To: UNCW Research Community
From: Dr. Christopher Finelli, Dean of the Graduate School and
       Dr. Stuart Borrett, Associate Provost for Research and Innovation
Re: Covid-19 Update for Research and Entrepreneurship Activities
Date: March 19, 2020

This message applies to graduate student and faculty research activities. As was communicated earlier by Academic Affairs, student research that is instructional in nature (DIS and Honors) must be moved to online or alternative formats. Undergraduate and graduate students who are in the writing stages of their theses or dissertations should work remotely.

UNCW continues to work toward minimal staffing in campus buildings by moving all instruction online and encouraging teleworking by faculty and staff. Building access will be restricted in the coming days to allow entrance only to those faculty, staff, and tenants identified as Communicable Disease Mandatory Employees (CDME) who are engaged in critical functions, sponsored research, and entrepreneurship.

Academic Affairs Resource Management is developing a process by which Deans and Directors will designate CDME to include those faculty and graduate students who require access to academic buildings for research and entrepreneurship purposes. Priority will be given to graduate student research activities for which termination would irreparably harm academic progress toward graduation, as well as critical sponsored faculty research. We cannot foresee how long building access will be allowed to continue or if supply chains can be maintained if further restrictions are ordered by federal, state, or university officials. Therefore, on-campus activity should be directed toward tasks that absolutely need to be done right now because any delay will result in a critical loss of data and toward preparation for cessation of operations. This should include securing instrumentation, biological hazards, toxins, and flammable materials.

Please contact your SPARC grant officer if you have concerns about how the change in research activity might impact your sponsored research projects and deliverables. Many funders are providing flexibility and additional guidance in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. SPARC is aggregating links to this guidance at https://uncw.edu/sparc/covid19.html. Despite the disruption, the Research and Innovation Services Team (RIST) including SPARC and the Research Integrity Office (RIO) will continue to provide services for proposal development and submission (proposals@uncw.edu), research integrity (e.g., IRB, IACUC), and award management. Let us know how we can assist you.

As funded research slows, grant funded personnel (e.g., technicians, students) and graduate students will continue to be paid. Yesterday’s HR guidance indicated that “all employees - including temporary employees and student workers - who are unable to work remotely because their position duties cannot be performed remotely, will receive paid administrative leave until March 31, 2020, for the period of
time they are unable to work remotely.” PIs with grant-funded employees (including graduate research assistants) who will need to be placed on administrative leave should contact their SPARC grant officer immediately to initiate this process. Graduate students on teaching assistantships can be directed to assist with online instruction or can be placed on administrative leave through your departmental business officer.

During this period in which lab access is allowed, PI’s and lab directors will mandate best practices for minimizing personal contact. These efforts can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ensuring that only critically needed activity is allowed and prohibiting activity that is not time-sensitive.
- Providing a laboratory configuration to ensure that proper social distancing can be maintained at all times.
- Prohibiting face-to-face group meetings. All objectives and tasks should be determined prior to coming on to campus.
- Scheduling lab use and shared facility use to ensure that proper social distancing can be maintained at all times
- Strict hygiene protocol with washing hands before starting work and after work, and sanitization and washing of hands at appropriate intervals throughout the work time.
- Wiping of all contact surfaces, equipment, high touch surfaces, etc., regularly through the day
- Minimizing time in the lab; no-non essential work in lab or office spaces.
- No overlap of personnel in confined spaces such as tissue culture rooms, freezer rooms, instrumentation rooms, etc.

Again, the primary goal of UNCW’s efforts is to protect the health of our students, staff, faculty, and our greater community. Secondarily, we are protecting the core academic mission of the university, including both teaching and research. We appreciate your extraordinary work to meet these goals during this extraordinary time.