



## Process Considerations for Restarting TTU On-campus Research: Advice to TTU PIs

The Office of Research & Innovation, along with input from other administrative offices across campus, has developed this guiding document to ensure a safe restart to on-campus research. This document is based on the following principles:

- **Principle #1:** Follow the cognizant Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives to shelter-at-home, implement social distancing, and reopen the workplace.
  - Governor Abbott announced his plans for reopening Texas on April 27, 2020 <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/opentexas/OpenTexas-Report.pdf>
  - White House Plan for Opening up America Again: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Opening-Up-America-Again.pdf>
- **Principle #2:** Protect the emotional and physical health and safety of our research workforce and of our human research participants – which will require everyone to use **new normal ways of working.**
  - Faculty and other research leaders must develop and implement new strategies that minimize the potential for virus transmission for everyone working in their offices, labs, studios, and field sites.
  - No researcher should feel compelled to work on campus or in the field during periods of shelter-at-home directives.
  - Special accommodations must be made for immunocompromised researchers.
  - Texas Tech employees who feel sick must stay home.
  - Safety in our field sites, laboratories, and studios must be rigorously maintained, with adequate access to PPE, and other safety related supplies.
  - College, Department/Unit leadership and EH&S must be made aware of all research activities within university spaces.
- **Principle #3:** Protect the careers of early stage researchers.
  - Careers of young researchers will be dramatically impacted by long delays in scholarly and creative activity. Younger researchers may be prioritized for restarting scholarship on campus.
- **Principle #4:** Ensure as rapid a research restart as public health conditions permit.
  - Develop a phased approach to restarting on-campus research. Ensure the appropriate safety and security measures are in place. Encourage continued teleworking, whenever possible and feasible.

1) **Draft Startup Procedures for TTU On-campus Research.**

- a. **Phase 1 Startup** (estimate 1 or more weeks)—buildings that support research and scholarship are brought up and into full operational status.
- b. **Phase 2 Startup** (estimate 1 week)—all OR&I, College, Department, and Unit research support services come back on-line.
- c. **Phase 3 Startup** (estimate multiple weeks)—researchers, staff and graduate students begin to reoccupy laboratory, office, and studio spaces.
  - i. Priority rankings for startup of offices, laboratories, and studios on campus will be assessed based on the following criteria:
    1. The building in which the activity is housed is open and fully operational.
    2. The proposed activity can only be conducted on campus, or at remote TTU laboratories and field sites.
    3. The group has adequate PPE as required by their individual experimental protocols.
    4. The investigator has generated a traffic flow design for the laboratory or studio (if possible) focusing on a single point of entry and single point of exit for normal researcher traffic.
    5. The investigator has generated a staffing plan that:
      - a. Limits laboratory/studio/office occupancy to one researcher per 144 sf of space.
      - b. Engages in regular cleaning of surfaces used by multiple individuals (*e.g.*, instrument panels, door handles, etc.).
    6. The investigator has surveyed the laboratory or studio and ensured that critical infrastructure is operational. This includes, hoods, HVAC, major equipment, freezers/storage units, etc.
    7. The investigator ensures that adequate hand soap and paper towels for personal hygiene are present in the laboratory.
    8. The investigator has minimized long-term experiments in favor of experiments with a briefer timeline, in case of a need for a renewed campus or laboratory closure.
    9. Where necessary, the restart of younger investigators' scholarship and creative activity may be prioritized over that of senior faculty.
  - d. Requests for restarting on-campus research, scholarly and creative activity are currently being reviewed by a campus committee, composed of representatives of EHS, compliance, animal care, building and campus operations, and IT, and recommended for approval by the VPR&I.

2) **Further considerations for PIs:**

- a. Following approval of individual requests to resume on-campus activity, Department Chairs, Deans, and Unit Directors will be updated on a weekly basis about investigators and groups approved for renewal of campus research,

scholarship, and creative activities. TTU Systems Operations, Procurement, HR, IT, and EH&S will also be informed of approvals.

