

**Principles and Procedures Regarding Access to Research Facilities
During the COVID-19 Pandemic
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

June 10, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable disruption to the normal activities of the University. This document describes the principles and plans necessary to reopen research facilities and restart research activities at UWM; it does not address other University activities. These principles and plans developed out of discussions among the Office of Research, University Safety & Assurances (US&A), Campus Health and Legal Affairs. It also draws on some best practice ideas from other universities.

Principles

The plan for reopening research facilities at UWM are based on the following principles:

1. Follow Public Health safety directives (with limited exceptions allowed by the directives and defined by individual institutions).
2. Protect the health and safety of the UWM students, staff, faculty and community.
3. UWM is responsible for deciding when to reopen its research facilities.

Framework for Reopening Research Facilities

UWM will use a staged approach to reopening research facilities. This reopening plan involves five stages that gradually move from more restrictive toward normal operations. This plan for restarting research activity is adapted from plans developed at the University of California and University of Washington, which have been widely discussed (and adapted) within the American Public Land Grant Universities (APLU) Committee on Research.

The five stages between “shutdown” and return to full access and activity are:

- Stage 1: Access is restricted to the maintenance of critical research capability, and very limited high-priority activities, such as COVID-19 rapid response research.
- Stage 2: A degree of relaxed access with priorities given to time-sensitive research activities. Limited use of non-laboratory resources is permitted, and no in-person human subjects research allowed.
- Stage 3: Increased relaxation of access restrictions which permits more research facilities to be opened. New research may be initiated if it has been identified as a priority, and in-person human subjects research allowed that does not involve close contact with subjects.
- Stage 4: Further relaxation of research density constraints. Most research activity can resume with a density of research personnel below normal operations; human subjects research allowed except that involving in-person interaction with high-risk populations.
- Stage 5: Return to business as usual, full campus density and activity.

This plan also prioritizes access for certain research activities, specifically:

- COVID-19 related research
- Time-sensitive research, especially field studies that are seasonal in nature
- Early-career researchers
 - Graduate students who need to complete projects for their thesis or dissertation
 - Post-doc researchers
 - Untenured faculty members

Process for Authorizing Resumption of Research Activity

The University will make its own judgements about the pace and timing of reopening its facilities. Decisions will be made with regard to public health directives, COVID-19 public health response systems, and the readiness of the University for expanded operations.

Approval for on-site and field research activity will occur in a three-part process:

1. Campus-level assessment of the appropriate “stage” of research activity.
 - The decision group consists of the Chancellor, Provost, and Vice-Chancellor for Finance and Administrative Affairs.
 - The decision group will consult with representatives from Human Resources, Academic Affairs, Office of Research, University Safety & Assurances, Legal Affairs, the Emergency Operations Center, and campus governance.
2. Authorization of individual facilities and research groups eligible under each “stage”.
 - Requires a safety plan that follows the guidelines provided by the Emergency Operations Center to be approved by University Safety & Assurances.
 - Requires the final approval of the appropriate Dean, who will consult with Department Chairs, Building Chairs, and University Safety & Assurances.
3. Approved plans will be copied to Department Chairs and Building Chairs.

Research Operations Safety Plans

The Research Operations Safety Plan is required before a researcher can access labs, libraries, offices, and other research spaces or conduct field research during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to establish procedures to ensure safe operations in UWM’s research facilities and operations. A key limitation in reopening research facilities will be the density of people both within a lab and buildings as a whole.

Faculty, scientists, and other lead personnel are responsible for developing Research Operations Safety Plans that will be used by themselves and their research groups. Shared spaces require plans that cover all the facility users. Plans for core facilities are the responsibility of their respective director (or an individual designated by the appropriate Dean). Field studies and other off-site research locations are also required to have safety plans. Researchers are encouraged to contact US&A for advice on safety procedures as they develop their Research Operations Safety Plans.

