

## **HR FAQs - May 1, 2020**

### **Returning to Campus and other HR-related topics**

The Emory Town Hall that was held on Friday, April 24, captured a wide range of questions from the Emory community, several of which were HR-related. Some of the most frequent questions (and answers that we have at this point in time) are provided below. Please understand that this situation is fluid and some answers we give now may change as recommended guidelines or the impact of the pandemic on our institution changes.

### **Jobs, layoffs & furloughs**

#### **Is it possible that Emory may need to do layoffs due to the financial impact of the pandemic?**

We have to be honest about the reality that there could be some difficult decisions that may need to be made in the future. Our sincere hope is that we can keep the impact on our staff and faculty as low as possible. The University is doing everything it can to mitigate the financial impact of this virus by cutting discretionary costs wherever possible on things such as travel, food, gifts and other expenses. Much will depend on how and when we can resume operations and bring students and research back to campus.

#### **How will Emory determine if staff furloughs or layoffs are necessary?**

The financial situation with regard to fall student enrollment, the resumption of research, and the amount of cost we are able to avoid through discretionary cost cutting measures are key factors in our financial viability. Many of these factors are still under assessment, but they will play a part in how we make decisions around the impact on compensation and employment. We will strive to ensure that, if reductions affecting employment or compensation become necessary, they will be done in a fair and equitable manner that considers the impact on our lower paid employees to the greatest extent possible. Our people are what make Emory so special, so decisions around employment are not made lightly.

#### **Will staff be offered options like early retirement, voluntary furloughs/reduced work weeks, and 10-month contracts in an effort to avoid layoffs?**

Every effort will be made to avoid layoffs, and a number of voluntary or temporary programs such as these will be under consideration.

### **Return to Campus**

#### **When can we return to campus?**

As much as we wish we could give you a timeline, we are unable to give a specific date at this point in time. Rest assured that there is a team of people at Emory who are looking at every single aspect of this issue, balancing the health and safety of our community with the financial needs of our institution.

One thing we want to emphasize is there won't be a day when we all can just return to work like the flip of a light switch. Things will not be as they were. There will be a new normal for many of us. And while we don't know what the new normal will look like exactly, we do know that it will be different. We ask that you be patient as we work through all of these issues. We will let you know as soon as decisions are made.

**What is the return to campus strategy? Will it be done in phases? Which faculty and staff are prioritized to return first?**

The process for return to campus is under development. It will likely occur in phases, based on criticality. Extensive planning by a recovery team of leaders from major functions and units is underway for how Emory will return to work on campus. It will be based on multiple criteria, but a key driver will be safety and the protection of the health of our community as guided by the CDC and medical experts.

**What safety measures will be in place when we begin to return to campus (testing, temperature-taking, masks, contact tracing, cleaning processes)?**

The conditions for return to campus are under development. The safety of our community is one of our highest priorities.

**How can we protect those employees who have underlying health issues?**

The process for returning to campus is still under development. We will work with schools, departments and units to ensure the needs of employees with underlying health issues are addressed in our process.

**Will we have a choice to go back to campus or work remotely? What if an employee is afraid to come back to work, for their own safety or the safety of people in their household?**

The process for returning to campus is under development. Some jobs can continue to be performed remotely while others will need to be performed on campus. Policies for how this will be handled will be communicated when the process has been developed. The health and safety of our employees and their families is one of our most important priorities. Appropriate safety protocols will be an important part of the plan for returning to campus.

**Is Emory considering permanent remote work for those who are able to?**

The continuation of remote work is being addressed through the planning process for recovery.

**With local K-12 schools closed and camps through August, will employees with children be supported to continue working in a remote environment?**

The process for returning to campus is under development. Some jobs can continue to be performed remotely while others will need to be performed on campus. Policies for how this will be handled will be communicated when the process has been developed.

**Will announcements from Georgia's governor affect when we are expected to return to campus?**

No. Emory went into a remote work status before the Governor issued the first executive order. Emory will make its decisions based on CDC and medical expert guidelines, in partnership with our colleagues at Emory Healthcare and using the incredible knowledge of our own experts here at the University. We will comply with any local executive orders that require stay in place and social distancing.

**Benefits**

**Will any benefit programs be cut or reduced, such as the Courtesy Scholarship or Tuition Reimbursement?**

At this time, there are no changes being considered to the Courtesy Scholarship or Tuition Reimbursement programs. HR always looks at our benefits programs on an annual basis and we will continue this review process.

**Will any effort be made to keep our health insurance rates from rising since we will not be eligible for merit increases?**

Health insurance rates are driven by the cost and utilization of health care. The rates will be considered this summer as part of the overall financial situation.

**Has any consideration been given to adjusting requirements needed to qualify for retirement, considering that some close to retirement might be in danger of losing their jobs?**

No plans have been made for layoffs at this time. However, should these difficult decisions become necessary, individual situations such as proximity to retirement will be reviewed.

## **Safety**

**I'm very worried about returning to work too soon. How can we be assured of our safety once we return?**

The health and safety of our employees and their families is one of our most important priorities. Appropriate safety protocols will be an important part of the plan for returning to campus.

**Will those who currently have to share office spaces be allotted another area to work in to facilitate social distancing once we are back on campus?**

The configuration of our office space is one of the operational things to be addressed prior to bringing people back to campus. We will continue to abide by social distancing protocols for as long as it is being recommended by the CDC.

**Are we required to wear a face mask at all times when on campus?**

Emory University recently instituted a face covering policy and distribution process as a commitment to the health and safety for all those who are currently assigned to perform essential work functions on campus. To ensure the protection and safety, each staff or faculty member who is required to be on campus will receive two (2) university issued washable face coverings if they are unable to provide their own face covering. For those employees who are coming to campus infrequently and/or not performing essential work functions on campus, we ask that they wear a face covering from home as supplies are limited in our inventory.

**How will Emory enforce that employees use safety measures such as wearing masks?**

Employees who do not observe required safety protocols may be subject to disciplinary actions.

## **Hiring Freeze**

**How are staff positions impacted by the hiring freeze?**

Emory implemented a hiring freeze on all open staff positions at all levels as of March 20, 2020 to help minimize the financial impact of COVID-19. The hiring freeze is expected to remain in place through August 31, 2021.

The Human Resources division has created an [Internal Resource Planning Program](#) that can locate and re-assign those who can fill staffing gaps during the hiring freeze period.

### **Are any positions exempt from the hiring freeze?**

Urgent, critical positions may receive an exemption from the hiring freeze, but these must go through a formal approval process. This process is coordinated through the HR leaders of each school or department.

### **How do the hiring freezes impact grant funded projects?**

Grant funded projects should go through the exemption approval process prior to posting jobs.

### **Do hiring freezes apply to post-doctoral researchers who would be paid by NIH funded grants?**

Requests to hire post-docs should go through the exemption approval process, but based on the specific circumstances they may meet the criteria for approval.

### **Do hiring freezes apply to positions in research labs?**

The exemption approval process recognizes the need for employees to staff funded projects, and requests that meet the criteria will be approved.

### **Merit Raises**

**All merit increases have been moved until after August 2021, over a year from now. Can some departments make exceptions if funds are there to award deserving employees who have worked hard all year?**

Unfortunately, there will be no merit increases regardless of funding availability. This is a university-wide policy that recognizes we are all in this together. There are many, many employees who have accomplished amazing things during this time and it is not possible to reward some, and not all.