15 March 2021

TO: ECU Official

FROM: Dr. Michael R. Van Scott
Interim Vice Chancellor

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Research Guidance

North Carolina continues to relax COVID-19 restrictions and is expected to cautiously continue to re-open as COVID-19 incidence decreases and more people develop immunity to SARS-CoV-2. In parallel, East Carolina University has gradually increased research activities that can be conducted with minimal risk of exposure to COVID-19 as defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). At this time, the level of research on campus is 50-75% of normal capacity, with priority given to sponsored programs, seasonal fieldwork, collection of preliminary data for grant proposals in Fiscal Year 2021, thesis and dissertation projects for students anticipating graduating in FY21, and other high-priority research projects approved by a dean and associate dean for research. Travel is still restricted and requires an exception approved by the Chancellor. Reviewed and approved human subjects research is ongoing. While COVID-19 incidence is decreasing, new variants and diminished social caution could result in a resurgence, which is occurring in other countries. ECU students, faculty, and staff should remain vigilant, follow safe practices for conduct of their research, and have a plan for ramping down research activities if COVID-19 incidence in Greenville and the surrounding area increases.

Principal investigators have an important role in setting expectations and precedents for ensuring the health and safety of the research personnel, including co-investigators, staff, fellows, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The following continues to be required for engaging in research activities:

1. Investigators and senior staff must be familiar with guidelines for addressing COVID-19 safety in the workplace posted by ECU Environmental Health and Safety, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and Centers for Disease Control.
2. Students and staff must complete training on COVID-19 safety in the workplace. Online training is offered through CITI and by NIH/NIEHS.
3. A Restarting Research Request form for non-human subjects research and/or human subjects research (PDF) must be submitted to and approved by the department chair and associate dean for research of the college or school where the project will be conducted.
4. A project-specific COVID-19 safety plan must be in place and accessible for all personnel listed on the approved project. The plan must address social distancing, disinfecting of work areas, use of personal protective equipment as recommended by ECU EH&S, OSHA, and the CDC, and check-in and check-out procedures if personnel are working alone. The Office of Environmental Health and Safety has provided guidance for safety plans and re-opening laboratories. Research at remote sites must align with posted fieldwork guidelines.
5. The faculty member must maintain a facility log that documents when individuals are in the facilities and what rooms or work areas they occupy.

An updated COVID-19 Research Guidance Phases table is attached and available online through REDE’s website.