- b. Research groups must update requests if they intend to add new personnel or make significant changes to an approved plan (significant changes include instituting longer range studies).
- c. Research groups should consider using staggered start-times and/or shifts to reduce contact for individuals coming on campus.
- d. Researchers and groups found by the VPR&I to be significantly out of compliance with the scope of their requests or university conditions for on-campus activities will face suspension of ability to continue on-campus activities.
- e. Students, staff, and researchers with underlying conditions (e.g. immunodeficiency) must be allowed to request continued work-from-home social distancing duties from their research supervisors. Individuals falling in these categories should request an accommodation from their PI. Any employee or supervisor who has concerns or questions regarding this process may contact Human Resources for assistance.
- f. Researchers approved for resumption of on-campus activity who have donated "spare" PPE should contact David Dorsett and Matt Roe to begin a phased re-stocking of donated PPE for their laboratories. Note that some PPE is backordered. Matt and David have established a protocol for resupply of donated PPE items.
- g. Initially, faculty must work with students to design experiments and creative activities that have relatively limited time durations. An initial guideline is that most individual activities undertaken in the early part of campus opening should have a maximum duration of one to two weeks. Guidance about when these restrictions may be lifted will be forthcoming.
- h. Exceptions to this "limited duration" experiment policy may be sought from the VPR&I. Please email a request explaining the basic experimental protocol, and explaining the reasons initiating a longer duration project are necessary and urgent.
- i. Faculty and research supervisors are responsible for ensuring the adherence of students/researchers under their direction to university guidelines.
- j. Please understand that a positive test for COVID-19 among your researchers will inevitably be very disruptive for your group. Not only will the individual testing positive have to self-isolate for 14 days (or show evidence of hospitalization and post-discharge isolation), but everyone in contact with that individual will have to stay home for at least 4-days, and then be tested for COVID-19. They should receive the result approximately 4 days later. So, there is a minimum 7 to 8-day research cessation if one of your researchers tests positive for the virus. Therefore, we are relying on you to encourage all of your students and staff to seriously maintain personal and laboratory hygiene, and social distancing.

### 3) Other Research Considerations Related to Restarting On-campus Research

- a. TTU is centrally placing a large order of common PPE (gloves, masks, disposable gowns, face shields, and safety glasses) to ensure quality, and priority for our order. Research groups should avoid submitting independent, small-batch orders for common PPE, and instead submit orders to the central stock. We will inform the community when re-stock of PPE is easing and individual groups can place orders again. Please submit orders for common PPE to Matt Roe and David Dorsett. Note: This restriction does not apply to more specialized PPE.
- b. Until the university has returned to normal operations under Phase I of the Emergency Remote Work Operational Plan, vulnerable individuals, as defined by current federal guidelines, may request accommodation from supervisors when their presence on campus is required. These decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis; employees and supervisors are encouraged to work with Human Resources if they would like assistance with this process. Note: Current federal guidelines define **vulnerable individuals** (previously termed at-risk by the CDC) as those over 65 years of age and those with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity (body mass index >40), asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy. Students, staff, and researchers with underlying conditions (e.g. immunodeficiency) will be allowed to request continued work-from-home social distancing duties from their research supervisors. Individuals falling in these categories should request an accommodation from their PI. Any employee or supervisor who has concerns or questions regarding this process may contact Human Resources for assistance.
- c. Building support staff will work with campus security to identify single points of access for entering and exiting buildings with significant research populations. These entrances and exits should be designated to minimize crossflow of arriving and departing researchers, and to minimize surfaces requiring frequent cleaning.
- d. All staff working in the most populated buildings and common laboratory and studio spaces will have their temperatures monitored once or twice daily using digital IR thermometers and will indicate that they pass the Governor's employee screening criteria. All individuals choosing to work on campus must be willing to be subject to daily checks.
- e. The campus will have two walk-up sites where investigators not in highly populated buildings can voluntarily obtain temperature and health checks.
- f. For the foreseeable future, face to face meetings, including research group meetings, departmental and support services staff meetings, Research Advisory Council meetings, and other collaborative meetings should be held by teleconference. Until further evidence that social distancing is being effective, conference rooms should not be in use for such meetings.

