

## Phased Resumption of Research Operations During COVID-19 Pandemic July 1, 2020

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### Summary

COVID-19 has dramatically changed how we conduct research on campus. We are now embarking on a limited expansion of on-site research activities, while ensuring we are following campus guidelines to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we continue the multi-Phased University repopulation plan, campus operations will be limited and activity on campus will look very different from that prior to COVID-19. To reduce the spread of this virus, we must continue to limit the number of researchers permitted to work in rooms and buildings. Only activities that cannot be performed at home will be allowed on site. Significant changes in workplace practices are expected from returning researchers. Restrictions will limit the number and density of people in campus buildings and rooms. New health safety protocols that follow government recommendations and best practices will be in place throughout campus operations.

- **Obtain Approval**
  - All on-site research activities require advance approval. To request your unit/department's return to on-site work, supervisors or department chairs are requested to work with their deans and unit leaders to complete the Roos Return Request [Qualtrics survey](#).
- **Reconfigure Work**
  - Limit the duration of time that researchers are working in the same room, even with physical distancing.
  - Research requests should take into account that some supplies and services in animal facilities and shared core facilities may be limited.

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- **Reduce Transmission (See [System Policy HR 700H](#))**
  - Stay home when you are sick.
  - Avoid contact with people who are sick.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes.
  - Wash your hands regularly throughout the day and when entering and before exiting all buildings; use hand sanitizer when hand-washing facilities are unavailable.
  - Disinfect all surfaces and equipment between shifts.
  - Follow campus guidelines on wearing face coverings while on campus.

### **Principles and Framework Guiding a Phased Approach to Restarting Research Activity**

**Goal:** To keep everyone safe, while increasing research activity in a phased approach as safety becomes easier to maintain.

**Principle #1:** *Follow the cognizant Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives to implement social distancing and other safety measures.*

**Principle #2:** *Protect the health and safety of the research workforce, emotional as well as physical. Protect the health and safety of our clinical patients and human research subjects.*

**Principle #3:** *Protect the careers of early stage researchers.*

**Principle #4:** *Undergraduate and graduate students are students' first, researchers second.*

**Principle #5:** *Implement a fair and transparent process for granting access.*

**Principle #6:** *Ensure as rapid a research restart as the public health conditions permit.*

**Principle #7:** *Participate in finding cures and preventions for COVID-19, while increasing the safe access to all patients to clinical trials for their conditions.*

### **Phases and Permitted Research Activities – A Plan**

Before allowing greater researcher access to labs, libraries, and research collections, a plan and rigorous enforcement of social distancing directives is necessary. Elements of such a plan may include (this list intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive):

- scheduled/work-shift access;
- required facial coverings;
- 6-foot social distancing;

- depending on size of research space and nature of activity therein, density limits such as no more than 2 researchers per bench, 1 researcher per 1000 sq. ft./, max 3 per lab unless further density is justified and approved;
- Temperature checks and face coverings consistent with [HR-700H](#);
- disinfecting work surfaces after use; and so on.

Example: PIs must maintain a low social density as well as social distancing (precautionary practices consistent with [HR-700](#)). PIs will create a list of which groups are within each room or suite for ease of inter-group communications and coordination. PI groups will create a “Users Calendar” to sign up and monitor their own activities within the rooms or suites. These calendars will be PI developed and maintained.

The following table provides additional points of consideration for researchers in their applications to Campus Leadership for a return to research activities:

