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 : Critical Research Activities
Date: April 6, 2020

We hope you and your families are staying healthy. This is a time of high stress and anxiety both at a personal level and for our university community. As you know, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to grow around the world and in the United States. If you are a nerd like us, you might find the Covid-19 websites at Johns Hopkins University (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html) and University of Virginia (https://nssac.bii.virginia.edu/covid-19/dashboard/) of interest. The science suggests that the best way to disrupt the disease dynamics and save lives is through physical distancing, which is why Governor Cooper announced his “stay at home” order (Executive Order No. 121) and the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners followed up with its Declaration of Emergency that adds additional restrictions. Most recently, New Hanover County has closed all public and private marinas and boat ramps, and the National Estuarine Research Reserve has closed access to Masonboro Island.

In an effort to better comply with the Governor’s order and better assist our community’s effort to reduce the disease spread, we have refined UNCW’s definition of Critical Research Activities as related to laboratory and field based-research that requires access to specialized facilities.

These activities include:

(1) research related to the Covid-19 disease and consequences of the pandemic,

(2) research that would be impossible to start or could not be restarted without significant investment of resources (e.g., time [> 1 year], finances [>$15,000]),

(3) efforts to maintain or preserve living organisms and sensitive equipment,

(4) sponsored projects for which the sponsor is not providing flexibility due to the Covid-19 pandemic,
(5) activities specifically requested by a US Government sponsor to continue during this time,

(6) research that is time sensitive and critical to graduate students experiments for graduation this calendar year.

We will work with the college Deans to review the current Communicable Disease Mandatory Employee (CDME) access list for research to ensure that the all personnel listed are necessary for these Critical Research Activities.

Please contact SPARC (sparc@uncw.edu) 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 sponsor guidance on its website. 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, research integrity, and award management. Let the team know how we can best assist you.

For those of you with ongoing research activities, we encourage you to continue to use best practices for maximizing safety for yourselves and your staff (see example SOP).

The Research & Innovation Office has worked with Environmental Health and Safety to create two checklists to assist researchers who are:

(1) ramping down laboratory activities (Lab Checklist – Hibernation), and
(2) continuing to operate during the Covid-19 outbreak (Lab Checklist – Limited Use).

Thank you for your understanding of these changes during this turbulent time. Again, the primary goal of UNCW’s efforts is to protect the health of our students, staff, faculty, tenants, and our greater community. With your help, we can achieve this goal.