

EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY DURING MODIFIED OPERATIONS: CONSIDERATIONS & RESOURCES TO GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

This version was updated on March 16, 2020 at 12:00 am. An updated version will be posted on April 3, 2020.

This document has been written to help supervisors and department heads prepare for and manage situations where employees are working remotely during modified operations as part of the College response to the COVID-19 emergency. The intention is that it will be updated with additional information as the emergency unfolds and as issues are identified.

The College has issued directives to certain departments, in which employees are continuing to work on campus during the period of modified operations. These departments include but are not limited to Public Safety, Dining Services, Health Services, Facilities, Counseling Services, and the Post Office. Other departments and individual employees not in these departments may be added.

All departments must implement mitigation and social distancing protocols as required by public health authorities. This includes compliance with [Governor Baker's March 15, 2020 Order Prohibiting Gatherings of More than 25 People and on Premise Consumption of Food or Drink](#) and the accompanying [guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#), which prohibit:

- any event or activity that brings together 25 or more persons in a single room or single space at the same time in a venue such as an auditorium, stadium, arena, large conference room, meeting hall, theatre, gymnasium, fitness center, private club or any other confined indoor or outdoor space; and
- on-premises consumption of food or drink in any eating establishment; provided, that such establishments may continue to offer food for takeout and by delivery provided that they follow social distancing protocols that allow individuals to stay 6 feet apart. This means that all dining services locations on campus must provide only take-away meals and must prohibit individuals from eating on-site.

The same guidance also reiterates that all employees must continue to practice social distancing (staying approximately 6 feet away from other people) whenever possible, and to frequently wash their hands, use hand sanitizer, and practice proper respiratory etiquette (i.e., coughing or sneezing into a tissue that is then disposed of or into the inside of your arm/elbow). Questions regarding how this guidance may effect a department's operations or any particular job duties should be directed to Human Resources.

For all other departments, to advance mitigation and social distancing protocols, as required by public health authorities, the College has asked that department heads prepare and implement a regime of working remotely to the maximum extent possible.

Advice on working remotely is outlined below. In addition, HR staff are available to advise department heads with questions: contact [David Achenbach](#) or [Kate Kilby](#) or send an email to hr@holycross.edu.

Deciding on and Memorializing Remote Work Arrangements

Supervisors and department heads must determine which employees can feasibly work remotely and allow and direct such employees to do so as soon as possible.

The goal is to maximize social distancing, consistent with the Governor’s March 15, 2020, Order and accompanying guidance described and linked above, so supervisors and department heads should avoid reflexive assumptions that employees must work on campus. Supervisors and department heads should think creatively about the types of work that might be usefully performed remotely during the modified operations period. This might be the employees own work or “other duties as assigned.” For example, consider whether there may be work that could be swapped between an employee working remotely and an employee who continues to perform work on campus. Similarly, consider whether work that needs to be performed on campus can be bundled so that it is done by a single individual or smaller number of employees who otherwise need to be on campus – or who can take turns coming to campus – while allowing all other tasks to be performed remotely.

Arrangements to work remotely should be memorialized in writing, such as an email from the supervisor or department head to the employee. Any specific terms or conditions that will apply to an employee’s particular remote work arrangements should also be memorialized in writing to the extent possible.

For example, an email memorializing a remote work arrangement may include the following language as appropriate. Please consult with Human Resources if you have any questions about what should be included in such an email.

Dear *[Employee Name]*,

This email confirms that you will be working remotely beginning on *[date]* until otherwise directed. This is a temporary arrangement and the College reserves the right to alter or end it. You are expected to work remotely *[all days or certain days]*, to stay in close communication with me and other colleagues as you normally would, to continue to follow all College rules and policies, and to review and comply with the [remote work protocols](#) – the College has implemented.

[State any other particular arrangements applicable to the employee.]

If you have any questions or concerns, now or during the period you are working remotely, please contact me, Human Resources, or, if the issue relates to technology, the ITS helpdesk.

We appreciate your flexibility during this period of modified operations and your efforts to continue the College’s work during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name here]

Technology, Access and Security

In general, you’ll want to be thinking about issues like technology, access and security.

