

# **Request for Authorization to Re-Start Research Activities**

Department of Biological Sciences – The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)

**Applying Principal Investigator and Affiliation:** Dr. Germán Rosas-Acosta, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, UTEP.

**Date of Application:** 19 May, 2020.

## **1. Justification for On-Campus Activities**

- The activities proposed in this plan require the use of the research facilities on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Bioscience Research Building (BRB), specifically the area assigned to Dr. Rosas-Acosta's laboratory and the Tissue Culture Facility.
- No physical proximity among participants is required for the work proposed.
- The activities proposed are required to pursue the goals of an active grant by the Department of Defense, therefore constitute work essential for the pursuit of the University mission.

## **2. Safe Travel of Participants to Campus and Building**

- All participants to be involved in the research activities proposed will travel individually to the university campus by car.
- Participants will park in their assigned parking lots or as near as possible to the BRB and from there walk to the building using usual paths.
- Participants will use a cloth facial mask and maintain distance from other pedestrians on their way back and forth from their car to the BRB.

## **3. Building Considerations**

- The participants will reach the laboratory area (BRB, Room 4.146; hereafter referred to simply as BRB 4.146) by using the elevators located in the building (the use of the stairs to go up is not currently allowed).
- The participants will use the entrance on the south side of BRB 4.146, using the corridor that passes by Dr. Rosas-Acosta's office (BRB 4.148).
- Participation in research will be limited to a maximum of 3 members of the Rosas-Acosta laboratory at any given time.
- While no interactions are required for the research activities proposed, efforts will be made to ensure that two participants are present whenever any research activity is being performed to allow for a "buddy system" to be implemented (if anyone should need help, there is someone within reach to provide such help).
- No office space is currently available for the members of the lab so there are no special considerations to be taken at that level.

## **4. Characteristics of Laboratory, Room or Space Used**

- The activities proposed will be executed in the Bioscience Research Building, Room 2.146 (BRB 2.146), in the area assigned to Dr. Rosas-Acosta (approximately 750 sq feet of lab space, enough for a maximum of 3 participants to be present simultaneously)

within the lab area), as well as in the section of the Tissue Culture Facility assigned to Dr. Rosas-Acosta (approximately 90 sq feet; only one person at a time will be allowed in that area).

- Surfaces will be decontaminated by spraying a 70% ethanol solution on bench surfaces and wiping it off with paper towels. This will be executed both at the beginning of daily activities by any given member of the group and at the end of activities, independently of whether other members will continue using the area.
- The Bioscience Research Building provides high airflow in the shared research lab areas and lower airflows in the common areas outside the research areas. Therefore, for any given lab member, the stay in the research laboratory will not be time limited, although the suggested maximum stay will be 6 hours. However, given that airflow is lower in the common areas outside the research area (corridors, restrooms, dining areas), stay in such locations will be limited to no more than 15 minutes at a time and participants will be advised to avoid interactions that would be considered disruptive of the social distancing rules (close proximity to others, establishing conversations and interactions that require loud talking or that trigger loud laughing).

#### **5. Participant Health and Personal PPE**

- Only participants who have NOT had a fever or a cough within the 48 hours previous to the intended participation time will be allowed participation in research activities. Participants commit to follow a strict self-reporting standard, acknowledging that failure to do so could lead to their dismissal from their continued participation in research activities at UTEP.
- Participants acknowledge that their participation in the proposed research activities is voluntary (they have the option to choose whether they participate or not), that they have been provided proper guidance on safe practices associated to working in the research labs during the current conditions, and that UTEP and the Principal Investigator are not legally responsible for their well-being.
- Only specific members of the laboratory that have self-identified to the PI (Dr. Rosas-Acosta) as belonging to low-risk populations for COVID-19 will be allowed participation in the proposed activities.
- Participants will wear protective cloth masks from the moment they leave their vehicle. The masks are required to be worn throughout the duration of the individual's stay at the university campus.
- Upon entry to the research space (Bioscience Research Building, Room 2.146), participants will put on their lab coats, put on gloves, measure their body temperature, and sign the arrival sheet (indicating name, time, lab they belong to, and their body temperature). Then, participants will proceed to the workspace, where they will disinfect their bench area as indicated above.
- The gloves will be disinfected frequently by spraying 70% alcohol solution.
- Before leaving the lab area, participants will be required to go to the door area, disinfect their gloves, measure their body temperature, fill out the arrival sheet, take off their lab coat, and dispose of their gloves. This procedure is not required if the participant is

accessing another research area in the building (such as the core facilities on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floors). In these occasions, participants will be advised to minimize the length of stay in other areas of the Bioscience Research Building.

**6. Description of Activities to be Performed**

- All activities that do not require actual physical presence of the participants in the Bioscience Research Building will be performed remotely. These include the planning of the experiments to be executed in the lab and the recording of data obtained while executing research.
- The activities to be performed will include most activities currently approved for the Rosas-Acosta’s lab under our current IBC protocol. A partial list of these includes among others tissue culture, lysis of cells, preparation of cell extracts for immunoblotting, isolation of total cellular RNA, PCR, qRT-PCR, gel electrophoresis (both agarose and SDS-PAGE), immunoblotting, DNA cloning, and DNA maxi- and mini-preping.

**7. Scheduling**

- Participants will coordinate with the PI to avoid having more than 3 participants in the areas assigned to Dr. Rosas-Acosta at any given time.
- Given the limited number of lab members that will be considered for inclusion within this protocol, it is likely that the same participants will be present in the lab almost on a daily basis, as required by the ongoing research.
- The duration of stay of any given participant in the different areas of the University will follow the directions indicated in item 4 above.

**8. Individuals whose access is being requested with this application**

By signing this form, researchers acknowledge that their participation in the proposed research activities is voluntary (they have the option to choose whether they participate or not), that they have been provided proper guidance on safe practices associated with working in the research labs during the current conditions, that any efforts to prepare a risk-free plan as long as the SARS-CoV2 is endemic in the El Paso community is not possible, and that UTEP and the Principal Investigator are not legally responsible for their well-being. Furthermore, by signing this form researchers also commit to comply with all rules and regulations associated with their participation in research activities under the current conditions and accept all penalties associated with failure to comply with such rules and regulations, including their removal from the building and losing access privileges to the research facilities.

#	Name	Title/position	Signature
1	Dr. Germán Rosas-Acosta	Principal Investigator	
2		Graduate Student	
3		Undergraduate Student	