Safety Plan development resources:

- Office of Research [Guidelines for Field Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- [US&A Research Startup Safety Checklist](#), which includes information on a wide range of potential safety considerations.
- UWM’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) guidelines for safe occupancy will be available by June 12, 2020. The link will be posted when available.
- [Online template](#) for developing and submitting Research Operations Safety Plans is posted on the Office of Research [website](#).

Prior to the submission of the safety plan, all personnel who will be working in a research facility must be designated as Essential Employees until Stage 5. (A link to request Essential Employee designation can be found in the [UWM Essential On-Site Work Practices document](#).)

The only exception to the Research Operations Safety Plans requirement is for UWM research-related staff who need to come to campus for **one-time, short-term access** to their facilities. These individuals must inform their building chair prior to the visit.

Implementation and adherence to the facility safety plans is critical. **Facility users who fail to follow the safety plans will have their access privileges revoked and the associated laboratory will be made inaccessible to all.** Deans may reopen the facility upon completion of US&A review and appropriate remediation.

Safety Considerations for Staged Reopening

The number of researchers who work on-site will be limited so that the density of people (in both individual spaces and overall building occupancy) is restricted for safe operations. Researchers should expect potentially severe limits on staffing levels in Stage 2 of this reopening. Some institutions have adopted a standard of one person per 300-350 square feet as the initial level of staffing, with the intention of increasing this at later stages. This reflects the need for circulation space and access to shared facilities (sinks, fume hoods) or equipment. It may be possible to increase the number of individuals engaged by arranging “shift” work in some facilities with appropriate disinfection procedures that will need to be detailed in a facility’s safety plan.

Beyond the density concerns, social distancing and sanitation/disinfection of facilities will remain an ongoing concern. Some important points are:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be sufficient for safe operations. Its availability may limit the pace of reopening facilities.
- Custodial services need to be sustained and the safety of staff ensured. This component needs to be incorporated into plans to reopen facilities. Current staff levels only allow first-floor bathrooms to be open.
- Research groups will be responsible for sanitizing their research space. This will require implementation of a cleaning protocol.

These factors will change over time to allow more on-site work as PPE becomes more available, support staff levels increase, and access to testing increases. The EOC guidelines will establish the specific requirements for safe operations.

General Guidance for the Safety of Individuals

Employees who elect not to return to campus research facilities because they are not comfortable with participating in the on-site research may be assigned alternative duties. However, to the extent such activities constitute part of their job duties, this may result in loss of salary if sufficient substitute duties cannot be assigned.

All individuals must follow the [UWM Essential On-Site Work Practices](#). Some key points to consider:

Facility users:

- Must not come to campus if they are sick or exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms as described on the [CDC website](#).
- Must follow posted checklist with disinfection protocols when they leave the laboratory.
- Must contact College if they believe that the health safety rules are not observed or that they may be asked to operate in an unsafe environment.

If a member of the research group presents COVID-19 symptoms, the following steps are required:

- a. The individual must cease work and follow [State of Wisconsin guidelines for self-isolation](#).
- b. The individual must contact their health provider as soon as possible for further instructions.
- c. The date an individual can return to work is subject to the public health guidelines at that time. These guidelines are changing frequently, and thus a delay of several weeks after the symptoms cease may be required.

In addition, if any member of the research group had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, they must follow the [State of Wisconsin recommendations](#) for limited self-quarantine and self-monitoring.

