



## Disconnecting From Work Policy

**Category:** Human Resources;

**Jurisdiction:** Vice President, Administration and Finance;

**Approval Authority:** Executive Team;

**Established on:** June 2, 2022;

**Amendments:** None.

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### Purpose

The health and wellbeing of employees is of the utmost importance to us and we, as a University, encourage and support our employees in prioritizing their own wellbeing.

Disconnecting from work is important for an individual's wellbeing, and helps employees achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance. Disconnecting from work *means to not engage in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or the sending or reviewing of other messages, so as to be free from the performance of work* outside of working hours.

To support our employees in balancing their working and personal lives, whether working traditional hours in the workplace or remotely, we have implemented this Disconnecting from Work Policy (the "Policy") to encourage employees to disconnect from work outside of their working hours in accordance with and subject to this Policy.

This Policy should be read alongside the University's associated policies, any relevant and applicable legislation, and any other policy that may become applicable and/or relevant.

## Application

- 1.1 This Policy applies to all employees, as defined by the Ontario *Employment Standards Act, 2000* (the “ESA”), whether they are working remotely, in the workplace, flexibly or are mobile. For clarity, “employee” under this Policy means only those employees of the University which are considered employees under the ESA.

## Definitions

- 1.2 The following definitions shall apply to this Policy:

- 1.2.1 Disconnecting from work: To not engage in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or the sending or reviewing of other messages, so as to be free from the performance of work.
- 1.2.2 Emergency: An urgent and/or critical situation, temporary in nature, that include but is not limited to something that:
- a) Threatens or causes harm to people, the environment or University property or disrupts critical operations.
  - b) If something unforeseen occurs, to ensure the continued delivery of essential public services, regardless of who delivers those services.
  - c) If something unforeseen occurs, to ensure that continuous processes or seasonal operations are not interrupted.
  - d) To carry out urgent repair work to the employer’s plant or equipment.
- 1.2.3 Work Hours: The hours in which an employee performs their work as directed by their individual employment contract, policies, or collective agreement or any alternate work agreements they may have.

## University Obligations

- 1.3 The University supports and aims to foster a workplace culture that promotes and values disconnecting from work and so will take steps to ensure that all employees, regardless of their place of work, are:

- 1.3.1 informed of what their working hours are reasonably expected to be and are informed of the circumstances, if any, in which they will be expected to engage in work-related communications outside their working hours;
- 1.3.2 able to take applicable meal, rest periods and hours free from work as required by law, contract or applicable collective agreement language; and
- 1.3.3 able to take vacation or other leave entitlements as required by law, contract or applicable collective agreement language.

## **Supervisor Obligations**

- 1.4 Supervisors will:
  - 1.4.1 facilitate implementation of the University's obligations under this Policy for those employees they supervise, including efforts to inform employees of what their working hours are reasonably expected to be and of the circumstances, if any, in which they will be expected to engage in work-related communications outside their working hours;
  - 1.4.2 develop procedures and/or practices with respect to disconnecting from work for employees they supervise and be mindful of employees' working hours; and
  - 1.4.3 respond to questions or concerns regarding disconnecting from work from those employees they supervise.

## **Employee Obligations**

- 1.5 The University expects all employees to comply with the following in the course of their work. Employees must:

- 1.5.1 co-operate fully with any applicable mechanism utilised by the University to record working time or update their working status (e.g. out-of-office messages) as applicable, including when working remotely, flexibly or when mobile;
- 1.5.2 be mindful of colleagues', vendors' and other third parties' working hours (e.g. by not routinely emailing or calling outside of working hours or expecting answers or responses outside of working hours);
- 1.5.3 notify their supervisor or manager, in writing, of any meal, rest, break or hours-free-from-work period (or other right or entitlement) which they feel they were entitled to but were unable to use due to performing work for the University on a particular occasion and why this occurred;
- 1.5.4 speak with their supervisor or manager if they feel their workload is preventing them from being able to take meal, rest, break or periods free from work that they are entitled to, or otherwise disconnect from work.

### **Ability to Disconnect From Work**

- 1.6 An employee's ability to disconnect from work depends on the University's business and/or operational needs and the duties and obligations of the employee's position, subject to an employee's employment contract, applicable collective agreement and/or any minimum statutory entitlements under the ESA.
  - 1.6.1 Nothing in the Policy precludes the University or other employees of the University from contacting colleagues, vendors/other third parties or other employees outside of what may be considered working hours or standard business hours, subject to any rights or entitlements the receiving colleague or employee may have under their employment contract, applicable collective agreement and/or their minimum statutory entitlements under the ESA.

- 1.6.2 This Policy does not afford employees a “right to disconnect” beyond what is within their individual employment contract, applicable collective agreement and/or any minimum statutory entitlements under the ESA, which may include rights, exemptions or entitlements speaking to: hours of work and hours free from work, overtime pay, meal and/or rest periods, public holidays and public holiday pay, and vacation.
- 1.6.3 Nothing in this Policy is intended to amend or supersede any grievance procedure or other aspect of any applicable collective agreement or other contractual dispute resolution mechanism.

## Reporting Concerns

- 1.7 All employees are expected and required to report any concerns or issues they may have which they feel are impacting their ability to disconnect from work and/or impacting their health and wellbeing.
- 1.7.1 Employees are encouraged to report such concerns or issues, in writing, to their immediate supervisor. If that is not appropriate or the matter cannot be resolved by doing so, employees should direct their concerns or issues to Human Resources.
- 1.7.2 Of course, all employees are also strongly encouraged to seek professional and/or medical assistance as they see fit if such concerns relate to their health and wellbeing, and the University has resources and supports available to employees.
- 1.7.3 Employees will not be subject to reprisal for reporting such concerns as outlined above or for inquiring about, exercising or attempting to exercise any rights as provided under the ESA.

## Posting, Notice and Retention

1.8 The University shall provide a copy of this Policy to each employee, regardless of their position within 30 calendar days of implementation. Should any changes be made to the Policy after its implementation, the University shall provide each employee of the University a copy of the revised Policy within 30 days of the changes being made. This shall be done by posting it to the University's policy website and emailing a link to all employees.

1.8.1 The University shall provide a copy of this Policy to all new employees upon onboarding and within 30 calendar days of the employee commencing employment with the University. This shall be done by posting it to the University's policy website and emailing a link to all employees.

1.8.2 The University shall retain a copy of this Policy and any revised version of this Policy for a period of three years after it ceases to be in effect.

**Policy Implemented on: [June 2, 2022]**

**Review Period:** 5 years;

**Next Review Period:** 2026-2027;

**Related Policies and Procedures:** To be determined;

**Policy Superseded by this Policy:** None.

The University Secretariat manages the development of policies through an impartial, fair governance process, and in accordance with the Policy Governance Framework. Please contact the University Secretariat for additional information on University policies and procedures and/or if you require this information in another format:

Open: Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm;

Location: University Centre, Thunder Bay Campus, Room UC2002;

Phone: 807-343-8010 Ext. 7929 or Email: [univsec@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:univsec@lakeheadu.ca).