- g. Unless one-on-one meetings with students and co-workers can occur in spaces large enough to ensure good social distancing, faculty are encouraged to engage videoconferencing technology for all such interactions.
- h. Food consumption must happen outside of laboratories in accordance with standard safety practices, but also should to the greatest extent possible occur in private office spaces. Groups of researchers should not congregate in common breakrooms for lunch and snack breaks. Unless breakroom spaces are large enough to allow multiple occupancy with social distancing, researchers without private office spaces should consider eating outside of their buildings.
- i. Due to the possibility of viral spread, drinking fountains and water-bottle filling stations in buildings will be shut down and marked as out of service. It is important for investigators to bring their own drinking water supply to campus.
- j. Researchers in public or communal laboratory/studio spaces must wear social distancing masks. TTU is ordering some re-usable masks, which will be made available for distribution to researchers returning to campus who do not have their own masks.
- k. Elevators in research buildings are reserved for the movement of freight and for use by individuals with difficulty navigating stairs. Elevators may also be used to move materials that might be dangerous to transport on stairs. Except in exceptional circumstances, no more than one individual should occupy an elevator at any one time.
- l. In buildings with large research populations, Operations may choose to designate certain stairwells for up-traffic and down-traffic to maintain social distancing. We ask investigators to honor these directions.
- m. Investigators are advised to use paper towels to open doors to restrooms and to thoroughly repeat hand washing as soon as they return to the laboratory.
- n. Hand washing is required for all researchers upon or just prior to entry to the laboratory/studio space and prior to or immediately after leaving the laboratory/studio space. Please follow national guidelines, washing for a full 20 seconds with soap and water. Frequent hand washing is encouraged.
- o. Until further notice, visitors will not be allowed in on-campus laboratory, office, and studio venues. Exceptions must be approved on a case-by-case basis by College/Unit leadership and by the VPR&I.
- p. The campus must be prepared to return to work-from-home status should a significant spike in COVID-19 cases be observed.
- q. With relatively small numbers of people on campus, it is incredibly important for groups to be vigilant about personal security and the safety of university property. Please watch for suspicious activity and report it to campus security.
- r. Please remember that initially, we are asking you to spend only the time on campus necessary to accomplish your research. If you can continue to conduct part of your work remotely, this takes pressure off of campus support personnel, and minimizes your potential for exposure.

- s. Except in exceptional instances, research related travel (including travel funded through research grants) remains restricted. Requests for exemptions and a brief rationale should be forwarded to the VPR&I for consideration.

#### **4) Illnesses and testing for COVID-19**

- a. Following the startup of on campus research, scholarly and creative activity, any investigators, or students not feeling well should stay at home. Those experiencing symptoms similar to COVID-19 should be tested and should stay home until results are obtained. TTU researchers with symptoms of COVID-19 should use drive-up testing facilities at Covenant Hospital or UMC. Infected individuals must self-report results to their supervisor and OR&I and self-isolate for 14 days after symptoms subside. A contact tracer will survey infected workers to identify campus contacts over the prior 14 days.
- b. Our preliminary plan is that all staff working in the most populated buildings and common laboratory and studio spaces will have their temperatures monitored once or twice daily using digital IR thermometers and will indicate that they pass the Governor's employee screening criteria. All individuals choosing to work on campus must be willing to be subject to daily checks.
- c. Any individuals with 100.0-degree temperatures will be identified, logged, and required to seek testing for COVID-19. These individuals must receive a negative test result, or show evidence of recovery from COVID-19 (14-day isolation, including where applicable hospital discharge) prior to returning to campus.
- d. Occupants of laboratories where a researcher has tested positive for COVID-19 will be instructed to remain at home for four days, then seek testing for the novel coronavirus, and may not return to work until they show a negative test result, or evidence of recovery (14-day isolation, including where applicable hospital discharge).
- e. Laboratory, office, and studio spaces occupied by a researcher who tests positive for COVID-19 must be vacated until housekeeping can conduct a comprehensive decontamination of the spaces.