



OFFICE OF RESEARCH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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To the Campus Community:

We thank you for your patience while we navigate the ever-changing environment of the developing COVID-19 crisis. As we continue to take measures to protect the health and well-being of everyone in our campus community, we ask you to start planning to ramp down nonessential campus operations, including research activities. These are steps that we are asking you to do now *in preparation* for a potential campus closure.

Effective immediately, each principal investigator (PI) or research group leader of a laboratory research program (experimental, computational, or otherwise) should prepare a strategy to ramp down campus laboratory research activities, with the expectation that if a closure occurs, suspended lab access will likely last at least six to eight weeks.

If a campus closure is ordered by government officials, the default assumption is that all research activities will cease by a time designated in the closure order, unless that research is deemed essential and those individuals conducting that research are designated as essential research personnel.

Research personnel on campus will be limited in number and **only individuals designated as essential will be allowed on campus or a campus location (e.g. Castle) (if a closure order is in place)**. Similarly, **only research activities designated as essential will be allowed to be conducted on campus or campus location if a campus closure is in place. Please note that no such order has been issued for UC Merced at this time but one could occur with very short notice.**

Examples of essential research personnel are those individuals who are:

1. Necessary to ensure the ongoing viability of research, including the well-being of research animals and other not-easily replaceable perishable research materials, such as cell lines, etc. Examples of such staff are:
 - Vivarium staff
 - Non-vivarium laboratory staff responsible for animal care
2. Responsible for maintenance of equipment that, if not done, could result in damage or high cost to equipment (e.g., cryogen fill on the NMR spectrometers).

3. The faculty and/or research staff who are necessary to ensure the ongoing viability of research that includes not easily replaceable perishable research materials. Not easily replaceable perishable research materials could include primary cell lines or long-term experiments for which there would be considerable cost and/or time associated with requiring the experiment to end. (An example would be a continual, ongoing one-month experiment that requires regular measurements or maintenance, without which all previous data would be lost.)
4. Researchers working on experiments that have a small window for completion — for example, research that relies on the ability to make specific measurements only a few times a year.

Note that students (including graduate students and postdoctoral scholars) are not mandated to serve as essential personnel. The decision to report to campus lies with the student worker. Consenting to serve in this capacity will require the signature of the graduate student or postdoc as well as the signature of a third-party individual (a School Dean or their designee).

Essential research functions are any functions that are necessary to maintain baseline research or scholarly operations and projects (e.g. vivarium management, clean room management, etc.), that if not continued will result in irreparable damage to instruments, samples or research programs. Any disruption to an “essential research function” could jeopardize the completion of sponsored projects (even if delayed), the reputation of faculty and the institution with sponsors, the prospects of future funding, and even the research capability itself housed at the institution.

Many sponsor agencies including NSF and NIH are making accommodation on funded projects research progress during this time. Please consult the [NIH](#) and [NSF](#) COVID-19 webpages. **We encourage all PIs to discuss the topic of research disruptions directly with their Program Officers.** There is a possibility that federal sponsors will have supplemental funds available to mitigate the impacts of disruptions due to the COVID-19 virus.

Examples of essential research functions include

- Maintaining research animals or other live research models
- Maintaining cell lines
- Performing measurements in an ongoing longitudinal study for where the cessation of measurements would jeopardize the value of the data set and the overall study
- Conducting measurements that can only be made in a particular season or time of year.
- Maintaining research computing resources, etc.

All faculty who wish to maintain on-campus research activities during a shutdown must fill out a request in the InfoReady system. This is the same system that the campus uses for the limited submission grant proposal-process. In short, we will ask PIs to prepare a one-paragraph narrative, describing and justifying the specific research task(s) which they feel are essential. PIs will also be asked to fill out an information sheet on those individuals that they propose to designate as essential research personnel

PIs should receive an email with an appropriate link to the InfoReady system by the end of this week. Guidance for preparing your research continuation request will be available on the InfoReady site. You will also find a link to this task at the [COVID19 Research Continuity Guidelines](#). Requests to continue on-campus research activities



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during a campus closure will be evaluated by a committee of campus leadership and faculty who will determine what activities will be allowed to continue.

Other UC campuses have been ordered to close with short notice. Thus, we ask that you fill out your request to continue your on-campus research activities in the InfoReady system when it goes live. These requests to continue on campus research can be made after a campus closure notice is announced but that may delay their consideration.

We also suggest that you use the [UC Merced Laboratory Ramp-Down Checklist](#) to plan the ramp-down process, noting that not all of the items on the list may apply to your specific lab. While this process may be disheartening, know that the steps you take now will support the long-term success of our labs and research groups. This checklist is for your own use and faculty at UCLA and other campuses have found it useful in guiding them through this difficult task.

The UC Merced IRB office has issued [Guidance](#) on ongoing human subjects research, though at this time the IRB strongly recommends pausing all human subjects research that require person to person interaction (as opposed to video conferencing or other communication modalities) until further notice.

PIs who conduct out-door, field-based research must practice appropriate social distancing. This includes during the use of transportation to and from research sites. In the event of a campus closure those PIs conducting field-based research will also be required to submit a request for the continuation of that research in the InfoReady system.

From this time forward, we ask that you actively encourage staff, students and postdocs in your group to work remotely whenever feasible. Encourage your colleagues to maintain a safe space of six feet from each other and practice good hygiene, and model these practices yourself. Absolutely require that if anyone in the group is sick, including essential personnel, they do not come to work. Establish a system by which you, and members of the lab, can check each other's status.

As a reminder, the University of California Office of the President has stated that under no circumstances are researchers to take materials — other than laptops and data storage devices — off site, including to their homes.

PIs are understandably concerned about issues pertaining to funding of research personnel, and research productivity during a campus closure. At present, it appears that most extramural sponsors recognize the extraordinary nature of these circumstances and have announced or will shortly announce strategies to not only hold researchers harmless but to support their ongoing and future activities. Some information is already available on our [COVID19 SPO Guidance](#). We will post additional information at this site as soon as it becomes available.

We are facing an unprecedented challenge with COVID-19 and must all do our part to flatten the growth curve to protect our community and lessen predictable pressures on our public health infrastructure. Visit UC Merced's dedicated [COVID-19 website](#) for additional information. Please contact VC Samuel Traina at straina@ucmerced.edu or AVC Deborah Motton at dmotton@ucmerced.edu with your research-specific questions.

Sincerely,

Samuel J. Traina
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