Technology. You’ll need to think about what the employee needs to operate remotely. Do they have a College laptop or other computer that is adequate for work use? Do they have and will they need

a printer? If they need a phone to work, do they have a suitable phone? Are there other business resources which they need to have with them in order to do their job? [Contact ITS](#) to determine what resources may be available and how they can be obtained.

Access. You'll need to think about whether the employee needs remote access to network resources via the College's Virtual Private Network (VPN). Some resources can only be accessed from inside the College's firewall and different rules apply in the case of more secured resources. [ITS has a webpage dedicated to answering these questions.](#)

Communication. Office phones may need to be forwarded so that calls can be answered by a home or cell phone. [The ITS webpage has instructions for call forwarding.](#) The ITS webpage also has instructions for [how to conduct virtual meetings](#) using Google hangout or teleconferencing.

Other Security Concerns. Please ensure employees continue to follow standard security protocols. Remind employees to consider whether work needs to be conducted in a private setting (e.g., not overheard or viewed by others who are in the remote environment). If hardcopy documents – such as papers, files, books, or records – must be removed or copied for use in the remote environment, please ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to avoid unauthorized or unwitting disclosure. Additional useful information is available at the [ITS Information Security webpage.](#)

Management Concerns, Tips and Pitfalls

Although circumstances have developed rapidly and certain decisions may need to be made with more limited deliberation than might typically be warranted, it is important to take all necessary steps to ensure compliance with College policies and the law, and to adapt so that the College's work can continue unimpeded. Accordingly, supervisors and department heads must be thoughtful, creative, and flexible in order to promptly address any issues that may arise. Below are some common issues that may arise in a remote work setting.

Setting Expectations. Supervisors and department heads will need to determine and communicate frequently with employees about job expectations while working remotely. Such issues are best addressed promptly to avoid confusion, misunderstandings or misconduct. For example, you may need to set different rules than those currently in effect, such as expectations for returning phone calls, responding to emails and being available for conference calls or other virtual meetings.

Tracking Work. Consider the use of regularly scheduled times for reporting status, department meetings and manager/employee meetings. Use secured shared drives, such as Google Drives and network drives, to keep track of progress on work.

Redesigning Processes, Electronic Signatures, etc. You may need to redesign workflows to maintain efficiencies while employees are working remotely. For example, electronic signatures may take the place of "wet ink" signatures, approvals may be accomplished by email, or by moving documents from one folder ("pending approval") to another one ("approved"). HR has expertise in working on workflow issues and is [available to consult.](#)

Conflicting Responsibilities. Does the employee have conflicting responsibilities that might interfere with their ability to work effectively in the remote environment? You should promptly discuss and address any such issues and be as flexible as possible consistent with applicable rules and protocols.

Requests for Reasonable Accommodations

Department heads and supervisors should refer employee requests for reasonable accommodations while working remotely to Human Resources which will follow [normal College policy and procedures](#). Note that accommodation requests may not be explicit, e.g. the employee may not use the term “accommodation” or may provide information simply indicating that they are having difficulty performing job tasks. In these circumstances the College may have an obligation to explore reasonable accommodations. If there is any question that the employee may require an accommodation, consult with Human Resources. Information related to accommodation requests, medical conditions, and/or disability-related issues, including information relating to potential Covid-19 diagnoses or quarantines, must be kept confidential, consistent with College policy.

Non-Discrimination

Department heads and supervisors are reminded not to discriminate on any unlawful basis, including in the assignment of work, decisions regarding working remotely, disciplinary matters, scheduling, or other terms and conditions of employment. Notwithstanding the heightened risk from Covid-19 to certain populations, such as older persons and person with underlying medical conditions, department heads and supervisors should not assume that any class of employees is any less capable of performing work or is more or less suitable for remote work under the current circumstances.

Prescheduled Leave

Per guidance from public health officials, [the College recommends that employees reconsider non-essential travel plans](#). in light of the unfolding emergency. Department heads and supervisors should discuss with their employees potential changes to their previously scheduled leave. Department heads and supervisors have the right to refuse, approve or adjust previously scheduled leave, but should try to be reasonable. Questions or concerns about changes to previously scheduled leave should be directed to [Human Resources](#).

