



Human Resources and Payroll

4087 University Drive, MS 3C3, Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Budget Situation

Mason must continue to respond to the changing economic climate. Human Resources & Payroll has developed an FAQ to try to address some of the HR & Payroll related questions that you may have regarding current economic conditions. If you don't see your question addressed below, please call us at 703.993.2600. We will make every attempt to address your particular concern.

During difficult times, the best thing to be is prepared. Avail yourself of the robust benefits package you have as a Mason employee, continue to assess your financial, personal, and professional position, and seek assistance when you need it. Before you make any personnel changes involving yourself or your unit, please consult with us. There are many resources, policies, and procedures that we can employ to assist you in reaching your goals.

What is the current status of the Commonwealth's budget?

The economic news and budget outlook for FY2010 indicate that the economy will continue to struggle for some time. Governor Kaine, in a speech to the General Assembly finance committee announced Virginia would see a \$1.2 billion shortfall this fiscal year. We anticipate hearing information more specific to Mason by September 1.

Will the Governor's announcement only address FY2010 or will it include FY2011 and beyond?

It is our understanding that the Governor's announcement will address the current fiscal year. That said, discussions on the next biennium budget are likely underway as the Governor will present his biennium budget for 2011 and 2012 to the General Assembly in December.

What does that mean for Mason?

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the Commonwealth's budget, there is a degree of uncertainty and anxiety for the Mason community. We anticipate a reduction in the FY2010 budget and, unless a significant change occurs in the economy, we can expect these reductions to

continue in FY2011 and beyond. How much the reduction will impact individual units is not yet known.

What is university administration doing to address these difficult times?

The central budget committee is developing contingency plans to minimize the impact of any reductions while strategically planning for the longer term implications of a down economy. The university will continue to monitor the state and federal budget situations and will regularly update the university community on budget conditions. In addition to cost savings, the university will also continue to engage the Mason entrepreneurial spirit to look for new revenue opportunities.

Will there be layoffs or a hiring freeze?

We hope not but it remains to be seen. Mason operates on a decentralized budget system. Each unit reviews its own budget and determines its own course of action. These are challenging times and budget reviews will necessarily be thorough. To cut costs, open positions may go unfilled.

Are furloughs in any of the budget plans?

Furloughs were not considered by the university at the direction of the Commonwealth. As a state agency, the Commonwealth considers furloughs to be solely in the purview of the Governor.

If a furlough is instituted by the Governor, can annual leave substitute for one's own furlough and can annual leave be donated to cover someone else's furlough?

Unfortunately, no. While annual leave is a liability for the university, budget savings have to be found in current expenditures not future liabilities.

Will the impact of the current economic climate be felt across the entire university?

Because Mason is a diverse institution – geographically, organizationally, functionally, and financially, one area can be experiencing growth while others are static and still others are experiencing contractions. To the extent possible, the university tries to weather difficult times by absorbing some cuts centrally. This may not always be possible therefore individual units may have to make choices. Because of Mason's decentralized structure, units are given latitude in how to manage their budgets. Hence the choices made will impact available options.

If there are layoffs, will HR & Payroll assist those employees who are laid off?

Yes. As state employees, the Department of Human Resource Management Layoff Policy 1.30 and Severance Benefits Policy 1.57 provide procedures and guidance for the layoff process. A notice of layoff can be very stressful. HR & Payroll is available to assist impacted employees during this transition. The Employee Relations team can provide a confidential ear, resources and assistance. The Class & Comp team will assist the impacted employee in his/her search for a new position at Mason or other state agencies and the Benefits Team can provide guidance on any benefits-related issues. HR & Payroll is also ready to assist those employees who remain after a layoff to help them deal with the emotional impact of having colleagues laid off.

If a term faculty member's contract has ended and the position has been eliminated, is the term faculty member eligible for unemployment?

Typically yes. However, please contact the HR & Payroll office regarding the impact of any employment action. In the case of managers and department heads, please contact HR & Payroll *before* taking any employment action. Unemployment eligibility is determined by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) on a weekly basis. For details on the unemployment process, please see the VEC website at <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/>

What can faculty and staff do to help?

- a. Tough times are always best weathered together. This is the time to work with your colleagues and the university to preserve the quality of the Mason experience for our students as well as for ourselves. Stress and uncertainty can cause tempers to fray and misunderstandings to grow. To alleviate this as much as possible, it's most important for faculty and staff to:
 - i. Stay informed
 1. Read eFiles and the *Gazette*
 2. Attend department meetings
 3. Attend town hall meetings
 - ii. Stay calm and cool
 1. Use your Mason benefits package if needed
 - a. Employee Relations Team
 - i. Workplace coaching
 - ii. Problem solving
 - iii. Facilitation, mediation, dispute resolution

- iv. Resource & referral
- b. Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
 - i. Available to both COVA and Kaiser participants and their dependents
 - ii. Up to four sessions are included at no charge
 - iii. EAP counselors are available to assist employees with situations related to:
 - 1. Financial issues
 - 2. Legal issues
 - 3. Career Planning
 - 4. Housing
 - 5. Child care
 - 6. Elder care
 - 7. Retirement
 - 8. Grief
 - 9. Abuse
 - 10. Alcohol
 - 11. Drugs
 - 12. Family
 - 13. Health

- 2. Share your ideas and concerns with your supervisor
 - a. Collegially
 - b. Cooperatively
- 3. Utilize the online budget suggestion box on the Office of Budget and Planning website at <http://budget.gmu.edu>; click on “Mason Ideas.”
- 4. Avoid negativity
 - a. Try to think constructively if cuts need to be made
 - b. Suggest solutions and opportunities
 - c. Maximize existing strengths in staffing, technology, geography, etc.
- 5. Be kind and demonstrate:
 - a. Empathy – Acknowledge that economic downturns can be frightening and difficult
 - b. Tolerance – Understand that everyone’s financial, professional, personal, and familial circumstances are

different and can be stressful in ways that you may not readily see

- c. Patience – Try to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Take a deep breath, try not to judge harshly, assume the best and not the worst in others
- d. Leadership – Help others to be their best selves

b. This is also a time to acquaint yourself with community and state resources including:

i. Credit Unions

- 1. Apple Federal Credit Union
- 2. Fairfax County Federal Credit Union
- 3. Virginia Credit Union

ii. Budget/Credit Counseling

- 1. Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Washington
- 2. Northern Virginia Family Services

iii. Virginia State Employee Emergency Fund

iv. Commonwealth Financial Training and Loan Program

Information on these resources and more can be found at

<http://hr.gmu.edu/worklife/financial>

c. Faculty and staff can utilize volunteer opportunities to redirect stress

- 1. Mason Links
- 2. Early Identification Program
- 3. Community volunteer programs
 - a. In tough times, everyone needs help. Donating time and energy to a group in need can do wonders for putting things in perspective.
 - b. Benefits eligible administrative/professional faculty and classified staff have School Assistance and Volunteer Service leave available.

8/27/09