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What will be impact of furloughs at UIS?

Students, faculty do not know what to expect

By CHRIS DETTRO
THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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Students returned to the University of Illinois Springfield campus this week with questions about how the recently announced U of I furlough plan for faculty and staff might affect them.

Charles Olivier, vice president of the Student Government Association, said Wednesday he's noticed a lot of confusion on the part of students in the first two days of spring classes.

"They don't know if they'll miss a class, things like that," he said. "I also have seen a lot of dedication on the part of professors.

"I had a professor say today that she's going to make sure her furlough days won't affect us academically. It just shows how dedicated our professors are to the students.

"But I have to be realistic, and I'm sure some students will be affected in some manner," Olivier added. "Hopefully, the impact will be minimal."

Some faculty members think that by taking furlough days en masse, the action will spotlight the need for a solution to the state's budget woes. Others think the less class time is disrupted, the better.

But everyone seems to be in agreement that the outcome of the furlough plan and its effect on UIS students is still up in the air.

"It remains to be seen," said UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen. "It's still evolving, and things could change quite a lot."

Pay cuts instead

On Wednesday, in fact, faculty and academic professionals were given the option of taking a temporary pay cut equivalent to what the university would save by them taking a furlough day. But with the temporary pay cut, faculty and staff would remain in the classroom. If they choose furlough days, they can't be at work or do anything connected with their job.

The furlough policy applies to 215 full-time faculty members, 240 academic professionals and nine senior administrators at UIS.

"All of us want to provide the best education to students," said Ringeisen, who along with U of I President Stanley Ikenberry fought for the right of faculty to be free to select whichever furlough days they want to take off.

"I don't think it will have a great effect (on students)."

Political science professor Chris Mooney is one who believes the state's budget crisis should be illuminated.

"There has to be some kind of crisis to keep the budget problems from being hidden," Mooney said. "My personal perspective is that furlough days are going to directly impact students no matter when they're taken.

"We have an opportunity, if we all take the same day, to have one of those events. If we take a certain day, then the students know, the parents know, everybody knows the shape the state is in."

'Sense of inconvenience'

Tih-Fen Ting, associate professor of environmental studies and chairman of the UIS Campus Senate, said she isn't taking her furlough days on instructional days.

"If some faculty decide to do that (take furloughs on days they teach), that's their decision," she said. "They have complete freedom to decide when to take them."

She said she expects students to have "a sense of inconvenience, so to speak," because of the furloughs. "The day-to-day interaction we all take for granted will be affected," she said.

Derek Felix, UIS student representative to the U of I Board of Trustees, said he's hoping students don't experience much difference.

"I'm hoping a lot of them will take furlough days on a Friday," he said. "We don't have a lot of Friday classes."

He said he personally doesn't think faculty taking the same furlough day would do much good.

"I think state leaders already have a feeling of what's going on," he said. "Hurting students doesn't really help the situation."

Ringeisen said that if some faculty members arrange to take the same furlough day, it's not being done to hurt students.

"It's my understanding they would use that as a teaching tool for students and the people of Illinois, to speak out about what it means when state government has no money.

"It would be something to demonstrate that the state having no money has consequences. The focus wouldn't be on their loss of pay, but on the state and the fact there are many things like this happening across the state of Illinois."

Little faculty backlash

On furlough days, faculty members aren't supposed to do any work connected to their job. That means no teaching, no answering e-mails, no office hours — not even being on campus.

"There is no specific meeting time for online classes," Ringeisen said. "Those students will notice that their e-mails aren't being answered that day."

"There are going to be impacts on students, just like the pharmacists who aren't getting paid, the day cares shutting down. ... There are effects on all types of services," Mooney said.

"There are going to be more and more of these kinds of things happening until major changes are such that state government quits floundering around on the budget situation," he said.

Ringeisen said there hasn't been much faculty backlash against the university itself.

"By and large, people understand that with the budget as bad as it is, something has to be done," he said. "We couldn't meet payroll beginning in April without doing something.

"It's a way to keep a catastrophe from happening."

Chris Dettro can be reached at 788-1510.

UIS employees have option to take salary cut instead of furloughs

University of Illinois faculty and staff subject to furloughs now have an option that will allow them to work but still save the university the same amount of salary.

Richard Ringeisen, chancellor of the University of Illinois Springfield, notified faculty and academic professionals Wednesday that they may opt to take a voluntary and temporary salary reduction in lieu of furloughs. Ringeisen said the new option was a system wide decision stemming from suggestions made by those affected by the Jan. 5 furlough announcement.

* The manner and amount of the salary reduction is the same under both options," Ringeisen said in an e-mail. "Those opting for the voluntary pay reduction program will not be required to take time off and so will not be subject to the work hour restrictions or timekeeping requirements associated with furloughs."

Those who wish to elect to take a temporary salary reduction instead of furloughs must complete an authorization form between Jan. 26 and Feb. 8.

* he temporary pay reduction will begin with the Feb. 16 pay date in an amount equivalent to one work day per month for four months for employees otherwise required to take four furlough days, or two work days per month for five months for executive group members otherwise required to take 10 furlough days.

nIf the university restores pay for furloughed employees, it also will restore pay for employees who voluntarily elected to take a temporary pay reduction instead of furlough.

* State Universities Retirement System (SURS) benefits will be affected similarly for those employees who elect to take a temporary pay reduction or furlough days. SURS benefits are based on years of service, actual earnings and accrued interest. Either choice will reduce actual earnings.

— Chris Dettro

Furlough requirements at UIS vary according to position

More than 460 University of Illinois Springfield faculty and academic professionals are required to take either furlough days or equivalent temporary salary reductions this spring as part of the U of I system's efforts to make up for a \$436 million backlog of unpaid state appropriations.

The cost-cutting measures announced Jan. 5, which include furloughs and a hiring freeze, are designed to trim \$82 million from the U of I's operating budget.

Faculty and academic professional staff will take four furlough days — a temporary leave of absence without pay — or equivalent pay reductions without taking time off, between the four pay dates of Feb. 16 and May 16. Monthly pay will be reduced through automatic payroll deductions by one day for each of the four payroll periods.

The president, chancellors and other senior administrators will take 10 furlough days or equivalent pay reductions between February and June pay dates. Their pay will be reduced by two days each month during the five-month period.

Faculty and academic professionals whose annual base salaries are \$30,000 or less; graduate assistants and fellows; employees with retirement agreements for retirement no later than Aug. 15, 2010; and individuals paid 100 percent from grant or contract funds as of Dec. 16, 2009, are exempt from the furlough policy.

Civil service employees also currently are exempt, although the university is trying to negotiate a similar pay savings with the unions.

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I believe that until some group of people such as the professors and others who are being forced to take these days off ban together the state legislators and governor will never take the whole budget crisis seriously. Everyone but those who are creating the problems are being affected by this furlough days, budget battle and lack of legislators/governor doing their jobs. When will they(the legislators/governor) be made to feel the hurt of their actions? Why is it that people like professors, state workers, laid off employees and others who have no say in the problem be the only ones who are being harmed? I am a student at UIS who may or may not be affected by this action. I do not blame the university for its actions, but I do blame the legislators for theirs.

geode_guy

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Refund the money to the students for the lost class time. They paid for a certian amount of class time and if they don't get it the Univ. should refund the tution for those days.

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