Sick Leave & COVID-19

If an employee informs a department head or supervisor that they have been exposed to and/or are exhibiting symptoms consistent with Covid-19, or have been quarantined, the employee must be directed TO STAY AWAY FROM CAMPUS and to immediately contact their health care provider. Then the department head or supervisor must immediately contact [Melissa Cutroni](#) in Human Resources. Sick time will be applicable to such absences and employees should be directed to follow regular sick time protocols, which may include providing a medical certification before returning to campus.

If an employee reports that they are not feeling well for other reasons, they should be directed to follow regular sick time protocols for contacting their supervisor and remain away from campus until they are well.

For employees who are unable to work as a result of a Covid-19 diagnosis (whether the person diagnosed is the employee or a family member), or other serious medical condition, leave under the Family and Medical Leave policy (“FMLA leave”) may be available. Please contact [Melissa Cutroni](#) in Human Resources in these circumstances, or if an employee inquires about FMLA leave.

Exposure to COVID-19 While on Campus

If a department head or supervisor is informed by an employee that the employee believes they have been exposed to Covid-19 while on campus, please immediately contact [Melissa Cutroni](#) in Human Resources at (508) 793-3566.

When Working Remotely is Not Approved

In situations where working remotely is not an option, supervisors and department heads must be explicit that the employee is not to work from home. However, as noted departments should authorize working remotely to the maximum extent possible. Although an arrangement to work remotely may not be ideal in normal circumstances, these are not normal circumstances.

Timekeeping, Pay and Leave Policies

Except to the extent the College communicates otherwise, regular timekeeping, pay and leave policies apply during the period employees are working remotely.

When employees are working remotely, department heads and supervisors should direct them to use one of the approved methods to report their time, which may include “remote time punching” from an off-campus device. Information regarding “remote time punching” will be provided to supervisors and department heads on the [Human Resources webpage](#).

Departments have persons designated as timekeepers who have, or will be given, remote access for time entry and time approval. If your designated department timekeeper does not have permission for remote access, or you have questions about remote access to time-reporting, contact [Karen Brosnihan](#) or [Jean Leavitt](#) or KRONOS@holycross.edu.

All supervisors are approved to enter and approve time from on- and off-campus locations. If you have questions, contact [Karen Brosnihan](#) or [Jean Leavitt](#) or KRONOS@holycross.edu.

Human Resources can also enter and approve time, if necessary. Send time to be entered to KRONOS@holycross.edu or a request that time be approved. The [Payroll Office](#) can also enter and approve time, including remotely.

For salaried employees. Department heads and supervisors should ensure that all salaried employees report time off consistent with applicable protocols. Because remote work can sometimes make accurate accounting of time-off difficult, supervisors and department heads should insist and confirm that all time-off is properly recorded.

Continuation of Regular Pay and Benefits

The College will continue to pay all regular full- and part- time employees, salaried and hourly, their normal base pay based on their regularly scheduled hours, regardless of whether they worked a regular schedule. For salaried employees, this will remain in effect through the March 31, 2020 payroll end date. For hourly employees, this will remain in effect through the April 11, 2020 payroll end date. Employee benefits will continue.

Possible Reduction in Work Hours

If circumstances require it, department heads and supervisors may assign employees to work fewer hours than their typical schedule. In such circumstances, employees should be provided as much notice as practicable. In the near term, if this occurs.

After the periods in *Continuation of Regular Pay and Benefits*, above, end, employees assigned to work fewer hours than their typical schedule may use accrued and available paid leave to supplement reduced work hours. This will allow each employee to be paid their normal base weekly wages for as long as they have sufficient accrued time. Employee benefits will continue. To further support this goal, the College may, if circumstances warrant, relax the usual rules on use of paid leave. This may include, for example, allowing employees to use accrued vacation time that would typically not be available until next fiscal year, and/or allowing employees with no available vacation time to “go negative” – be paid their leave in advance of accrual – in their leave balances, up to a certain maximum amount. The College will communicate further details regarding these possible measures, if and as necessary.

If it becomes apparent to department heads that certain operations or tasks may need to be curtailed pending the recommencement of normal operations, supervisors and department heads should be communicating with employees regarding anticipated work schedules. This will allow employees to plan as best as possible. If there is less work available for hourly employees due to curtailment of on-campus activities, supervisors and department heads should distribute available work hours as equitably as possible among similarly situated hourly employees including by considering available work outside their regular department.