HR Benefits and Services During COVID-19 Closure

Germanna’s human resources team, together with sister college HR leaders and guidance from DHRM, have been evaluating the best way to provide benefits to our employees. It is hoped the below will provide a framework of those benefits and the order in which we should approach, based on the information we have today.

TELEWORK
DHRM continues to encourage us to be flexible and innovative when providing telework opportunities for all faculty and staff (full and part-time). Some ideas for telework may include:

- **Professional development.** Are there courses that you’ve wanted your employees to take and/or learning opportunities that you’ve struggled to fit in? Now may be a great time to encourage your teams to seek out virtual opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills.
- **Process manuals.** Everyone intends to cross-train, but we’re all so busy! Are there certain departmental processes that could be outlined, FAQs that could be developed, how-to guidelines to share, etc.? What are the things that you’ve always wanted to have available to share with a new hire, and could someone start working on those now?
- **Policies and Procedures.** In a similar line of thinking with process manuals, do you have departmental policies and procedures that are outdated, or new ones that could be drafted?
- **Research.** Are there new things going on in your professional field that you haven’t had a chance to dig into yet? Someone on your team may be wonderfully suited to research and report back on trends or other industry news.
- **Projects.** Are there projects you’ve been meaning to tackle for some time but there was never enough time in the day? Now is a great time to collaborate via Zoom and work on those projects.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCES

- HR’s most frequently asked questions (general, benefits, time management and teleworking) are posted at [www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19).
- It is normal for employees to be worried and stressed during a disease-related outbreak. All health plans offered to state employees and their dependents have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Included are up to four sessions at no charge for such services as mental health, alcohol or drug abuse assessment, child or elder care, grief counseling and legal or financial services.
- GCC Counseling Services list of [Community Resources](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19).
- [Virginia State Employee Loan Program](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19)
- [State Health Plans and COVID-19](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19)
- [Commonwealth Virtual Classes](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19)
- [COVID-19 Resources for State Employees](http://www.Germanna.edu/COVID-19)

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY LEAVE (PHEL)
Employees are eligible for PHEL under the following scenarios:

- Those who have contracted COVID-19 or have immediate family members who have COVID-19,
- Closure of the agency by the governor (this is not the case for GCC, our office buildings are closed but we are providing services remotely),
- Age 65 or above,
- Chronic Health Condition/suppressed immune system,
• Employee impacted by a partner organization whose closure, or policy essentially prohibits the employee’s ability to report to work and which telework and/or other social distancing methods were not possible. For example, clinical instructors,
• Reduced work hours if directly attributable to the COVID-19 response.

DHRM updated their PHEL/COVID-19 policy effective 3/26/20 providing for an increase in the number of PHEL hours as follows:
• Full time employees are eligible for up to 160 hours of PHEL and it can be used intermittently. For example, if an employee is able to telework 25 hours per week, the employee can utilize 15 hours of PHEL each week to supplement until the 160 hours is exhausted. Full-time employees who are unable to complete a full 40 hours of work (on-site, telework, or usual paid leave), should contact human resources to discuss options to utilize PHEL.
• Wage employees are eligible for up to the average number of hours they would normally work during a four-week period. For example, if a wage employee averages 29 hours per week then they would be eligible for 116 hours (29 hours x 4 weeks) of PHEL. Or if a wage employee averages 7 hours per week then they would be eligible for 28 hours of PHEL.

Process for PHEL: Utilization of PHEL requires supervisor and human resources approval. Approved PHEL will be loaded into a full-time employee’s leave balance as “Other.” Human Resources will record the PHEL hours in the wage employee’s timesheet directly.

JUST BREATHE . . . tips for managing stress during this time
Stress during an outbreak can include concerns about our health, changes in sleep and eating patterns, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems, and increases in the use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. Here are some ideas:
• Express gratitude. It sounds so simple, but appreciation for the good things in our lives is one of the keys to managing stress. Each morning, express gratitude for three things. Make sure the expressions are specific. For example, be grateful for the hilarious joke your son told last night. Write it down in a notebook, and when things get stressful, read your moments of gratitude. A daily gratitude practice can boost the immune system, improve mental and physical health, and create a sense of calm during stressful times.
• Play some music. Music is an amazing tool to help calm the mind. Put aside work for a few minutes and lose yourself in music. For some, quiet music is the answer. Others need more upbeat tunes. I prefer some good old ‘70s rock.
• Meditate. I know this might not be the easiest time to start a new meditation practice. For now, spend about 2-3 minutes on a guided meditation when you start to feel the stress and negative thoughts take over. The Calm app is a great place to start. It has a free version and some fabulous quick meditations to quiet the mind.
• Give back. Giving back is another tool that has been shown to reduce stress. Consider ways to pay it forward. For example, when you’re at the drive-thru window, you can pay for the car behind you.
• Get outside for a walk. Many companies in our area have asked employees to work from home. It’s hard to stay at home with no social interaction. Get outside for at least a 10-minute walk and take in the wonders of spring.
• Schedule a virtual coffee. Working from home can make anyone a bit stir-crazy. Set up a few virtual coffee dates where you can meet with a colleague and have a light conversation.
• Remind yourself of your shared purpose. Connect to your organizational values and mission. Remember the greater good that your organization is serving.
• **Share kindness.** Many are going through the day worried about their own health and the wellness of their family and friends. Assume positive intent if a colleague becomes a little cranky. Share kindness by showing up for those who need extra support. Even a simple “How are you?” can show people you care.

• **Detach from media.** Have periods of your day away from media, so you aren’t marinating all day in negative news. Instead of watching the news, find a feel-good movie or series to catch up on.

Let’s all take a collective deep breath. We will get through these challenging times. Practice gratitude, get yourself out of fight-or-flight mode, and you will be able to tackle whatever challenges come your way. Levy, Lynne (2020, March 13). *Just Breathe: 9 Tips for Managing Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, retrieved from www.workhuman.com.

**Please stay home, stay safe, and keep others safe.** It is up to us all to keep the workplace safe for those employees that must still perform their duties on-site. Your human resources staff are ready to assist, so please don’t hesitate to reach out and ask questions. We are here for you!