

Mitigating Impacts to Research Activities Due to COVID-19

April 6, 2020

Central Washington University is doing everything possible to allow our research programs to continue productively, while simultaneously prioritizing the protection of the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff. The goal of this memo is to provide you with guidance and resources specifically regarding research issues and to help you in planning during this time when constraints due to COVID-19 are constantly evolving and changing how we conduct research. A careful and proactive plan can minimize the negative impact we may experience.

Central is closely monitoring federal agency guidance regarding research and creative activities, as well as guidance provided by federal, state, and local public health and other government authorities. Currently, the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” mandate through May 4 by Governor Inslee significantly restricts research activities on campus.

Ultimately, continued research and creative activity on campus should be established by PIs with the approval of their department chairs and deans. Please work in collaboration with your unit leadership, and coordinate with the appropriate CWU regulatory/compliance bodies (e.g., School of Graduate Studies, Human Subjects Review Program, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Environmental Health & Safety, and Safety Committees) to implement your plans. All approved on-campus research activities plans including social distancing and hygiene protocols for spring term plans should be housed in the college dean’s office.

Please be aware that all Central locations are subject to local public health directives, which currently vary by county and we should expect them to continue to do so. Thus, not all campus locations may be affected similarly.

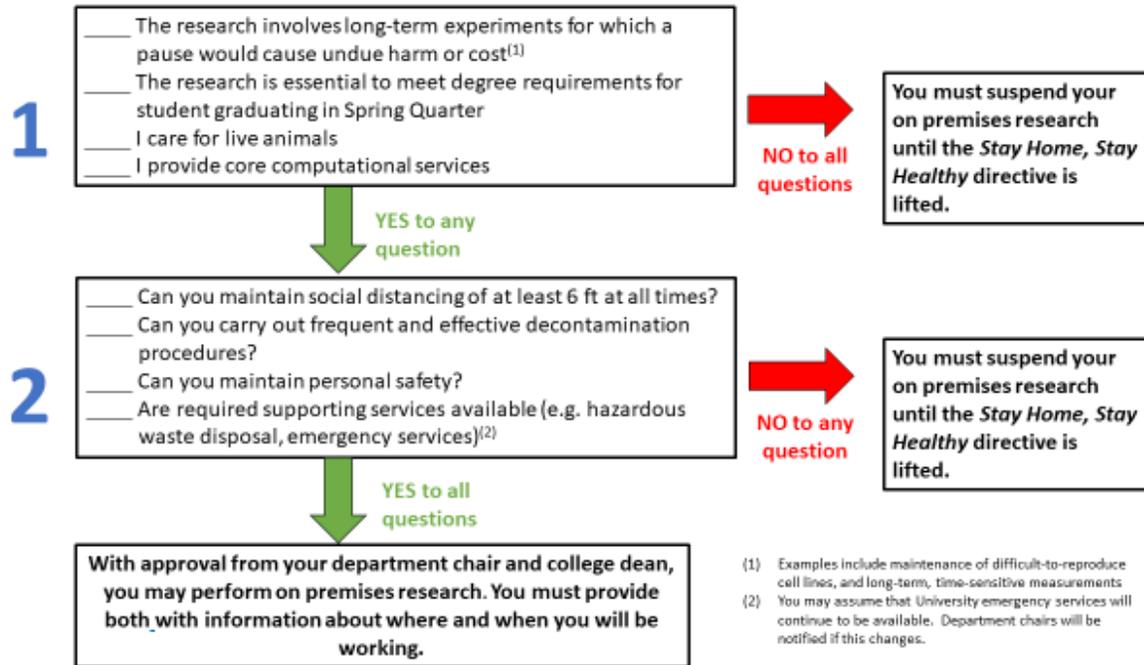
Research Guidance and Planning

Working remotely

- Everyone in your research group should be working at home, if feasible, carrying out work such as data analysis, literature review, manuscript writing, or proposal and progress report writing. All meetings should be now taking place remotely.
- Discuss plans with each member of your research team; it may be useful to have a regular remote check-in on weekly plans and progress for those working remotely.
- Remember to be as accommodating as possible for the members of your research team; each person will have unique circumstances. Regular and frequent communication is key.

Essential Personnel for Research on Premise

While directives mandate restricted access to University research spaces, every research group will have a plan for maintaining, reducing, or suspending research activities. In the case of campus suspended operations, the usual policies would apply. This includes the need for Essential Personnel to carry out specified duties. Essential personnel shall meet all the requirements of the Allowable Research Decision Tree, see below. These plans should be submitted and approved by the college dean.



In each unit, Essential Personnel should be already designated. If you are unsure of who in your research project is designated Essential Personnel, work with your department administrator or an equivalent administrator to identify such personnel.

Communications

If a communication plan for your research group is not already in place, designate points of contact so everyone receives timely information.

Plan for researcher time

Principal investigators and research group leads should discuss approaches now in the event that some personnel are unable to come to work. Such advanced planning will make future decisions straightforward and minimize disruption to research activities.

