

FAQ – UMass Unions United – June 5, 2020

1. Are all of the unions on the same side or not?

YES – we are in this together! Officers from all of the UMass unions meet several times a week to coordinate our appeals for fair treatment from the administration – we are **UMass Unions United**. We had a town hall meeting with almost 500 people attending and it was obvious that we are all in solidarity with each other. We are fighting against austerity, addressing health and safety concerns, and working on the campaign to raise revenue from the state and the federal government to support public higher education.

2. So why are some unions taking furloughs while others are not?

Each unions makes decisions about what is best for their members and the campus. In the case of furloughs, the three largest UMass staff unions (AFSCME, USA, PSU) accepted furloughs as the best way to retain and remunerate their members. The academic units (MSP, GEO, RAPMU, PRO) were in a different position because they are on an academic calendar, and their contracts expired on May 20. Furloughs were not possible, and pay cuts universally would have hurt their members without recourse to unemployment insurance. Employees in the staff unions who are on 43-week or 35-week contracts were not furloughed because this is their period of non-responsibility. More than 90 percent of MSP members are on 9-month contracts and currently in the period of non-responsibility.

3. I don't get that! Why would the staff unions choose to accept furloughs?

The staff unions had good reasons to accept furloughs. Our lowest-paid staff will earn more with the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) than they do in their regular jobs. The furloughs were explicitly structured as five-day layoffs so staff could claim PUA for that week. The CARES Act provides an extra \$600/week bump (in addition to approximately half of one's regular pay), so *anyone earning \$62,400/year or less will come out ahead*. Some staff would have liked to take more weeks of furlough. For example:

- An employee who earns \$30,000/year will gain an additional \$311.50 for the furloughed week compared to their regular pay.
- An employee who earns \$50,000/year will gain an additional \$119 for the week.

4. Okay, fine. But some staff make more than \$62,000, right?

Correct. An employee who earns \$100,000 will lose \$361 for the week. All the unions agree: that's not fair! We are all fighting against the administration's choice to balance the budget on the backs of staff at UMass. The administration should compensate everyone who loses money in the furlough. In the next round of contract negotiations, the staff unions will be asking to be "made whole" for the furlough, for example with added vacation days between Christmas and New Year's. The MSP and other unions will strongly support their request. We will also do everything we can to prevent

layoffs among staff – this was the goal of the furloughs, and we will all be united to fight against any staffing cuts in the summer or fall. Stay tuned to participate in upcoming actions against layoffs and budget cuts.

5. Many faculty would like to take a furlough in solidarity with the staff. Can they do that?

Actually, we tried this! All of the unions thought that voluntary furloughs should have been tried before they were implemented across-the-board. The MSP did propose voluntary furloughs for faculty and librarians who could have taken them before the academic year ended. We also proposed furloughs for everyone who would not be financially harmed by the furlough. The administration said no.

6. So what is the MSP doing if not furloughs?

First, faculty are being asked to do two weeks of unpaid work this summer. This is time when faculty are not compensated by the university and usually are doing their own research or other teaching. Two weeks of unpaid time is their version of a furlough.

Second, faculty are giving up significant compensation. According to our current agreement, faculty are entitled to \$5,000 *for every course we convert from face-to-face to online or multi-modal courses*. The MSP has agreed to waive this requirement. By giving up this provision, faculty are effectively donating \$5,000 to the administration for every course we move on-line. We hope this will save jobs.

MSP is also working to make sure our lowest paid members do not suffer. New lecturers and librarians, part-time faculty, people with partners out of work, people with child care and elder care responsibilities, and other vulnerable individuals would be disproportionately impacted. Many MSP members make far less than \$100,000 per year – more than a third of our members are non-tenure-track. Many MSP members have already been “non-reappointed” for the fall, which is a layoff for faculty.

7. But what about the university’s finances? If everyone makes do with a little less, won’t that help in the long term?

Maybe. But in truth, *we don’t know*. The administration has not told us where the savings are going from furloughs or foregone pay. The MSP contract says that if the university is facing a situation of “financial exigency” the administration must share all “accurate information, statistics and/or financial data related to such plan.” Despite repeated requests, this has not happened. Instead, the administration has made a call for “shared sacrifice” without providing evidence that furloughs or cuts are necessary at this time. We’re happy to share the sacrifice. But we all believe in data, and we would like some evidence before we make any more difficult choices.

8. So where are we now?

All of the unions are negotiating successor agreements, or extensions of our current agreements, before our contracts expire on June 30. If the administration wants to make a unified proposal at any time – for example, that the unions accept specific cuts or furloughs in exchange for no layoffs in any union – they should do so, and all of our unions will be ready to negotiate. We should be having these discussions at the bargaining table, with full information, instead of the administration stoking tensions between unions by seeing who is most willing to accept pay cuts and who resists.

9. What about the decision to reopen campus in the fall?

Again, all of the unions are united in our demand that campus must be safe, and all employees must have protections in place before we plan to return in larger numbers to our offices, labs, and classrooms. Faculty would much rather teach face-to-face than online – but we would never want to put our colleagues, students, or staff at risk. Many faculty and staff have underlying health conditions that would make it dangerous to risk exposure to the coronavirus. We miss our students, and we can't wait to be together again – but only when it is safe to do so. Some employees never left the campus, and many rotate onto campus each week. Our unions put in a joint proposal for a labor-management committee to negotiate over healthy and safe working conditions, including when and how to reopen campus. We should all be part of a collaborative decision-making process because these decisions will affect our lives and our families.

In sum, all the unions are together in this crisis. We all reject the administration's divisive message that some are sacrificing while others are not. We are all making a sacrifice for the good of the university and the people who make UMass work. We are all calling for transparency rather than austerity. We call upon our leaders – on campus, in the state, and nationally – to join us in the fight for greater investments in public higher education. We are in this together, fighting for a healthy and excellent UMass.