<p><b>Phase 1</b></p> <p>All research that can be done remotely should continue</p> <p>On site research activity transitions to an estimated <b>35-50% of normal</b></p>	<p><i>Deadline-driven research activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonal data collection such as field work, experiments close to completion, or deadline driven, <u>whose pause or deferral would lead to catastrophic delay or loss of research results.</u> Animal experiments where a delay would result in euthanasia or loss of a colony.</li> <li>• Prioritize access for graduate students and postdocs close to completing their degree/term of appointment.</li> <li>• Prioritize research for completion of grants with end dates within 3 months (where funding agency has not granted leniency).</li> <li>• <u>Core facilities:</u> restart facilities based on sufficient ‘customer’ demand (approved projects) where work cannot be done remotely.</li> <li>• <u>Humanities and Social Sciences:</u> Explore options for expanded on-campus library research options (e.g. paging services, where faculty can order books and other materials to pick up from campus location). Prioritize researchers with deadlines (tenure, book contracts, etc.) for access to Library (rare books/materials) on a</li> </ul>
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	<p>limited basis. Some monitored access to offices for those at critical career points (tenure, promotion).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Field research</u>: When University sponsored travel restrictions have been lifted - expand approvals depending on what current restrictions are in the counties where field research is to be conducted.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Core campus functions are staffed and operational to handle increased load (LARC, EH&amp;S)</i></li> <li>- <i>More core facilities are staffed and operational</i></li> <li>- <i>Labs are able to purchase necessary supplies</i></li> <li>- <i>Social distancing, face mask, cleaning measures understood and in place</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p> <p><b>Gradually expand # of people on campus</b> while maintaining social distancing</p> <p><b>Critical new on-campus research allowed, but labs/groups only allowed to operate at 50-70% total personnel capacity, with social distancing.</b> All research that can be done remotely should continue to be, including all seminars, group meetings, etc.</p> <p>On site research activity transitions to an estimated <b>50-70% of normal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Field Research</u> - expand on case by case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions (including University Sponsored travel restrictions), ability to travel safely and ability to social distance at field sites)</li> <li>● <u>Humanities and Social Sciences</u> - allow use of libraries to limited numbers of researchers using hygiene and social distancing protocols. Access to offices can be allowed with social distancing practices in place.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Phase 2</b></p> <p><b>Continued expansion of research on campus</b> while maintaining social distancing</p> <p>Critical new on-campus research allowed, but <b>labs/groups only allowed to operate at 70-90% total personnel capacity, with social distancing</b></p> <p>All research that can be done remotely should continue to be, including all seminars, group meetings, etc.</p> <p>On site research activity estimated at <b>70-85% of normal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Field Research</u> - further expand on case by case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely and ability to social distance at field sites)</li> <li>● Some face to face Human Subjects Research resume under limited conditions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 3</b></p> <p><b>All types of on-site research are allowed</b></p> <p>On site research activity <b>normal at 85-100%</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Restart normal research operations, including field research and human subjects research.</li> </ul>

## Introduction

This document provides guidance and direction for restarting on-site research activities, while ensuring we are following campus efforts to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Onsite activities** refer to those activities conducted on campus, at University-owned facilities, and at non-University field locations or leased spaces. Research that can be conducted remotely should continue to be done remotely (e.g., theoretical and computational work, or non-face-to-face human subjects research) and does not require review or approval to continue at home.

### A phased process

Campus research activities were curtailed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This document provides guidance on the steps toward a gradual increase in these activities on campus. The restart will be phased, with a focus on restoring activities at research sites while minimizing the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus to our students, staff, faculty, and the larger community.

Controls on the spread of the infection need to be balanced with research needs to operate effectively and safely. During this phased process we take a conservative approach in setting

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guidelines to reduce the chance of transmission of the virus. Additionally, we will learn how to operate safely in this new working environment.

The re-opening of campus research activities will focus on projects that can move forward while successfully implementing requirements for physical distancing and other safety protocols to reduce transmission risk. As campus researchers learn to carry out their research in these new ways, while preventing spread of the virus, additional expansion of research activities will be possible.

## Guiding Principles for On-Site Research Activities

The framework for increasing research activity at campus research sites must be informed by the following principles:

- Protect the emotional as well as physical health and safety of our workforce.
- Protect the health and safety of our clinical patients and human research subjects.
- Follow campus health directives (e.g., physical distancing, size limitations on gatherings.)
- Implement a fair, equitable, and transparent process for granting access to campus research facilities.

## Implementation Considerations

As we reconstitute on-site activities, we must maintain physical distancing and continue to prioritize the health and safety of our communities.

- Research that can be accomplished remotely should continue to be done that way, until further notice, with access to campus only in the case of extenuating circumstances.
- Restarting on-site research activities impacts other units on campus - animal care staff, biosafety staff, custodial staff, PPE needs, research sites, and shared core facilities located in the same building. Limits on these essential services may necessarily impede some of our desired activities.
- During the phased process of the Roos Return Plan, some additional in-person human subjects research studies may resume as we begin to phase in these activities. Other studies may resume face-to-face human subjects interactions provided that public health conditions are favorable at that time.

## Prioritizing Research Facilities and Projects

During Phase 2 and 3 of campus activity, we seek to increase on-site research activities while minimizing the risk of contamination. Phase 2 will serve to establish new patterns of behavior that enhance our ability to maintain physical distancing and other safety protocols to reduce

transmission risk. There will be limitations on access to facilities, availability of support staff, and custodial services as we ramp up campus activities occurring in our buildings.

