

Remote Work Considerations

Questions for consideration: Below are key questions related to factors that will impact decisions regarding remote work.

Relevant Factors: Decisions about Remote Working	Why the Factor is Important
Starting Point: What was the status of your remote working situation prior to the pandemic?	Every job role started pre-pandemic in a certain circumstance. Those factors may contribute to the discussion and final decision. For instance, if a job role was permanently remote prior to the pandemic, it will be important to understand the circumstances leading to the dynamic and what remains relevant. Also, campuses will need to make decisions equitably about how 'prior circumstances' weigh into current choices?
Student Interaction: What percentage of my job role is directly serving students? And what is your campus' view on which creates a better service experience for your job role (remote or on-site)?	Relational research demonstrates that positive, in-person interactions more quickly and effectively build familiarity, comfort, trust and meaningful connection among people. Within higher education, connection is a major factor in ongoing engagement and also serves as the foundation for the balance of challenge and support that facilitates learning and development. Aligned is the fact that ' <i>product-based companies are more likely to go remote than service companies... When you provide a service to your client... in-person conversation can never fully replace [virtual setting].</i> ' https://www.workpuls.com/blog/things-consider-before-going-remote .
Space Planning: Does my job role contribute to valuable and important campus space that supports students?	Physical spaces on campus can play an important part in the living/learning of students' university experience. It's for this reason that campuses are intentional about space and how it is used. On some of our campuses, space is also at a premium. If a job role were to become entirely remote, it could impact spaces - allocation, availability, care and management on campus. Does your job impact this?
Job Productivity: Where am I able to be most productive and effective in my job?	The University's commitment is to the <i>Experience, Performance and Development</i> of all our students and employees. We recognize that work environments make a difference. For instance, ' <i>people who work in distributed teams need to be more self-sufficient, motivated and self-disciplined.</i> ' (https://www.workpuls.com/blog/things-consider-before-going-remote). In a resource-limited institution dedicated to expanding learning through higher education - we must maximize the effectiveness of our great workforce.
Job Work Hours: Are there work benefits to your job role being remote and outside of traditional work shifts?	Remote work can allow for lower-risk and more flexible work-engagement outside of traditional work shifts. This can be especially helpful in circumstances where traditional work shifts actually inhibit a job role's ability to provide the best service. In a circumstance where there is more latitude being considered for remote work, answering these and other questions is an important step.
Performance Leadership: Is my role better able to be supported and my performance better able to be adequately assessed and coached given a certain working situation?	Again, the University's commitment is to the <i>Experience, Performance and Development</i> of all our students and employees. At any given time it is imperative that our team members are able to be supported, have their work assessed for quality and receive relevant job coaching. It can be easy for employees who work in opposite situations to wonder if each other are getting their work done. It is critical to be results-focused. For some jobs and circumstances that can be more challenging. Also, at certain times in a person's career that can/may be better served in-person rather than remote. Examples can include (and are not limited to) when a person is new to a job or when their performance is not solid.
Experience Level of the Team: What is your experience level in your job? At the University? In your Profession overall?	Our mutual responsibility is to consider the overall Experience Level of our team. The skill and operational efficacy of a team should factor into short- and long-term decisions about which roles, if any, would be able to work remote. In this circumstance, it can be important for an employee and manager to revisit the discussion of remote work after time and skill development.
Team/Function Effectiveness: Is my job role location important to a bigger picture of effective teaming and leadership?	The effective operations of the University requires productive teamwork among individuals, departments and functions. Sometimes that means that a job role is better placed for the purpose of facilitating and sustaining effective team/function relations. Some roles require significant cross-functional communication while others are more siloed and require only brief and/or infrequent collaborations. This can sometimes mean that a job role is best suited to be on campus. It can also mean that a job role may be better suited to be off campus or in a certain geographic location. For example, many of the University's Shared Services roles are tasked to support multiple campuses and having a job location on one of them creates challenges to the role's efficacy. Consider the dynamic for your role.
Equitable Workload: Does my choice of work location negatively impact others' workloads?	In some situations, a person's choice of work location can negatively and inequitably impact their peers' workload. For instance, if a job role facilitates student or peer access to the use of certain equipment/resources on campus, someone on campus in the department may have a frequent/high volume of campus-based work, while a person in the department working remotely may not. The dynamic can inadvertently create inequities in workload and foster frustration and productivity issues. Important Note: Individuals who work remotely can find that their work habits can mean more focused time without breaks since the work environment may/may not prompt breaks or the need to walk to other offices. As employees, we need to recognize the difference between our workday management habits which we can personally manage/change versus campus service/operations dynamics that require campus-based individuals to take on more work.
Job Satisfaction: What working situation facilitates the greatest job satisfaction for me?	Research shows that job satisfaction has a direct and significant impact on employee engagement, contribution and productivity. There can be many work environment factors that contribute to or detract from job satisfaction. In a remote job circumstance, those can be (and are not limited to), the ability to better manage home responsibilities, no commute, fewer distractions, better work space, increased productivity, and technology providing an overall improved experience. These benefits always need to be considered within the context of the workplace's needs/expectations for how the best work is accomplished. Our employee's job satisfaction is important, and our students' needs are also primary. Remote work allows employees to <i>incorporate work into their lifestyles and not necessarily the other way around.</i>

