

USAC Web Submissions - Received 1-18-24

Idea/Question #1: On 1/4/24, we received "a note from Geraldine" suggesting we focus prioritize wellbeing. This is an appropriate message and one I believe in! On Sunday 1/7/24 @ 7:30 am, I received a Leave Report Reminder email. Can we stop the non-urgent weekend emails? Our actions counter our best intentions.

Rationale/Reason: Trying to preserve work/life balance.

Response: We appreciate your feedback and continue to evaluate and adjust the timing of system-generated messages where possible. The particular message referenced is scheduled to go out on the 7th of each month to employees who have not approved their time and on the 10th to supervisors. The system is not able to recognize whether those days are workdays or weekends. We continue our commitment to supporting and promoting employee wellbeing and will make efforts to adjust practices when possible.

Idea/question #2 : What is the University policy on closing for 30-60 minutes during lunch so staff can take a lunch break?

Rationale/reason: More businesses are closing for brief periods so that staff can take lunch. UR staff in offices with few staff as well as offices that rely on student workers to work the main reception often have to skip lunch and work without breaks due to lack of coverage during lunch hours. Student workers call in sick or they are not always available to cover typical lunch periods. It would be helpful for the University to have an official policy on this so that there is consistency across units for staff being allowed and able to take lunch breaks and that staff do not have to wait until very late in the day to eat or eat while working so that the office can remain open during that period. Inconsistency is unhealthy and leads to resentment as some offices may be allowed to close briefly while others cannot. There should be a consistent policy all managers follow or a university break period for all employees (e.g., noon - 12:30).

Response: Our policy on work hours and meal breaks is purposely flexible to allow departments to consider the best alternatives that suit their operations. Our campus serves a varied set of constituents, including current and prospective students, current and prospective employees, community visitors, etc. Because of the great variation in our operations and the services we each provide, we are not considering a lunchtime shutdown. Our policy does speak to employee's entitlement to a meal break. If operations are limiting the opportunity for a proper meal break, we encourage employees to speak to their manager or their HR Business Partner, who can help facilitate discussions and explore solutions. See policy: <https://hr.richmond.edu/current-employees/schedule.html>

Idea/question #3 : Why is intermittent FMLA required to help elderly parents every so often? The process is burdensome for employees esp when caring for two parents out of town and having to work with NY Group Life takes hours of paperwork and calls.

Rationale/reason: What is the difference b/c taking care of elderly parents, children and spouses on an as-needed basis and why is intermittent FMLA required for one category and not the others (e.g., child and spouse)? I have spent hours on the web page and on the phone (wasted precious time) with NY Life and doctors to care for parents every 5-6 weeks. It is burdensome and stressful for the employees when they are already stressed esp if they are "sandwich" employees. Managers and supervisors should be giving the same instructions to all employees - not treating some different from others.

Response: Family Medical Leave (FML) provides eligible employees with job-protected leave for qualifying family and medical reasons and requires continuation of their group health benefits under the same conditions as if they had not taken leave. The University must comply with all Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requirements which includes informing employees of their FMLA rights and responsibilities.

Employees have the right to take FMLA leave all at once, or, when medically necessary, in separate blocks of time or by reducing the time they work each day or week. The intermittent leave process with New York Life (NYL) is the same for an employee's own illness or that of their spouse, child or parent. Intermittent leave under FMLA requires recertification every 6 months for a longer-term condition, or sooner if medical circumstances have changed.

Once HR is notified by the employee or manager of a potential need for FMLA we advise the employee to contact New York Life to apply for FML. (we can include this link if helpful <https://hr.richmond.edu/managers/leave/fmla-std.html#if-an-employee-has-plenty-of-sick-leave-do-they-still-have-to-apply-for-fmla>)

When managers contact HR about leave options for an employee, they are provided with the same information as above as well as the information on the Human Resources page.

HR is happy to assist the employee below if they are having issues with recertification. Please reach out and we will work with NYL to help resolve any issues.

Idea/Question #4: Why charge for a 5K at UR for university staff & students?

Rationale/Reason: If UR is promoting wellness, why are we charging for folks to walk and run across campus for a free breakfast and t-shirts? Shouldn't the event be accessible to all without paying? There are already portable toilets by the baseball field and buildings with toilets, for example, and other costs should be minimal as the event is on campus.

Response: Thank you for your submission. The University promotes well-being for students, staff and faculty in many ways. The Spider Dash 5K is just one way we do that. For this particular event, we must cover our cost for meals, timing, bibs, t shirts, bags, signage and awards. The University will be paying for some of the costs which are not covered in the registration fee. We have tried very hard to keep the cost to a minimum.

Idea/Question #5: Inadequate Leave for New Employees with Covid

Rationale/Reason: One of my direct reports, hired in 2022, has come down with Covid. As they are a newer employee who has not had much time to build up a buffer of sick time, the now-rescinded Covid leave that we were originally allotted would have been a tremendous asset at this time. I would like to recommend that in the face of our current Covid spike, this time be reapplied to their leave balance. At the very least, this would be appropriate for those employees (such as the one in question) who did not use this available leave before it expired, but I would further recommend that it become a fixture of our leave package until such time that Covid is no longer causing widespread illness, hospitalizations, and long-term health concerns. For longtime employees such as myself, this is much less of an issue, but for those who just joined us, who we should want to best support as a new part of our community, they have very few options but to eat through the entirety of their sick leave while battling this still-persistent virus. Studies have shown that increased activity during Covid-related illness leads to worse outcomes as concerns long Covid. It is in everyone's best interest that individuals are able to recuperate without concern that any future health emergencies will require them to go without pay. This should not be the environment we, as a University community, wish to foster.

Response: The federal emergency declaration policy expired in May of 2023. At that time, the University carefully evaluated our approach going forward and made the decision to scale back protocols, reporting, and special benefits, including the additional 5 COVID days that had been granted to employees. The great majority of employees continue to have sufficient time to cover illness as well as set time aside for vacation. For new employees, it can always be a bit challenging – covid or otherwise – if events arise which necessitate absences. In the event of anything more serious, they will have the availability of Short-Term Disability. When we look at our sick time allowances compared to other employers, we feel comfortable that we are providing comparable benefits. At this time, there are no plans to reinstate COVID days.