. If planned and managed successfully, telecommuting can be an opportunity for building trust, deepening engagement and increasing productivity among employees. It can also be employed as a strategic talent management initiative that improves employee attraction, engagement and retention while reducing costs for both the institution and employees.

Be flexible. Managers should think of telecommuting as a continual work in progress. Teams are unlikely to get all arrangements right the first time. Remain flexible, evaluate frequently and adjust the arrangements as needed.

Virtual presence. Instant messaging systems can be used by team members to check-in each morning, and change status when they will be away from the computer for more than a few minutes. Transparent communication tools like shared calendars can also be useful and are encouraged. Advanced collaboration tools such as video conferencing may also be considered as they help to bridge the gap by building trust and intimacy that is conveyed by eye contact, body language and other nonverbal communication cues.

Customer Service. Service-level support requirements in communicating with customers should be clearly defined, with agreement from all team members on service levels to ensure transparency. Commit to an acceptable response period for email inquiries or phone calls.

IT support. Work with IT to ensure the technology is effective, efficient, operates consistently and provides excellent customer service. IT department involvement and support is critical to teleworking success.

Trust. Managers should use telecommuting/teleworking as an opportunity to foster trust between employees and management. Established daily check-ins can be useful, but rigid micro-monitoring of daily activities hinders productivity and creates an environment of distrust.

Manage by results. Establish a clear definition of objectives and performance indicators, and monitor those indicators. For managers who are unaccustomed to remote work, telework can be disconcerting. Recognize there may be a period of adjustment and worker activity should not be confused with the results those activities produce.

Regular and Consistent Communication

We will continue to provide you with regular and consistent communications, most often in the form of a memorandum such as this one. Please anticipate that we will communicate with you as information becomes available. In addition, please know that the UW System has a dedicated [COVID-19 Preparedness](#) website where you may obtain the most current information related not only to your work on behalf of the UW System.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

The most important thing you can do at this time is to keep yourself and others healthy. I urge you to obtain information about COVID-19 from reliable, accurate, and trusted health resources, such as the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#).

I understand that for some of you telecommuting requires a significant change in how you accomplish your work. Thank you for embracing this change. I appreciate your understanding as we strive to limit the spread of COVID-19, and to continue to accomplish the important work we do at the University of Wisconsin System for our students, campus colleagues, and community members from all across Wisconsin.