Guidance for research in a virtual university

Amid increasing concern over COVID-19, Mines is stepping up our efforts to protect students, faculty, and staff, and to protect our wider community. As President Johnson said in his 3/17/2020 email, we are shifting to virtual university mode: going virtual for those functions that we can possibly accomplish remotely, while minimizing (and planning carefully for) those we cannot.

Research & Technology Transfer is currently working with our deans, departments, and centers to identify those essential research activities which can only occur on campus over the next few weeks. Recognizing that winding down some on-campus research activities may not be achievable by our goal of March 19, we are working to suspend all non-essential on-campus research activities by no later than Friday March 20, following a safe and orderly process.

Considerations

- **Critical laboratory activities and staff**: Initial determinations about critical operations and staff are being made by the department heads and center directors, vetted by the Deans and Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), and approved by the Vice President for Research and Tech Transfer (VPRTT). (Thank you for your quick responses on this!) Non-essential on-campus research activities will be safely suspended by NO LATER THAN the end of the day Friday March 20th, earlier if possible. If your needs change over time, please submit your requests for on-campus research access to your Department Head or RTT-sponsored Center Director to review and send to the Deans and VPRTT. A few use cases to consider:
  - If your research is primarily theoretical, you are likely to be able to do all of your work (including team meetings) virtually.
  - If your research involves instruments or systems that require regular care and feeding in order to exist, then you should plan for that minimal care and feeding with an appropriate health and safety plan.
  - If you anticipate a point where you need just a little laboratory work in order to enable continued work from home, you should request access for the specific people and time involved in doing that work.

We recognize that most cases will not be so clear-cut, but please try to focus on what is truly essential for continuity of research, with the default being at-home activities.

- **Safety and health**: Safety and health are our guiding principles. This is the right moment to refamiliarize yourself with your lab’s safety protocols and ensure your spaces and tools are properly cleaned and sanitized. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Also, while it is important to practice the social distancing rules for virus protection it is also important to have a buddy around when you need to perform higher risk research activities. Refer to the EHS [lab safety procedure](#) for examples of when you shouldn’t be working alone.

- **Lab Hibernation Checklist**: For non-essential research activities, use the attached checklist to verify your lab is in a safe “hibernation” state prior to leaving campus.
• **Guidance on federal funding:** Federal guidance is likely to lag behind your need to make decisions. We believe that you will be given flexibility regarding deadlines and that no-cost extensions to your projects will be fairly easy to obtain. We do NOT believe extra funds will be made available to account for delays, except on rare occasions. Please plan accordingly to do as much at-home work that you can (this is the time to catch up on all the reading, writing, and analysis that has been hanging over your head all year!) while we remain in virtual university mode. If you want more details on what your specific funding agencies are saying, the Council on Government Relations (COGR) offers Agency Guidance Specific to Federal Award Impact.

• **Student research at the graduate and undergraduate levels:** Faculty mentors are the best resource for student researchers with questions. Faculty should be doing everything possible to enable at-home research and to accommodate student needs.

• **Human subjects research:** Novel coronavirus may drive you to change research studies as necessary to protect participants. Federal regulatory and Mines policy requirements must still be met. Significant modifications to the ways you interact with human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the human subjects review (HSR) team before being implemented. Please direct any such questions to humansubjects@mines.edu.

The COVID-19 situation and guidance from Mines, community, state, and federal governments continue to evolve rapidly. Please keep an eye on campus guidance and resources, frequently updated at https://www.mines.edu/coronavirus/.

Thanks to the Research & Innovation Office at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Parts of this message are adapted from communications to their research community, used by permission.