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Job Opportunity: Does having this role feasible to conduct as a remote work role open greater opportunities for attracting and retaining top talent from other geographies?	Maine's talent market, especially in certain fields is limited. Does my job role being permanently or partially remote provide greater talent opportunity for the University? Note: With space on campuses sometimes at a premium, it is important to consider that transitioning a role to <i>permanent remote status</i> may lead to permanent space reallocation. That said, these decisions can also consider other options including the feasibility of co-working suites where colleagues share space on alternate schedules and/or where a space is dedicated to supporting hybrid workers in a new way.
Post-Pandemic: How will your department readjust to providing excellence to students and each other post pandemic?	The worldwide pandemic initiated appropriate crisis response by the University in March 2020 to send all employees whose roles did not require on-site operations, home to work remote. The year plus timeframe where UMS operated in various stages of remote provides insights about what is feasible, what works well, what doesn't, etc.
Sustainability: Is it the role or the current employee's preferences driving the conversation about working remote?	Both are relevant to decision-making. Decisions about the role can impact space availability, technical support needs, etc. A worthwhile exercise is to consider the current employees' circumstance and also to imagine if the employee moves to another job. Are there options for this role to switch from one status to another in a sustainable way?
Health and Wellness: Do you have any medical accommodation factors that are relevant to a decision about remote vs. in-person work location?	In alignment to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), accommodation needs, if applicable, can play a role in the decision-making. Important Reminder: Managers can understand that/if their employee requires an accommodation and what that accommodation is. It is not lawful for a manager to inquire/seek to ascertain the specific nature of an employee's disability. The UMS Office of Equal Opportunity and its ADA Coordinator can assist both employees and managers in their understanding and support of options.
Health and Wellness: Do you have access to a sustainable remote working space that can facilitate a fully ergonomic work setup?	As University job roles that did not require on-site work were asked to shift remote in March 2020, many of us found ourselves crafting work spaces quickly and creatively - guest bedrooms, couches, kitchen tables, basements, etc. The University emphasizes and aligns to the requirement that our employees have an ergonomically healthy work set-up that is sustainable. Refer to Safety/Risk Management workflow.
Investment: Are there any expenses required for maintaining your work space remotely? Can your department cover the work-related costs?	Our US:IT department facilitated our temporary transition to a primarily remote workforce in March 2020 in a crisis decision format. That situation has afforded US:IT greater understanding of what technology investments (one-time and ongoing) are necessary to maintain remote vs. on-site working. The Telecommuting Guidelines outline what technology components are covered and what are not. If there is a point where there is a fee for certain additional and allowable technology support, can your department support that fee?
Technical Dynamic: Does your home location have reliable internet access? Are you willing to come into the office if the reliability impacts your job role's service?	Though the objective is that no technology-driven compulsions would remove choices/options, we also know there can be genuine obstacles to securing reliable internet access in ME. University-supported remote work would require internet connectivity.
Technical Dynamic: Does your work require a level of network access and security that can only occur on-site? If so, how frequently?	During the pandemic, there were new technical processes/tools that expanded access to remote working. That said, there are some positions whose access to technology can only occur on-site. This may be just at certain times or all the time. As well, timing may be flexible, allowing the feasibility for alternate options that may not have been the case prior to the pandemic.
Remote Location: If you were to work remotely, would it be from one location or multiple, possibly crossing other state lines, internationally and/or time zones?	Circumstances can mean that employees have the need/interest to travel during their standard workweek. If an employee working remotely travels across time zones (one-time or pattern) and it impacts their ability to conduct their job and serve their customers, this could be a factor. Also, if an employee chooses to live in a different state, it can impact the employee's benefit options, labor laws, taxation and, therefore, University operations. The employee and University need to understand the circumstances and be sure that they are manageable. Based on these dynamics, pre-approval is required to work out-of-state beyond two weeks.
Facilities Impact: Would my role shifting to partial or permanent remote positively benefit the University's goals relative to facilities/space management?	UMS' infrastructure spans a broad range of age, accessibility, quality, required maintenance and expense. As UMS continually seeks to use its resources wisely, including its building infrastructure, will your job role decision impact facilities choices?
Dependencies: For your role, is there a dependency to your ability to work remote?	Dependencies can range the full gamut in their nature. A good example might be that for the stability of a department, function or campus, it's critical that one or the other of key roles be on-site at any given time. Taken at an even high risk level, it can also mean the opposite - that ideally the two roles are always operating such that both are kept safe/at distance from each other in the case of a crisis ((Ex.) roles not driving together in case of an accident or not socially present with each other in the case of a viral pandemic). There are multiple options for addressing this; first, there needs to be clarity on the role dependencies and expectations.
The Right Mix: What perspectives do you have on the balance described in the next column that relate to you?	The decision about your job role falls within the full University's decision about the right mix of remote/hybrid/in-person work for the University.