Stages of Reopening Research Facilities at UWM

STAGE	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
<p>Stage 1</p> <p>UWM at present</p>	<p>On-campus access allowed to maintain research capability or prevent catastrophic disruption.</p> <p>COVID-19 related research permitted.</p> <p>Only research deemed critical and essential is allowed and must be approved by the Provost.</p> <p>Researchers must be designated as Essential Employees to be on site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research facilities and field stations are closed. • Research access limited to social-distanced essential personnel for priority research activities to protect life safety and critical research infrastructure/capability. • Minimum staffing. • COVID-19 related rapid response activities are permitted (e.g. testing, ventilators, detectors). • Core facilities that support COVID-19 research. • Access to faculty offices to pick up books and materials, shut down instrumentation, etc. with notification to building chair. • Field Research: Prioritized seasonal data collection or experiments close to completion where pause or deferral would lead to “catastrophic loss” of research results. • “Critical and Essential Research” activity where a delay would have significant financial impacts or catastrophically disrupt the project or protocol (including avoiding euthanasia of research animals). No “new” projects can be initiated on campus.
<p>Preparations for Stage 2</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure necessary core facilities can be staffed and operational in parallel with needs of approved research projects. • Labs may purchase necessary supplies. • Develop plans for safe operations. This would include social distancing, facial coverings, cleaning measures, etc. Use the EOC guidance and the US&A safety checklist. • In consultation with the Animal Resource Center, develop plans to re-stock animal colonies.
<p>Stage 2</p>	<p>All research that can be done remotely should continue.</p> <p>Labs/groups allowed to operate at reduced density (estimated at 25-35% of normal campus operations) with social distancing and appropriate safety measures; an approved safety plan is required.</p> <p>Density will be limited to maintain building health & safety. When necessary, access will be prioritized based on time-sensitive research (see listed priorities).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit access for researchers with ongoing projects which cannot be conducted remotely, if the research can be conducted safely under the EOC and US&A health & safety guidelines. • Prioritize research access (excepting human subjects research) for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Graduate students and postdocs close to completing their degree/term of appointment ○ Assistant Professors ○ Completion of grants within 90 days of the project end date if the funding agency has not granted leniency to extend the project term. ○ Seasonal data collection and experiments close to completion or deadline-driven, whose pause or deferral would lead to catastrophic delay or loss of research results • No in-person Human Subjects Research allowed regardless of prioritization factors.

STAGE	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
Stage 2 continued	<p>Safety plans must include shutdown options in case of a sudden return to Stage 1.</p> <p>Researchers must be designated as Essential Employees to be on site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For approved projects, new animal orders and establishment of new breeding pairs subject to ARC approval. • Library: Contactless pickup of books and other materials at all three campus locations. • Non-laboratory settings: Prioritize researchers with deadlines (e.g., tenure, book contracts, degree completion, etc.). Some monitored access to offices for those at critical career points (tenure, promotion). • Field research: expand on a case-by-case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely and ability to social distance at field sites); approvals will depend on current restrictions are in the locations where field research is to be conducted.
Preparations for Stage 3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for core campus functions to be staffed and operational to handle the increased load. • Plan for needed core facilities to be staffed and operational. • Labs are able to purchase necessary supplies. • Plans for safe operations developed and approved by Dean; includes social distancing, facial coverings, cleaning measures, etc. Use safety checklist provided by US&A.
Stage 3	<p>Gradually expand number of people (estimated at 40-60% of normal campus operations) on campus while maintaining social distancing.</p> <p>Critical new on-campus research allowed with social distancing and appropriate safety; an approved safety plan is required.</p> <p>All research-related activities that can be done remotely should continue to be, including seminars, group meetings, etc.</p> <p>Researchers must be designated as Essential Employees to be on site.</p>	<p>Changes from Stage 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow access to offices for faculty and grad students on application, 1-3 days/week to allow for psychological relief and family harmony. Must maintain social distancing and max occupancy per building. • Libraries: Buildings open under limited circumstances (limited hours and areas). Limits on social gatherings of up to 50 people in effect. Maintain all personal health protocols including social distancing. • Non-laboratory settings: Access to offices, studios, etc. can be allowed with social distancing practices in place (see above). • In-person Human Subjects Research that does not involve close contact with subjects with the approval of US&A.
Stage 4	<p>Researchers must be designated as Essential Employees to be on site.</p>	<p>Changes from Stage 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to offices allowed generally, with attention to social distancing and cleaning. • Expanded access to libraries, collections, studio spaces, performance spaces and labs with social distancing and disinfection of materials. • Human Subjects Research involving close contact with subjects who are not high-risk COVID subjects with the approval of US&A.
Stage 5	<p>All types of on-site research are allowed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restart normal research operations, including open museums and libraries, field research and full human subjects research.

