U-M’s Voluntary Furlough/Hours Reduction Program: Information for Units with Employees in J-1 or F-1 OPT Status

As you know, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, U-M is currently offering two voluntary programs for staff:

- A temporary furlough program for staff in non-critical operations
- A temporary reduction in hours

If your unit is hosting J-1 Exchange Visitors, or employs F-1 students with Optional Practical Training employment authorization, you may have received questions about their eligibility for these two voluntary programs.

**Voluntary Furlough Program:**

**J-1 Exchange Visitors:** Recent Department of State (DOS) guidance for COVID-19 situations states that: J-1 exchange visitors are expected to be working towards their exchange program objectives to the fullest extent possible during this situation. Current J-1 exchange visitors may continue on programs that fully complied with the regulations, provided that any deviation to the original program is not excessive for the circumstances and that it occurred due to factors outside the sponsor’s or exchange visitor’s control.

J-1 Exchange Visitors on voluntary furloughs would not be working towards their exchange program objectives. Since the furlough is voluntary, it would not be a factor outside the exchange visitor’s control.

**For these reasons, U-M J-1 Exchange Visitors should not elect the voluntary furlough.**

**F-1 Employees on Optional Practical Training:** F-1 students with optional practical training employment authorization may not be unemployed for more than an aggregate of 90 days for post-completion OPT (the first year of OPT), or for the STEM extension of OPT, for more than 150 days, applied to the entire period of standard post-completion and STEM OPT. Before requesting a voluntary furlough, your F-1 OPT employees should carefully consider how many days of unemployment they have already accrued, or might accrue in the future, since exceeding the allowed days of unemployment would be a violation of their F-1 status.

**Voluntary Effort Reduction Program:**

**J-1 Exchange Visitors:** A reduction in hours may be possible for Exchange Visitors who can continue
to pursue their program objectives.

**F-1 Employees on Optional Practical Training:** a reduction in hours may be possible. Recent guidance from the U.S. government’s Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) states that for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, SEVP considers students who are working in their OPT opportunities fewer than 20 hours a week due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 as engaged in OPT. This would not represent a violation of their F-1 status.

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please email icenter@umich.edu

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