

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

EXTENDED FIELD DATA COLLECTION TRIPS

March 21, 2020

Disclaimer: Starting March 21, 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 the 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.

Third Disclaimer: None of these protocols and procedures outlined below supersede any additional executive orders from the President, Governor, or TTU Administration regarding further movement restrictions (i.e., shelter in place, etc.). If further guidance and orders are implemented regarding restricting movement and travel, all current, pending, and future travel and field data collection requests will be reviewed within those updated guidelines as directed by those Executive Orders, and may be rejected, canceled or rescinded.

Fourth Disclaimer: If a researcher becomes ill or symptomatic prior to departure for their requested travel, they must (a) cancel the planned trip, and (b) contact their PI, their Health Care Provider, and follow the appropriate protocols for their own health and well-being.

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There is one field-related policy in this document:

- Longer-term field season work; with extended stays in field-based locations

Longer Field Season Field Research Travel Policy. With extended stays. No hotel stays are allowed.

- Description:
 - This travel is specifically for longer-term “field seasons” that might extend for weeks to months
 - With “stay” or “home” at a single location:
 - In an TTU trailer
 - In collaborator lodging
 - In state/federal lodging (parks; WMAs; etc.)
 - This may fall under our no-cost blanket travel approval, and be considered “Remote Work Accommodations” and lodging.

Proposal and Justification for Continuation of Field Research studies: This has been developed in consultation with Dr. Heppert, Dr. Galyean, and the 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.
- 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 and extended stay; the details and specifics of the lodging; personnel and the accommodations; and to their best knowledge – proximity of others in their “neighborhood” if on a public lands facility, private lands or other private property
 - If use of public/common restrooms; public water collection sites; and other such elements are in play (with non TTU researchers) in a remote field station, this needs to be clarified and detailed as much as possible.

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Other specific details that are needed:

- Beyond the above proposal request for continuation of field-based data collection in long term housing situations, 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)
 - Approval of field site owner permission for extended stay/lodging at their facility (whether public or private) (written/e-mail)
 - Who will be traveling and their status (faculty; student; technician; undergraduate student worker; full time staff; etc.).
 - Who will be living in the extended stay facilities
 - Destinations: if different from the single long-term stay facility – then justification/logistics description needs to be included
 - The destination of the remote-field station/home is one destination
 - Other destinations would include daily trips for data collection – how far away from home base; and what 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 is 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 that 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 a 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.

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- 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
- 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 and placed in the vehicle receipts, with location, employee name, date, and vehicle number.

Safety Protocols:

- For all researchers in longer-term 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
 - This will include daily text/call/e-mail from the field crew leader to their PI
 - 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 cohabitation, 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 the field site 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.
- If a researcher becomes ill or symptomatic during the day, they must contact their PI, their Health Care Provider, and return home immediately.

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For all returning researchers, self-quarantine will be required; so planning of these trips are paramount.

- **For these extended stay trips – a 14-day quarantine will be required upon their return to Lubbock**

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