

Texas Tech University  
Field-Research Travel Guidelines within the Constraints of COVID-19 risk mitigation  
March 2020 until further notice

March 20, 2020

Disclaimer: Starting March 20, 2020, until further notice: All requests to continue field-related data collection and associated travel activities will be submitted from each PI to your specific Department Chair. It will then be forwarded to your College-Specific Dean and Associate Dean for Research and the VPR of Texas Tech University. No travel to/from field site locations will be granted unless vetted and approved by the VPR and following these processes. “Researcher” here will reference graduate students, faculty, or full-time staff or full-time technicians. Student workers (TTU students) will be addressed separately.

Second Disclaimer: In order for any specific research project to continue, Dr. Heppert will need to receive a formal, detailed, and specific request for each project that requires field-data collection. From Dr. Heppert: “Given the gravity of this situation...we want to ensure researcher safety (social distancing) at a time of minimizing the size of field research crews...and given the fact that we are emphasizing the question of timeliness (meaning relative damage inflicted by our inability to collect one part of a critical longitudinal data) as a criterion for sustaining normal research activity, I need to receive requests from each project to continue their field studies” This verbiage from Dr. Heppert is included herein so as to minimize any misinterpretation of his message to our researchers.

**There is one field-related policy in this document:**

- **Day trips to/from field data collection sites**

**Third Disclaimer:**

- ***As of March 20, 2020 – there will be a moratorium on TTU-related data collection that requires day trips. This day-trip option may be available again starting April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, assuming that no further TTU, Texas, or Federal Orders restricting such activities are announced beyond that date. This decision was made amongst TTU leadership based upon the implementation of Governor Abbott’s executive orders earlier (March 19, 2020) regarding statewide closing of in-house dining for restaurants and statewide closing of K-12 schools until April 3<sup>rd</sup>. We realize this will impact the next two weeks; but hopefully we can begin to resume some more normal activities after this two-week moratorium.***
- ***This entire situation is rapidly evolving, and we all need to be flexible and patient during these times, and this moratorium may extend well beyond April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020.***

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**From April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 onward: Regular, Day-Trips: Field Research Travel Policy. No overnight stays**

- Description:
  - This travel is specifically for day-trips to/from field sites to collect data for research projects.
  - This would normally fall under our no-cost blanket travel approval.
    - With no overnight stays.

**Proposal and Justification for Continuation of Field Research studies:** This has been developed in consultation with Dr. Heppert, Dr. Galyean, and College-Level TTU Leadership. Each PI needs to pay close attention to these details in how the request for continuation of their field research is prepared.

- Each PI will need to clearly justify the need to continue the studies in the short-term (spring/summer 2020) based on the critical criteria (continuity and immediate societal benefit).
  - The emphasis here is a strong justification for continuation relative to the critical timing of data collection; whilst detailing the importance of this work that might endanger the value and success of already collected data, and existing grants and collaborations, while simultaneously minimizing risks of exposure and spread of COVID-19.
  - Keep in mind, this protocol is for day trips, either regular or periodic
    - In this scenario, not only is the destination important, but the travel path and safety protocols used/developed to minimize contact during the day, during the travel
- Each PI will need to explain how procedures/protocols will protect the researchers and any subjects involved from community spread of the contagion.
  - While working on these justifications: Please keep in mind that approving the undertaking of wholly new or iterative field data collections (studies that merely increase N) would be irresponsible.
- Researcher must provide detailed logistics and justification/mission/objectives for the travel for these day trips; including details and specifics of personnel traveling and working on a given day

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**Other specific details that are needed:**

- Beyond the above proposal request for continuation of field-based data collection using day-trips, the following must also be included:
  - Dates of travel. All planned and scheduled dates.
  - Formal written/e-mail approval by funding agency/entity to continue doing field work and collecting data
  - Approval of field site owners (private/public) that TTU researchers can enter the properties and do the work/data collection (written/e-mail)
  - Who will be traveling and their status (faculty; student; technician; undergraduate student worker; full time staff; etc.).
    - How many vehicles will be requested/used for a given day-trip
  - Destinations:
    - Daily destination, and chances of encountering the public or other people there might be in those trips
    - Planned routes of travel to and from field locations (more important if there are more than one field site) – with an emphasis on minimizing contagion risks through more populated areas/cities/towns
      - Provide a map for all planned travel (to the best of your ability)
    - Time of travel (departure and return times) – with an emphasis on minimizing risks of contact with other people during the travel
    - Identify specific gas stations at which the traveler will be stopping

**TTU Vehicle Use if the Proposal is Approved by the VPR**

- Disclaimer: at this point in time, no research will be approved if travel and field data collection requires domestic air travel. Therefore, the following need to be followed:
- Vehicle use
  - Researchers must coordinate with their appropriate travel coordinator for reserving an TTU vehicle
    - Please provide at least 36 hours lead time to coordinate
  - All researchers using TTU vehicles will be required to adhere to the following protocols to minimize risks of exposure to themselves and others – regardless of where the location might be
    - Gloves will be required while pumping gas or using the restrooms at gas stations.
      - Please dispose of the used gloves in the trashcans at the pump. If you use the last set of gloves, refill the bag upon return to the barn.
      - The appropriate Department is working to provide this in each truck
      - All hard surfaces in the trucks should be wiped down with disinfectant wipes after each trip

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- All equipment will be wiped down with disinfectant wipes after each trip
- The researchers will not stop for anything other than fuel during these trips.
- In the event the pump does not provide a receipt, the employee will take a photo of the pump display including: Amount of fuel, total spent, and price per gallon.
- This will be printed at a clean facility placed in the vehicle receipts, with location, employee name, date, and vehicle number.

**Safety Protocols:**

- For all researchers in field conditions collecting data for their research, we need to reaffirm and reimplement daily safety checks and protocols for our researchers. All of us do this in some manner, but we need to be sure we do the following:
  - This will include daily text/call/e-mail from the field crew leader to their PI. For these day trips, it would be good to do so upon return to campus.
  - And will also include safety protocols for researchers while in the field
    - Continue normal TTU safety trainings relative to vehicle/ATV (as possible during these times); and other safety protocols implemented within your Department
  - This will include updates relative to each individual researcher's health (see below)
- ***Health Monitoring Protocols:*** All researchers will be required to perform daily health checks; measuring temperature; monitoring coughs; shortness of breath; etc. during these extended field season stays. These will be recorded by each researcher on daily logs; so as to monitor their own health, and the health of their coworkers
  - Blending traveling in vehicles and maintaining social distancing practices will be complex; so please be thoughtful about approaches to minimize exposure and spread risks.
  - If symptoms intensify or indicate potential COVID-19, then all need to be tested; and quarantined at home, or in medical facilities as needed.
  - If symptoms develop, these researchers need to be in direct contact with their PI and Appropriate Department Chair. That information will then be relayed to proper university officials in your College and the TTU VPR.
- ***For extended stay trips – a 14 day quarantine will be required upon return to Lubbock***
  - ***For these day trips, we do not have a protocol in place for quarantine at this point in time. However, this is rapidly evolving, and the ability to embark on day trips may be prohibited in the near future, even after the April 6<sup>th</sup> 2020 moratorium deadline.***

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***Finally – if all of the above is vetted, approved, and Prior to Departure:***

- *Researchers need to provide a written (e-mail) acknowledgment of their knowledge of the risks involved to them, and others relative to the COVID-19 pandemic.*
  - Those need to be sent to their PI/Supervisor and Appropriate Department Chair. That Department Chair will forward to the College Dean's Office and TTU VPR, and appropriate travel coordinators to ensure that all our team is on the same page, and have the requisite documents in place