

AFSCME Voluntary Furlough Survey Report

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One option for addressing the budget challenges facing the University is that of voluntary furloughs. While the subjects of mandatory furloughs and pay cuts have been actively pursued by the administration, little serious attention appears to have been dedicated to the possibility of saving revenue through the voluntary unpaid absences from work.

Consequently, the AFSCME leadership at the U decided to research this topic. In response to a data practices request by the Union, the University provided the email addresses of all University staff.

Union staff at Council 5 prepared a short survey regarding the topic of voluntary furloughs for publication via a web-based service (surveymonkey.com). The invitation email to the survey, and the survey itself, was kept short in order to avoid prejudicing a response one way or another on the issue, and to minimize disruption of the workplace.

Union staff sent out emails to the entire list of university employees (19,742 emails) on the evening of Tuesday, April 27. Approximately 5 percent of those emails “bounced back” from bad addresses, resulting in about 18,750 emails delivered.

No controls were set for the survey. It is possible that some respondents completed the survey more than once. There were reports that workers in some departments, like Boynton Health Service, were unable to open the survey. Respondents who use email less frequently in the normal course of their duties might have been less likely to respond.

Despite these limitations, response to the survey clearly indicates a great deal of interest in the topic of voluntary furloughs.

Within a week of the first emails, more than 4000 employees had responded. Approximately 22 people requested that their names be removed from the list, and there were several dozen additional emails with questions about the sponsorship and intent of the survey.

Attempts were made to honor all requests for removal from the email list, and to respond to each email.

A revised email invitation with a reminder to complete the survey if respondents had not already done so was sent out to University staff on Monday, May 3. Thousands more staff responded. By the time the results were downloaded for analysis in the mid-afternoon on May 5, there were 7000 responses – 37 percent of the University population.

General Data Results

Approximately 37 percent of respondents – 2581 – indicated willingness to participate in a voluntary furlough. Data on wages and the possible duration of the furlough was provided by 1440 respondents.

On average, those respondents volunteered for 61.44 hours of voluntary furlough, with a value of \$1543.43 a piece. Hard data for the entire group that provided specific information on wage amounts and the possible duration of a voluntary furlough showed a potential value of \$2.2 million for a furlough from this group.

What if the survey respondents who said they would take a voluntary furlough but did not provide all the information necessary to calculate the value of that furlough took leave at the average rate of \$1543.43? The total projected value of a voluntary furlough by survey respondents who said yes to the idea then grows to \$4 million.

What if the entire university community participates in a voluntary furlough at the same average rates as survey participants?

Assuming 19,000 employees, 37 percent is 7030. Subtracting the number who have already voted yes (2581) leaves 4449. Multiplying that number by the average value of the furlough per volunteer so far (\$1543.43) yields a result of \$6.87 million. That, combined with the \$4 million already projected from volunteers, results in a voluntary furlough value of \$10.87 million.

About twice as many respondents who reported income earnings indicated an hourly versus salary wage, although the total value of the reported furloughs between the two groups was about the same.

Although we will continue studying the data to get a better picture of the breakdown by employee group for interest in voluntary furlough, it appears clear that this option warrants careful consideration by the University's top leaders.

Sample Validation

The following table illustrates the percentages of various employee groups at the university, based on information provided to the Union on April 7, 2010. Keep in mind that staffing data provided by the employer to the union is often inaccurate.

Employee Group	Incumbents	Percentage of total
Clerical	1841	9.33%
Technical	1023	5.18%
Health care	188	0.95%
Civil Service	6852	34.71%
Faculty	4263	21.60%
Administrative Academic	2199	11.14%
Administrative Professional	3372	17.08%
Total	19738	

As stated earlier, this was not a scientifically rigorous survey. Respondents were free to complete the questionnaire to whatever degree they chose. Some filled out the questionnaire completely. Others filled in salary data but not job titles, job titles but not furlough duration, furlough duration but not salary data.

Next is a chart illustrating the breakdown by employee group of those who expressed a willingness to take voluntary furloughs. Of the 2581 respondents who said they would take a voluntary furlough, 1101 clearly identified their job title, enabling the linkage to employee group.

Furlough Respondents by Employee Group

Employee Group	Identified volunteers	Percentage of total
Clerical	247	22%
Technical	108	10%
Health care	15	1%
Civil Service	215	20%
Faculty	203	18%
Academic Administrative	147	13%
Administrative Professional	166	15%
Total	1101	

Although not all respondents identified their employee group, the largest units here are clerical, civil service (comprising all of the non-AFSCME hourly employees) and faculty.

A smaller percentage of respondents identified their job title, hourly or weekly wage, and the possible length of a furlough. That information was used to calculate the following table. Again, because significantly fewer respondents listed job title, wage and furlough length than did those who listed just wage and furlough length. Consequently, to the total furlough value listed below is smaller than the \$2.2 million figure referenced above.

Furlough Value by Employee Group

Employee Group	Value per group	Percentage of total
Clerical	186,071.59	12%
Technical	98,498.12	7%
Health care	22,603.80	2%
Civil Service	233,876.18	16%
Faculty	455,131.00	30%
Academic Administrative	197,694.85	13%
Administrative Professional	304,980.28	20%
Total	1,498,855.82	

What is interesting here is that, while faculty comprise only 18 percent of identified respondents, their group is responsible for 30 percent of the identified savings. This indicates a considerable willingness to sacrifice on behalf of the organization. While Clerical workers comprise 22 percent of identified respondents, they are only 12 percent of the total furlough earnings, perhaps reflecting their relatively low wages compared to the rest of the organization.

Conclusions

Survey responses indicate dramatic interest in voluntary furloughs, as opposed to pay cuts and mandatory furloughs. It also appears as if voluntary furloughs could well reap savings in the same ballpark as the pay cuts and mandatory furloughs currently being pursued by the administration.

One benefit of voluntary furloughs expressed by many respondents was the ability to control the timing of the unpaid leave. Relatively few respondents wanted to take several continuous days at once. Instead, they proposed working the unpaid leave into their schedules over a longer period of time. This flexible control of the voluntary furlough is, perhaps linked to the relatively long duration of furlough time respondents seem ready to volunteer for – more than 60 hours on average, compared to the 24 hour period proposed by the administration for mandatory furloughs.

These results indicate the topic of voluntary furloughs clearly warrants immediate and serious consideration as an option for addressing the university's budget problems. Even if voluntary furloughs do not reach the financial targets set for mandatory furloughs and pay cuts, the savings from a voluntary furlough can close the gap, and consequently lessen the severity of those other, harsher measures.