

# COVID Furlough FAQs

## 1. Why is the college offering a paid COVID Furlough?

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced change on our campus, in our community and around the world. As a result, many jobs and the hours normally available have been affected. Through the passage of the CARES Act, benefits not usually available to employees and employers have been enacted. The COVID Furlough allows employees whose work has been eliminated or severely limited to get paid (thanks to enhanced unemployment benefits) and keep their Augustana health insurance. Our hope is to continue to minimize any effect on overall pay for employees.

## 2. How does unemployment compensation work?

During COVID Furlough an employee would be responsible for filing for unemployment and providing information required to the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The amount an employee receives will depend on that employee's current wage and is subject to a maximum of \$471 per week. Eligible employees may also be eligible for an additional \$600 per week, provided by the national CARES Act, for a maximum of \$1,071 per week. The supplement provided by the CARES Act is set to expire on July 31, 2020.

## 3. Are all employees eligible to take a COVID Furlough?

Only employees who do not have regular work available to them either on campus or remotely are eligible to take a COVID Furlough. Employees wishing to take a COVID Furlough will need to submit this [short request form](#) to the Office of Human Resources. Once an employee's supervisor confirms that work is not available, the furlough will be granted. Employees will be required to use all Augustana provided COVID leave before beginning a COVID furlough. In some departments, there is enough work to keep a fewer number of employees in certain positions working regular hours. In these cases, the COVID Furloughs will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis.

## 4. What happens with employee benefits during COVID Furlough?

The Augustana benefits an employee selected during open enrollment will continue. The employee will be responsible for paying their portion of the premiums or flexible spending account deductions and their benefits will continue.

## 5. Should I take a COVID Furlough or use my accrued vacation time?

If you have a large supply of vacation time, you can choose to substitute this for your regular work hours. In this scenario, you will continue to receive matching retirement dollars as well as the college retirement contribution.

## 6. How long will the COVID Furlough last?

Employees who choose to take a furlough will be asked to return to work as soon as work becomes available. As the Illinois Stay at Home order is lifted, we hope to return employees back to their regular work as soon as possible. We also hope it may be possible to offer other work options at that time that will allow work for more employees. For employees whose jobs have been affected by distance learning, work may not be available until students return to campus.

## 7. If I take a furlough will it affect my continued employment?

An employee's request to take a COVID Furlough will not be a consideration in future decision making about employment.

## 8. What if I'm on a temporary assignment?

For those employees who have accepted an alternate assignment instead of their usual work duties, a COVID Furlough may still be available. However, if your temporary assignment is of an essential nature, COVID Furloughs will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis.

## 9. What if there is some work available but not enough to fill my normal hours – can I take a part-time furlough?

No, the nature of this program requires furloughed employees to be completely relieved of Augustana duties during the COVID Furlough. The college has offered a variety of leave options to supplement pay for employees who are only partially working due to the stay-at-home order and the move to distance learning. These options include using the temporarily offered college COVID leave, sick and vacation leave, and borrowing from future vacation benefits.

## 10. Can I use vacation time for a period of time and later apply for a COVID Furlough?

Yes. As described above, COVID Furloughs will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis, but there currently is no deadline by which employees must apply. We anticipate COVID Furloughs will continue to be offered until work becomes available and positions are resumed. The nature of state unemployment benefits may, however, change based on the time an employee is furloughed. Employees may access important [information about unemployment benefits in Illinois here](#).

## 11. Are other financial resources available to me?

The federal government, under the CARES Act, changed the rules regarding hardship distributions and loans from individual retirement accounts. The usual tax penalties with a pre-retirement distribution have been removed and loan payback times have been extended. Typical time to process a loan or distribution is 24-48 hours once the request has been made. The best source for additional details on these programs is a call to TIAA at 800-242-2252.

## 13. What if I still have questions?

The Office of Human Resources is happy to assist and answer individual questions. Please call 794-7352 and leave your phone number for a return call, or email [humanresources@augustana.edu](mailto:humanresources@augustana.edu) and let us know the best way to contact you and provide assistance.