Precautions

- Remember all personnel should stay home if they experience any symptoms including fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.
- **Maintain social distancing.** Ensure that research team members are able to arrange personal interactions to maintain a comfortable six-foot distance from each other. If it is difficult to maintain social distance due to crowding in a research facility, you will need to work out shifts and set up schedules so that the number of people working at any one time does not preclude the ability to keep social distance.
- Finally, the most effective prevention measure is frequent and thorough hand washing.

Ramp-down decisions

If you feel that the best course of action for your research group is to ramp down your research activities, you should do so. Every situation will be different. If you do begin to ramp down, please be sure to address the issues noted below.

Guidance for the possibility of a research facility shutdown

- Prepare for a significant drop in support services on which you depend. By thoughtful planning you may be able to minimize the long-term impacts on your research.
- Make sure all data is backed up on the cloud, that all labile materials are stored appropriately, and that all instruments are shut down every night. Plan as if you may not have access tomorrow.
- Take stock of your inventory and pre-order reagents and supplies that have long shelf lives. Consider those that have had long shipping delays in the past and order early. Make sure your critical consumables (gloves, pipette tips, growth media, etc.) are in stock.
- Plan for keeping equipment functional and safe.
- Animals on campus are being maintained and cared for following CWU IACUC procedures and the recommendations by the Office of Laboratory Animals (OLAW).
- Repairs performed by Facilities and other service providers may be delayed. Consider scheduling those now.

Locked buildings

For security and safety, buildings have moved to a locked mode, similar to weekends and holidays, so you and your research team will still have access. Make sure you have a plan for communication with anyone who might not have after-hours access but has legitimate access needs (such as an undergraduate researcher or a repair person, for instance). Note that some of these facilities are curtailing hours and/or services, so it is wise to check in advance anyway.

Human Subjects Research

Effective March 23, 2020, all human subjects study procedures involving in-person interactions should be suspended. Similar to conducting fieldwork, any study procedures that violate CWU restrictions or mandates by the Governor of Washington or local health officials should be postponed or cancelled. You should contact your faculty advisor/sponsor if you have any questions about how or whether to proceed with your research.

The HSRC is still accepting and reviewing new applications, modifications and continuances, even under the temporary pause. This is because HSRC approval is often only one of many steps necessary to conduct a research study. We recognize that it is important for researchers to continue to work on startup activities during the temporary halt. This will help enable research to rapidly begin or resume when the halt has ended.

Animal Research Issues

Even with all buildings being locked 24/7, your existing animal facility access remains the same.

Questions or Concerns

Please contact:

- Your College Dean
- Kevin Archer, Dean of the Graduate Studies and Research, archerke@cwu.edu
- Gail Mackin, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, gail.mackin@cwu.edu
- Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, iacuc@cwu.edu
- Human Subjects Review Program, hsrc@cwu.edu

Undergraduate and Graduate Research and Creative Activity Guidance

April 6, 2020

1. At this time, access to CWU academic buildings is restricted and only essential personnel are allowed access. In the event that these restrictions are lifted, research at CWU will be open and allowed **as long as proper social distancing and hygiene practices are implemented**. We encourage research group leaders to make the best decisions for all members of the research group. Your health and safety are our first priority. And, please do not travel to research spaces if you are sick.
2. Student research and creative activities on premise is restricted solely for students graduating in the spring quarter.
3. We encourage regularly (at least weekly) scheduled opportunities for the research group to connect where expectations and concerns are shared constructively and compassionately.
4. However, in this emergency situation, productivity may look different than it did last term, and remote work continues to be encouraged if at all feasible.
5. If students or support staff are responsible for essential laboratory operations, then they should maintain access to the research space for these activities. However, once these essential activities are accomplished – again, practicing proper social distancing – they should be encouraged to return to their remote workspace.
6. No student should be required to enter the research space if they do not feel safe in doing so. Simply share your concerns with your research advisor – they have been encouraged to be flexible and as supportive as possible.

Note that some of this content may be also included in the section above, “Working Remotely.”

Conducting fieldwork

Any fieldwork that violates Central Washington University restrictions, such as on travel or gatherings, or mandates by the Governor of Washington or local health officials, should be cancelled. If it does not violate those mandates, then you should be in close contact with your faculty advisor/sponsor as you determine how and whether to proceed only after seeking approval from your departmental chair and dean. This conversation, with a clear agreement between the parties, should take place regardless of whether the work is funded by a grant, contract or other CWU funding procured by the faculty member.

Guidance for undergraduates

At this time, undergraduate engaged in research or creative activities should be provided alternative research activities that may be completed remotely. Such alternatives could include

literature review, coding qualitative data or working on other research tasks remotely, writing up research already completed, or watching someone else working at the bench by video as they describe what they are doing. Note that some research facilities may have limited access at this time, so students should work with their mentors to determine the best course of action for completing their work for credit. Undergraduates either volunteering or working for compensation in a university research facility should follow the general university guidance to work remotely whenever possible. All undergraduates should consult with their mentors to determine how to proceed, and how to maintain their safety while pursuing research activities.

For undergraduate research involving fieldwork, including community work, please see the statement above regarding fieldwork.

As always, this is a rapidly evolving situation, and could change.

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