

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Staffing Guidance for University Breaks Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### **1. What is the “University Break” period?**

The weeks of Thanksgiving, Winter Break, and Spring Break. A “University Break” is when employing units are encouraged to utilize variable or reduced work schedules during a time of lower activity level on campus.

### **2. Why does ISU encourage variable or reduced work schedules during University Breaks?**

To the extent possible, to promote work/life balance for employees, and to support energy conservation during a period of lower activity level on campus. There are significant organizational benefits to be derived from such arrangements. For instance, variable or reduced work schedules during university breaks can improve staff morale, increase productivity, and reduce absenteeism and turnover.

While considering variable or reduced work schedules, at the same time, employing units need to maintain office hours as stated in the “Staffing Guidance for University Breaks” document.

When the university has classes in session, such as the winter session, units and departments need to ensure they are staffed appropriately in order to support students and a successful session.

### **3. Are there policies that guide administrators and staff regarding operational hours or individual leave time – in addition to this set of guidelines for University Breaks?**

Yes, the following policies are available in the Policy Library (<http://www.policy.iastate.edu>): Holidays Policy, Office Hours Policy, Vacation Time Off Policy, Flex Time Policy, Work Week Policy, etc.

### **4. Are non-exempt and exempt employees eligible for variable or reduced work schedules during University Breaks?**

Yes, both non-exempt and exempt employees are eligible.

Supervisors need to keep the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in mind when considering or implementing variable or reduced work schedules for non-exempt employees since they are eligible for overtime if they work more than forty hours in a work week.

All full-time employees, including academic and non-academic staff, are considered to work a 40 hour work week for payroll purposes. The work week begins at 12:01 a.m. on Sunday and ends the following Saturday at 12:00 midnight. (See the Work Week policy)

**5. Who determines whether a variable or reduced work schedule is possible during University Breaks?**

The respective vice president, dean, department chair, or director has the responsibility to determine the unit's workforce needs and operating hours in general. The unit's operating hours during these breaks shall be approved by the respective dean, vice president, senior vice president or the president.

Per the "Staffing Guidance for University Breaks," administrators are encouraged to implement variable or reduced work schedules for employees, to the extent possible. Each request for a variable or reduced work schedule or time off shall be discussed with and reviewed by the employee's supervisor. The discretion to approve or deny work and time off requests rests with the supervisor as the supervisor determines the job duties needing to be performed during the University Break period.

The supervisor may also terminate or amend an approved request based on a number of reasons, including operational changes, staffing changes, leadership changes, performance, etc.

**6. (For Supervisors) When and how should I develop and communicate a variable or reduced schedule in the unit?**

The vice president, dean, department chair, or director shall develop plans as early as possible and shall communicate the plans with all affected employees at least a month in advance of the University Break.

Supervisors should take into account their unit's obligations during the University Break period and shall work with employees to develop a coverage schedule to meet the needs of the unit. If a unit will close during the University Break period, arrangements may need to be made to designate, and route messages to, a single point of contact during the period. Units should work with their building supervisor to determine building and office access. Units should specify access and office hours information on websites, voice messages, signage and other communications.

**7. (For Employees) What do I need to do to request time off or a variable or reduced work schedule?**

Employees who wish to request a variable or reduced work schedule or time off shall follow established procedures for making such requests, including to make a request to the supervisor two weeks in advance of the University Break. Employees who are given time off during the defined break periods must follow established policies for requesting time off. Both the employee and the supervisor should make every effort to make balanced decisions based on business priorities.

**8. May a supervisor deny a request for a variable or reduced work schedule or time off?**

Yes. An employee may be denied a variable or reduced work schedule or time off by the supervisor if they are deemed an “essential employee.” Supervisors shall take into account their business needs in a variety of situations when considering designating an employee(s) as essential and shall notify employees when possible, in advance. An employee may be determined to be essential for events including but not limited to periods during the University Breaks.

**9. Should the employing unit choose to close during a University Break, what are the options for employees?**

With approval of the respective dean, vice president, senior vice president or the president, a unit may close over a University Break. The respective supervisor shall work with employees who wish to remain working. This may involve discussions about alternate work locations. Supervisors will coordinate through their chain of command to find feasible alternatives. Paid time off (i.e., vacation) or unpaid time off will be automatically approved for those employees who wish to take time off during a unit closure.

If a unit will close during the University Break period, arrangements may need to be made to designate, and route messages to, a single point of contact during the period.

**10. If the unit will remain open during the University Break, may a supervisor require that an employee take paid time off (e.g., use accrued vacation) or unpaid time off?**

No, a supervisor may not require an employee to take paid or unpaid time off during the period of the University Breaks. However, if the supervisor determines there is not work to be performed in a work unit or no need for full staffing during the break period, the supervisor has the right to determine alternate project work (in addition to alternate work locations when a unit will close) for those employees who wish to remain working.

**11. How is holiday pay impacted if an employee is on unpaid time off before or after the holiday during a University Break?**

Per the “Staffing Guidance for University Breaks,” employees who are in an unpaid time off status at any time during the weeks of Thanksgiving or Winter Break will be paid for the holidays that fall within those weeks – whether or not the employee is in unpaid time off status before or after the holiday. (This is an exception allowed for University Break periods. See the Holidays Policy for implications of unpaid time off around other holidays throughout the year.)

**12. (For Supervisor) How do I plan for someone to monitor phones and emails while the office is closed?**

Supervisors should take into account the operational needs of the unit during the break period. For example, if an exempt employee is required to check messages, then they should not be required to take vacation for the period they are engaged in work unless the period engaged in the work is de minimis. A supervisor may choose to arrange for someone to monitor a central message location during break times rather than have all staff check their individual messages.

Non-exempt staff required to monitor phones or emails must be paid for all time worked.

### **13. How is FMLA impacted if an employee is on medical leave during the University Break?**

An approved FMLA is not impacted by University Break periods; in other words, the employee remains on medical leave if previously approved for FMLA.

### **14. Whom do I contact if I have questions?**

Contact your UHR Delivery team at [hr\\_delivery@iastate.edu](mailto:hr_delivery@iastate.edu) or UHR Employee/Labor Relations staff if you have questions about the Staffing Guidance for University Breaks.