

Dealing with the furlough

(Academic Senate/Academic Affairs Retreat)

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Overview

All of us at CSUF are concerned about the impact of furloughs on our professional and personal lives during the coming year and perhaps beyond. The furloughs impact our campus in many ways. Some staff, faculty and administrators are finding themselves in personal financial difficulty. In some cases this is leading to people being unable to afford to continue to work at CSUF, and we are losing good people already. Students are also going to be affected as faculty cut classes and workload, and staff and administrators take scheduled furlough days. Combined with fee hikes, enrollment limits, and other consequences of budget cuts, this may delay student progress to graduation. In addition, the stigma of being a University requiring employees to take furloughs is likely to reduce our success in hiring for years to come. The overall perception of the Cal State system, including our campus, is also likely to suffer.

We must take time to assure there is in place a process of eliciting ideas about how to mitigate the effects of our budgetary challenges. It is absolutely no one's intent that we will do the same amount of work in fewer hours. We will simply have to lower some of our expectations.

A university is a complex institution with a wide variety of responsibilities of faculty and staff, who often work under myriad conditions and expectations. It is important that we take into account that variety of conditions and expectations because economic uncertainty can lead to an even greater level of stress than would otherwise be the case. Naturally, there will be misunderstandings as one group of employees sees another receiving different treatment, even though that difference is qualitative, not quantitative.

Some examples:

- Faculty may perceive that they are working the same hours with less pay
- Other staff see administrators with large salaries not having to suffer as much
- Some staff see faculty as getting what appear to be special benefits such as travel, unsupervised hours, etc
- Public safety personnel will not be placed on furlough.
- And, some on campus may see the trades as being able to earn overtime while others aren't

But, rather than focusing on making sure that the pain of furloughs is spread evenly, it will be imperative for the university community to come together to support one another's differing missions.

What can we do?

For starters, a higher volume of clear communication is required. While communication most often starts at the top, for it to be meaningful, it must go in several directions, up and down and laterally. Needed information does not always follow administrative structures. A recent focus group with staff in Academic Affairs revealed those concerns. Similarly, the Academic Senate wants to make sure that there is transparency and clarity in communication with the faculty on furloughs, budget cuts, and related issues. There was unanimous concern for better communication in these uncertain times. It must take place at all levels.

Now, remember, communication has both cognitive and affective components. It is not sufficient to just put out black and white cognitive information such as the specified furlough days, who will staff essential offices that will remain open on those days, etc. Administration needs to solicit faculty and staff input, demonstrating the importance of a collaborative process in decision-making.

How can we make a difference? For starters, as much as it seems corny, we all should attempt to maintain an overall positive attitude. Our students, staff, and colleagues all look to us for guidance and focus. We must realize that this situation poses challenges for everyone, and not become overly focused on our own difficulties. At the same time, we need to be compassionate since this situation is going to cause very real pain and suffering to many. But we can't let the exigencies of today endanger the working environment of tomorrow. We need to focus on the future. Budget crises have a way of making any institution focus much more strongly on what its core values and responsibilities are and how to assure they are satisfied.

Let us keep in mind: the furlough is a fact and it's not going away. There's no gain in rehashing old news. Our concern is how best to handle a trying circumstance, not the perceived cause of the circumstance itself. We have little power to effect the underlying causes of the furlough: California's dysfunctional constitution for example, though we should pressure our representatives and lobby for increased funding, stressing the importance the CSU plays in the future of California's economy and civil society.

Specific impacts and recommendations:

Faculty:

Challenge: Financial hardship:

Recommendations:

- 1 Offer as many intersession and summer courses as possible to help faculty make extra pay.
- 2 After the budget crisis is resolved, close the CPAC gap. Faculty need regular salary increases, and need immediate "make-up" when in years like the last two, raises are not honored. Have faculty pay raises not be dependent upon the State budget in future contracts.
- 3 Another round of faculty equity raises with a more transparent process.

Challenge: Faculty retention:

Recommendations:

1. Release time for faculty with active research programs
2. Release time for faculty heavily involved in service activity
3. Increase or at least maintain intramural grant programs
4. Provide for enough sabbatical leaves for all applicants, each year

Challenge: Faculty morale:

Recommendations:

- 1 All steps outlined under financial hardship and faculty retention above.
- 2 Send a clear message to faculty that reducing their workload during the furlough period is appropriate and encouraged.
- 3 Flexibility with RTP
- 4 Demonstrate to faculty that cutbacks are affecting everybody by limiting and reducing administrative travel and canceling or reducing campus events
- 5 Promote transparency and shared governance and joint decision-making with Academic Senate in budget planning.
- 6 Encourage the Chancellor's Office and CFA to work together during contract negotiations, not against each other. The lack of cooperation this year has been devastating to faculty morale, and we cannot afford to have this continue while the faculty are furloughed and a new faculty contract is being negotiated.

Staff:

- 1 Develop "co-curricular" opportunities for faculty and staff:
 - a Adopt an "each one, teach one" philosophy
 - b Financial planning and/or overhaul workshops
 - c Encourage life enhancement activities/learning opportunities
- 2 Develop group activities
- 3 Help develop personal goals for the coming year's use of furlough days
- 4 Teach people how to take time off

Administration:

- 1 Have regular communications updates that provide candid information regarding furloughs, budget projections, process for analysis and decision-making
- 2 Have positive, reinforcing communications to help people deal with the issues in a proactive manner; ability to check up on one another
- 3 Develop a formalized lateral communications capability, using social networking technologies, to enable the campus community to share with one another ideas, perspectives
- 4 Redouble efforts to provide concrete reinforcement of staff, faculty and administrators' value to the institution
- 5 Find ways to cut back on less urgent initiatives, reporting, etc., to remove as much of the work burden as possible, particularly for those staff whose workload may not be easily lessened

The CSUF:

Challenge: Reputation:

Recommendations:

- 1 Attempt to retain as many junior faculty as possible
- 2 Plan on conducting increased searches in 2 or 3 years to make up for shortfall during the budget crisis.
- 3 Close the CPAC gap
- 4 Raise admissions standards, reduce enrollments if necessary, decrease SFR
- 5 Release time for research activity resulting in publications
- 6 Push for increased external funding
- 7 Over the long term attempt to reduce average teaching load for all faculty

Students:

Challenge: Time to Graduation

Recommendations:

- 1 Increase intersession and summer offerings targeted at facilitating graduation
- 2 Have Colleges take a close look at department offerings for the purpose of ensuring that they reflect student needs for timely graduation
- 3 Ensure that when faculty reduce course meeting times or workload that courses still maintain course objectives