



# @WORK



## Vacation Planning

As we settle into the new year, it seems now is a good time to review some vacation practices.

The Collective Agreement defines the vacation year as April 1 through to March 31. Employees earn vacation at a rate determined by the amount of service they have at the University, (see Article 16 in Part A and Article 8 in Part B). You earn vacation in one year so you can take time off the next year.

It is important you work with your supervisor and meet the deadlines the department has outlined for you to submit your vacation requests. Vacations are scheduled by mutual agreement and also need to be consistent with the [“Managing Staff Vacation Procedure – Support Staff”](#) policy. This also means taking into consideration any blackout periods your department has designated in which nobody is eligible to take vacation. A department should give you as much advance notice as possible regarding designated blackout periods – i.e. time when due to reasonable operational requirements all hands on deck are needed.

In each vacation year, you have the right to take all of your vacation entitlement in one unbroken period or split it into multiple periods. If you request to use all of your vacation time at once, you will have priority over those who are not. In a situation where two or more employees have requested the same time off, but the department cannot have them away at the same time, seniority will apply.

You should plan on using your vacation time within one year. It is good to have a break from work - to relax, rest, unwind and rejuvenate. It's healthy! However, in a circumstance where you cannot use all of your vacation in one year or want to plan something exciting for the next year, you can ask for approval to carry over some vacation time into the next

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# Vacation Planning

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year. This is done through your supervisor or manager consistent with the “Managing Staff Vacation Procedure – Support Staff” policy. On the flip side of this, if there is a unique circumstance where you have too much vacation time banked, your manager can require you to reduce your vacation bank.

It is important to remember that BearTracks shows vacation calculated in a calendar year, (i.e. from January 1 to December 31) despite what this shows the vacation year is still the fiscal year, April 1 to March 31, (just as it is detailed in the collective agreement). Please make note of this so you can ensure you are aware how much vacation you actually have to use.

## Reminder of Development Funding—Casual Level 2, Auxiliary or Regular Employees

IF you are in one of the categories above, you have access to the Human Resources Development Fund. Please take note that as of **March 1, 2015**, you may submit a request for a learning or development event that will occur between April 1, 2015 and July 31, 2015. Remember also that applications are approved on a first come, first approved basis as long as your request is for an activity that either enhances your capacity to do your work or would prepare you for a different role. Please ensure that you are not applying for training that is required by your supervisor or manager. That should be paid for by your department.

## Help Me NASA!!!

*Help me NASA is a new feature in the @Work newsletter. The purpose of this segment is to seek input from NASA members so we can provide a response to common questions that arise from the collective agreement and your workplace. To submit questions to be considered for this column, please email: [nasa@ualberta.ca](mailto:nasa@ualberta.ca) with “Help me NASA!!!” in the subject line.*



**For immediate assistance with any personal issues or concerns please contact your LRO.**

**I just started at the University on January 12, 2015 in a continuing position. Do I have to wait until I pass probation to get benefits?**

No, if you are hired into a Regular position, you are fully covered for benefits from the first day of employment.

**I heard that EFAP is available to me even though I am a Casual Employee. Is this true?**

Yes, that is correct. Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available to all employees, regardless of their status, whether they have benefits or not, the number of hours they work, etc.

**I didn't use my HSA or PSA at all in 2014. What happened to that money?**

Unused amounts in your HSA will be carried forward for one year only. If you have any HSA-eligible expenses in 2015, they will be charged against your 2014 funds first. The PSA is different. There is no carry forward. You do have until March 31, 2015 to make your claims on both of these accounts. *NOTE: If you have any 2014 HSA funds left on December 31, 2015, they will be returned to the benefit plan.*

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# Help Me NASA!!!

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**I have some old receipts for physiotherapy (dated 2014). Can I still submit them? I did use all of my coverage in the Supplemental Health Plan. Can these be reimbursed through my HSA?**

Yes, you still have time to submit these receipts. All claims for 2014 have to be submitted by March 31, 2015.

**Can I claim massage therapy under the supplementary health care plan?**

No, you cannot. However, you can claim massage therapy fees under your HSA - as long as the massage therapist meets Sun Life's accreditation requirements and you have the funds available.

**I am travelling to Chile this summer. One of my co-workers said our benefits would cover me. Is this true?**

Yes. Out-of-country emergency medical coverage is part of your benefit package.

**I want to get laser eye surgery, can this be covered under my benefits?**

Laser eye surgery can be covered in part by your Vision Coverage (\$300) as well as your HSA (if you have funds available).

**My kids and I got glasses this year, but my older son lost his. Can he get a new pair?**

Under the vision care plan, there is a \$300 allowance for the purchase of prescribed glasses for expenses in a certain time period. If your son is under 18, then he would have \$300 after July 1, 2015 towards a replacement pair. If he is over 18, then he would have to wait until July 1, 2016. If you have funds available, you could also use your HSA to cover these costs.

**I just bought a computer. Can I claim this purchase through my HSA?**

No, but you can claim this expense through your PSA (depending on what funds are available in the account).

**My daughter and I both had a tumble on the ski slopes over the Christmas holidays and are both going to physio. Is the \$1000 limit for physiotherapy for both of us?**

No, the coverage for physiotherapy is \$1000 per year per covered person.

**I missed the period in November when I could change how much was in each of the Spending Accounts? What will the amounts be in these accounts for 2015?**

You would have had \$1,250 to divide between your Health Spending Account (HSA) and your Personal Spending Account (PSA). The defaults are HSA of \$1000 and PSA of \$250.

**The benefit plan says coverage for physiotherapy, acupuncture and chiropractor is \$1000 maximum per year but another maximum of \$2500 is mentioned. How does that work?**

The coverage is up to \$1000 for each service as long as the total for all services is a maximum of \$2500. These limits are per person covered.

**I am going through a divorce and both myself and my kids are feeling quite stressed out about this situation. Is there anything in my benefit plan that would help?**

Probably the most useful resource at this time is the Employee and Family Assistance Program. EFAP is a completely confidential service to support you and your children in dealing with such issues. There is counselling for all of you, stress management advice, and a financial counselling service that can help you understand the financial impacts of your options or choices. Also, if you want some guidance on basic things to consider or how to choose a lawyer, you can talk to them about that as well.

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@WORK is published monthly



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### NASA

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