**RESEARCH CONTINUITY UPDATE**

**May 5, 2020**

**Q&A**

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| **General questions about campus reopening** | |
| 1. Are masks required for people to return to labs and offices at UTEP? | At the minimum, a facial covering is required (mask, bandana, etc.) in areas with more than one person. Some environments may require more protection. |
| 1. Will surveillance testing be conducted? (Without that it is impossible to determine who could be infected and which are the hot spots in campus.) 2. Will the university conduct antibody testing? (Seems crucial for reopening.) 3. Observations: There is not a single virologist in the reopening task force. There is not a single actively wet-lab researcher in the task force. | The Task Force is consulting with experts in virology, epidemiology, immunology, and other applicable areas. Some form of testing program is likely, but this area of research is rapidly evolving, and it is too early to predict the best protocol to follow. |
| 1. How will classroom constraints affect the current registration process? I already have sections in classroom to capacity. With social distancing requirements classroom capacity is reduced. | There will likely be a substantial impact on the numbers of students who can be in classrooms in the fall. The Task Force is in the process of reaching out to faculty for help in developing alternatives. |
| 1. Different populations have different risk factors. Is the return to work task force considering this ... multi-tier approach? | Yes, the Task Force is considering the different risk levels, particularly the potential impact on families and vulnerable populations. |
| 1. Could we conduct "hybrid" classes? (Most activities are online, but exams are on campus (for more reliable proctoring). | Planning for hybrid classes is encouraged. Whether they can or must be implemented depends on the level of virus activity in the community. |
| 1. Is there a timeline when university travel will be allowed again? | For the near future, authorization for travel will depend on a number of factors, including level of virus activity, applicable regulations, destination and justification and will be considered only on a case-by-case basis. |
| 1. Are we still permitted to visit our offices without notifying anybody? | Faculty and essential staff are permitted to visit individual offices. |
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| **Research Questions** | |
| 1. **Lab access** |  |
| 1. Can faculty and staff go to their labs? | Faculty and essential staff are approved to visit their individual offices/labs and, with an approved Work/Safety plan, use their labs to conduct essential research. Such plans need to describe procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Consideration should be given for PPE and for joint-use spaces where social distancing cannot be maintained.  At this time, Work/Safety Plans should be routed through chairs and deans to the VPR. There is no specific format for requests. Chairs and Deans are expected to carefully consider each request and to provide substantive comments when forwarding them to the VPR. Involvement of students in the research lab requires specific justification (e.g., work required for a thesis or dissertation) and special attention to their safety. Also include signed statements from the students acknowledging the Lab Safety Plan and stating their agreement to work in that environment.  Given the premise that undergraduate students are not as experienced as graduates there must be strong, compelling justification. Such requests will face considerable scrutiny. Undergrad students must have UGRA appointments.  Requests to use volunteers are most strongly discouraged. Issues include: student status, health insurance, training, risk and liability.  These guidelines are subject to change. Please refer to the RESEARCH COVID-19 web site for the most current information. |
| 1. For justifications to get graduate students back in our labs, where should we submit the requests to? ORSP. Graduate school, or individual college dean? Should the case be submitted to the chair first? Is there a model write-up to follow? |
| 1. Can we get an exception to permit undergraduate students in our labs? My lab relies 100% on undergraduate volunteers. I could decrease the number of them, but I still need them. |
| 1. Can I take the student's temperature as a protocol to entering the research lab? | Yes. Recommend you include it in your Lab Safety Plan, along with questions to determine if the students are symptomatic. |
| 1. **IRB issues** | |
| 1. How is IRB differentiating and cataloging proposals specific to COVID-19? For example, if we add an amendment with specific questions, will our study be flagged. | The Human Research Oversight and Compliance Office (HROC) is flagging new projects that are COVID-related and/or amendments with COVID elements. Amendments with COVID-related questions need to align with the objective/purpose of the study. |
| 1. My research involves human subjects. I am concerned that my projects are going to be dead in the water for many months. | This is a major concern in the national university community, and is strongly dependent upon governmental guidance on social distancing and human to human contact. Expect guidance to change depending upon the health threat. We recommend you be prepared to mobilize your research when distancing restrictions are relaxed. |
| 1. Can the IRB deny a study if undergraduates are included as personnel? | The simple inclusion of undergraduates in a study does not preclude IRB approval. HOWEVER, the IRB must consider current university and governmental standards for COVID-19 mitigation measures, including social distancing requirements that may prevent in-person project activity. At this time, no one (faculty, staff or students) may be conducting in-person, face-to-face projects. |
| 1. **Other research issues.** | |
| * 1. Will UTEP provide support/materials for adjusting our grants? Work that I do (performing arts and community engagement) will probably need to be done at a distance, but our department does not currently have that technology. | ORSP will assist colleges/schools and departments in identifying and obtaining resources that can address such concerns. We cannot promise success for all cases, but we will try to help. |
| * 1. Will there be any resources for equipment to enable the transition from face-to-face to on-line interviews? The people we work with have few or no resources (laptops, pads, broadband) for on-line. |
| **Questions about PPE and cleaning/disinfecting supplies.** | |
| 1. We had lots of 3M masks, but everything was confiscated by EHS staff at the CCSB. Will we get those back? | All masks collected were labeled with the names of the departments and PIs who had offered them. It is anticipated the PPE will be returned over time as it is needed for the research of the lab and as replacements become available. |
| 1. There are a lot of online resources of making our own face masks. Are they considered acceptable PPE for use in our labs? | A homemade cloth mask or bandana satisfies CDC and community guidance for public activity. Specific lab environments may dictate a higher level of protection. |
| 1. I have been trying to order PPE (gloves and masks) in preparation for return. No availability of gloves on Grainger for now. I am concerned. | EH&S advises that the availability of masks and gloves through our regular suppliers was disrupted by the urgency of the situation. The Federal government dictated that the Hospitals and Healthcare settings be granted primary access to available stocks since their need was determined to be greater. Even now we cannot acquire most models of N95 respirators.  Purchasing and General Services is addressing the problem and will update as more information is known. |