



UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA WILMINGTON

Memorandum

To: UNCW Research Community

From: Dr. Stuart Borrett, Associate Provost for Research and Innovation, and
Dr. Christopher Finelli, Dean of the Graduate School and Interim Executive
Director for Marine Science

Re: Research Update: COVID-19 - Next phase of Research Ramp-Up

Date: July 24, 2020

PURPOSE

As we prepare for a return to the physical UNCW campus and the start of the Fall 2020 semester, it is also time to transition to the next phase of our research ramp-up. UNCW remains committed to supporting all faculty research, and especially our junior faculty working to successfully establish research programs. Further, research provides important support and learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. While research and scholarship at UNCW never stopped completely, the restriction of on-campus operations in keeping with the State's COVID pandemic safety measures ([Safer at Home](#)) has impacted UNCW research, scholarship, and creative activities.

The first phase (Phase 1) of the UNCW research ramp-up enabled some access for researchers requiring specialized facilities, instruments, and field work. This memorandum provides important information on the next phase (Phase 2) of our research ramp-up. Phase 2 includes a wider variety of research and applied learning activities, and provides additional guidance for how to accomplish this while **keeping UNCW students, staff, faculty, and the broader community safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

RESEARCH ACCESS

UNCW recently announced its return to campus timeline for Fall 2020. As noted, employees will have access restored starting July 27, and campus will return to more regular operations starting August 3. Under our Phase 2 ramp-up, faculty can use the week of July 27 – July 31 to review and prepare their research programs and spaces for the full research ramp-up that will begin August 3. At that time, all staff and students employed to conduct research should have campus access, which obviates the need for the research approval process used during the first phase of ramp-up. Provision of campus access for research activities will also revert to normal procedures on August 3.

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

RESEARCH OPERATION GUIDANCE

Phase 2 of the research ramp-up focuses on conducting research as safely as possible while the COVID-19 pandemic continues. A number of tools have been created to accomplish this goal including the following:

- **Best for the Nest.** The [Best for the Nest](#) information, including the [Community Standards Quick Reference Guide](#), provides the overall guidance for campus, including community standards and operational changes that apply to all campus activities including research.
- **Research Space COVID Capacities.** Physical distancing remains an important mechanism to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The Office of Research and Innovation and the Institutional Research and Planning Space Planning & Management Office is working with campus leaders to determine a COVID Capacity for spaces primarily dedicated to research. Given the diversity of research spaces, a guiding principle for this process is that the faculty Principal Investigator or the research *space steward* (the person responsible for managing the space) is the most knowledgeable about the space and activities that occur in it. Thus, your input to this process may be requested as unit leaders seek to better understand how space can be used safely and efficiently. As with the changes to the instructional spaces, reduced density in research spaces may require researchers to adapt activities and operations so that research can continue as safely as possible. This process is underway.
- **Human Subjects Guidelines.** The Research Integrity Office worked with faculty on the Institutional Review Board (IRB), non-IRB faculty, and the Office of General Counsel to develop additional safety guidelines to enable face-to-face human subjects research to continue. These guidelines will be available soon and will be posted on the IRB website (<https://uncw.edu/sparc/integrity/irb.html>).
- **Research Continuity Planning.** As we have learned repeatedly at UNCW, researchers need to be prepared for emergencies and disasters that may affect research activities. This includes both the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that may again necessitate changes to campus operations and hurricanes. To help researchers prepare, we have worked with Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) to create a Research Continuity Planning template and process that will help Principle Investigators be better prepared when these emergencies occur. This will be available from the EH&S website (https://uncw.edu/ehs/emergency_management.html). We encourage all

researchers to complete this planning process as soon as possible so that they are prepared should a restriction to campus access be necessary again.

OTHER OPERATIONAL CHANGES

In many ways, Phase 2 of the research ramp-up will return research to more typical operations, but with additional health and safety measures in place. However, it is important to recall that campus operations will not be fully normalized, and this will continue to impact research activities. For example, the UNC System has implemented a system-wide suspension of non-essential HR actions such that hiring research personnel including students, even for externally funded research projects, requires an approval from the Chancellor. This process will take additional time. Similarly, purchasing is restricted to essential items. This may include items for research, but researchers need to plan for the extra review process to extend the timeline for purchasing. Relatedly, university employee and student travel also requires additional approvals that are extending the necessary lead time. Researchers will need to plan accordingly. For specific guidance on spending limitations, travel restrictions, and hiring processes, please contact your departmental administrative support professional and/or your college business officer.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

The research community is asked to distinguish between PPE required for research purposes and that needed for COVID-19 safety. PPE that would be typically purchased for research purposes, including gloves, face coverings, goggles/safety glasses, etc., should be purchased through standard operating procedures. Any PPE that is needed specifically for COVID-19 safety, including face coverings, wipes, work station partitions, and hand sanitizer, should be coordinated through your unit's Business Officer. These items are being ordered centrally and distributed as needed to campus units.

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

Following the [Best for the Nest](#) guidance, much of the Research and Innovation Services Team will continue to work remotely this fall including the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance ([SPARC; sparc@uncw.edu](#)) and the Research Integrity Office ([RIO; rio@uncw.edu](#)). These departments will continue to provide services for proposal development and submission, research integrity, and award management. Let the team know how we can best assist you.

We are excited to enter this next phase of research ramp-up that enables more faculty and students to more fully engage in research, scholarship, and creative activities. Note that its continuation depends on university, local, state, and federal guidance and the

COVID-19 disease dynamics. Investigators should be prepared for further research ramp-up or ramp-down activities as conditions change and the campus pivots its operations to adapt. Links to the guidance mentioned in this email as well as future information will be available on the Office of Research and Innovation website (<http://uncw.edu/research/>).

For any questions about this process or safety concerns, please contact the Office of Research and Innovation at covid19research@uncw.edu.