## Guidelines for On-Site Research Activities

In opening our campus for more research, we must work together and strive to maximize the distance between each other at all times and everywhere. We must also minimize the time individuals spend together in an enclosed space.

The types of spaces needed to conduct research activities vary widely among the different disciplines on our campus. This variation will factor into decisions made towards restarting research activities.

## Face-to-face Human Subjects Research Restart Framework

This section presents a general framework for allowing resumption of IRB-approved face-to-face human subjects interactions for studies that provide the potential for direct and meaningful benefits to individual participants. As we enter subsequent phases of the Roos Return Plan restarting additional face-to-face study interactions may be initiated provided that public health conditions are favorable at that time.

This framework is for schools, departments, and institutes to use in developing specific guidance for their study teams and for setting priorities in restart phases. Specific guidance and processes for individual study teams will be provided by the PI's school/department/institute and research site. Authority for resuming face to face human subjects research will be dependent on the nature of your research, conversations with your supervisors and department chairs in consultation with deans and unit leaders submitting requests to the Campus Coronavirus Planning Team, provost or appropriate vice chancellor.

A temporary hold was imposed on face-to-face (i.e., in-person) human subjects research interactions with exceptions for therapeutic studies involving drugs or devices, or other research activities that are critical to the health and safety of patients or study participants. Even for therapeutic studies, we recommended moving toward remote data collection methods to the extent possible (for instance, telephone or electronic methods for screening or follow-up). Human subjects research conducted online or using other remote data collection methodologies (email, mail, phone, etc.) continued.

Human subjects research regulations are based on principles found in the Belmont Report.

- <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmontreport/index.html>

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- One of the three guiding principles is “beneficence;” specifically, that we must maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. Beneficence applies to particular research projects, but also applies in a larger sense to our entire research enterprise. With the COVID-19 situation, beneficence relates to how our institution and PIs are maximizing benefits and minimizing risks in face-to-face human subjects research interactions

Restarting of IRB-approved research studies that have the potential of direct and meaningful benefits to individual study participants relative to risks, including those imposed by possible COVID-19 exposure, will be dependent on the Administrative approval and the presence of procedures to mitigate exposure to participants and study personnel.

- Direct and meaningful benefit means that participation in the study has a good probability of having a direct benefit to the participant in a medical, psychological, social, or other dimension, and that these benefits outweigh the risk of COVID-19 exposure associated with in-person interactions.

Recommendations for restarting face to face interactions with research participants:

- Study teams must provide subjects with information about what to expect during their face-to-face interaction, including screening, physical distancing, and measurements in place to minimize risks associated with the spread of COVID-19.
- All research tasks that can be performed remotely should continue to be performed remotely, even after the phase-in start date.
- Extreme caution should be adhered to when considering the resumption of face-to-face group meetings. Study team meetings should be held using technology-assisted methods such as Teams, Zoom, or other methods.
- All public health best practices must be used in face-to-face human subjects research interactions. These practices include physical distancing, frequent hand washing, staggered work schedules for employees, minimum necessary staff on site, use of face coverings for both staff and participants, use of PPE when indicated, use of gloves, clear procedures for sanitizing, and other measures.
- If appropriate, study teams should consider the use of screening questions based on COVID-19 symptoms prior to scheduling a study participant
- Plans for monitoring staff health and safety should be developed and consistent with [HR 700 H](#).

As IRB-approved studies restart, population density within and the flow of traffic through facilities should be considered to ensure availability of adequate space for appropriate physical distancing.

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- The same guidelines used for laboratory research will apply to human subjects research interactions.
- Communication with building managers about study needs, times and durations of room use, sanitation practices, and best routes for participant access must be maintained.

***These activities are not research specific activities and do not need to be submitted to the IRB for review***

- Some studies may have more perceived risk than others. For example, studies involving exercise equipment, MRI procedures, more than one simultaneous participant engaging in data collection, or use of manipulatives do not necessarily increase risk, yet participants may have a concern about possible surface contamination.
- It may be appropriate to discuss risks of acquiring COVID-19 with certain research participants, such as those in higher risk categories.

## Moving Forward for All Research

Progress toward establishing best practices for carrying out research while maintaining physical distancing will permit successive phases and increased levels of research that can be approved and safely carried out on campus.

Researchers should also be aware that during this phased process, many normal campus operations will be limited. Campus operations will increase over time as the ability to manage the spread of COVID-19 improves, but in the meantime, research PIs are asked to be sensitive to the challenges their group members may be facing and accommodating as they work to adapt to this new campus environment.



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