FAQ: University-wide Initiative to Reduce Vacation Balances

BACKGROUND:

USF provides vacation hours to its full-time and part-time staff working at least 20 hours per week. With no federal, state or local requirement, vacation hours are provided as a benefit. The purpose of the benefit is to enable employees to have paid time off to take care of themselves and to have an opportunity to take a break from their work routine so they can return to their jobs refreshed and ready to handle whatever comes next. As recently communicated we need to balance that purpose with the reality of the financial implications COVID-19 is imposing on the university.

Q: On April 24, employees were notified about a University-wide initiative to use their vacation hours so that as of July 31, 2020 employees will not have more than 90 hours. How will this be enforced?
A: Supervisors, deans and vice presidents will work with employees to schedule and support this time away.

Q: How long is this initiative in effect?
A: At this time, the Cabinet has determined the initiative will be in effect until July 31.

Q: What will happen to my hours in excess of 90 hours (for 37.5 hour/week staff) or 96 hours (or 40 hour/week staff) as of 7/31/2020?
A: This is not a “use it or lose it” vacation policy. This initiative is a concerted effort to support taking vacation, to assign vacation in a time when there may be reduced work or increased stress, and to save money for the university in a time of constrained financial resources and future uncertainty in the wake of the global pandemic.

Q: Due to work responsibilities and/or coverage issues, I am unable to take a bulk of time off right now. Can I request an exception to the July 31, 2020 date?
A: USF supervisors and department heads are encouraged to allow employees the opportunity to take vacation during this time. Please discuss with your supervisor to make arrangements for you to take vacation while balancing your work priorities for this period of time. If you and your supervisor are unable to formulate an adequate plan, contact Human Resources for assistance. If due to extenuating circumstances you are unable to take time off, please have your supervisor forward a request to your dean or vice president. With their support, an exception request can be submitted to Cabinet for review.
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Q: If I don’t use my vacation before July 31, will I lose it?

A: No, but just as your supervisor may assign you to work on a special project; they may assign you to take vacation and not work. As a reminder, there are many benefits to vacation that are equally as important to the financial offset it will provide to USF’s balance sheet including:

* Improved Physical Health: lower stress, decreased heart disease and blood pressure, quality of sleep;

* Improved Mental Health: feelings of calm arise from time away from work, which allows the mind to heal and makes positive changes to mood,

* Decreased Burnout: those who take regular vacations are less likely to burn out and are more creative and productive.

Q: I’ve requested vacation time off in support of the message to reduce vacation balances to 90 hours by July 31 as communicated by the President. How can I check to see what my balance will be as of that date?

A: In USFWorks you can view your balance for time off plans as of any date. To view accrued time-off balances, in the ABSENCE worklet:

- Click on the ABSENCE BALANCE button under the VIEW column
- Enter a specific future date in the AS OF field
- Click OK. You will see a report displayed of your balances as of the date entered
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Q: I have a large vacation balance of 20 days and had been saving these hours to use later in 2020. Can I log this future time off and have it count toward the 90 hours’ balance requirement as of July 31, 2020?

A: If you have requested vacation and had your vacation request approved, and your request requires that you have those additional hours available, your dean or vice president may make an exception with the approval of Cabinet. If you had planned to make such a request, do so now.

Q: I am a new hire and only have 5 days of vacation accrued, but would like to take off 2 weeks (10 days) off vacation prior to July 31. May I go negative on my vacation balance?

A: No, you may not go into the negative on any of the time off plans. You can request to take the additional time off as unpaid. Exempt staff should request unpaid time off in full day increments.

Q: As a supervisor, how can I accommodate a possible number of large vacation requests from staff?

A: Following are some strategies:

- Review time off requests prior to approving to ensure there is adequate coverage for business operational needs
- Review business priorities for the short-term
- Identify and train back-up to help with coverage; opportunity to cross train
- Have employees refer the caller/sender to another colleague in out of office messages.

Department heads and supervisors are encouraged to be flexible in accommodating employee time off requests. Should any unforeseen problems arise, Human Resources is available to help departments navigate through any uncertainty regarding employee absences.
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Q: As a supervisor, how do I know how many vacation hours my staff has available?
A: USFWorks provides great reporting tools. Please refer to this job aid or contact leaves@usfca.edu for assistance.

Q: Can employees work on their scheduled vacation time off?
A: No. Employees are not required to do work on their days off.

Q: I do not need all of my vacation hours. May I donate them to another employee?
A: It is very gracious to be willing to donate your earned vacation hours. Unfortunately, it is not possible to donate vacation time to other employees.

Q: I am saving my vacation time in the event of reduced hours or layoff. Does this mean there will not be reductions in hours or layoffs?
A: The university is working hard to do all it can to protect its employees. It remains likely that there will be reductions in hours and layoffs. This is disheartening to even consider, but the reality is that COVID19 and the economic downturn have had and will continue to have a devastating impact on higher education and the University of San Francisco. The university is only asking to use vacation time so as to reduce vacation hours to 90 hours, while continuing to allow vacation accrual in an effort to provide that extra security in the event of reductions in hours and layoffs.

Q: Can I require my OPE staff member to use vacation hours?
A: Yes. You can schedule your OPE staff member to participate in this effort. At this time, OPE leadership is disputing the application of this initiative to its membership, therefore, should OPE staff members choose not to take vacation, consult HR for advice on assigning them to vacation time. We are committed to respect the rights of all our community members, including the rights set forth in the collective bargaining agreements. At this time, OPE disagrees that USF may assign its members to be on vacation. We will address this in the proper forum. The entire university community and each and every one of its members will be impacted by this current crisis and shared sacrifice and flexibility are essential in navigating our future.
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Q: Will I be allowed to earn and accumulate more than 12 days of vacation time after July 31?
A: Yes. There is no change in your accumulation rate or the maximum accrual rate. You will accrue as you otherwise would have between now and July 31 and beyond. This is an initiative to encourage and assign employees to take vacation which is an effort to help the entire community. The university has always had the ability to assign vacation, it has done so in the past, but not to this extent. There are not currently plans to change the vacation policy. Any policy changes will be carefully considered, supervisors will consult with staff for input, and there will be ample notice and opportunity to use all earned vacation.

Q: The President’s email specified that “we will be requiring exempt staff, librarians, and hourly staff to reduce their vacation balances to no more than 12 days as of July 31, 2020”. Why does this not apply to all employees equally?
A: This plan does apply equally to all employees who earn vacation. Faculty do not earn vacation.

Q: I have other questions about vacation that were not answered here. To whom should I direct these questions?
A: Please contact Diane M. Sweeney sweeney@usfca.edu in Human Resources with any additional questions about the university-wide initiative to reduce vacation balances.