

Fall 2020 Research Reopening Plan
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
August 2020

Introduction

As UWM prepares for the Fall 2020 semester, this updated Research Reopening Plan reflects (1) the changing usage and occupancy patterns that will occur with on-site instruction, (2) the development of building-level use and occupancy plans, and (3) updated safety guidance from the UWM Emergency Operations group and various professional organizations. Recognizing that these factors will result in different levels of research activity across UWM's research facilities, this plan provides a more flexible approach to restarting research as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact UWM's activities. The approach to phasing human subjects research has also been substantially revised.

Principles

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

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

General Considerations for Reopening Research

UWM has been using a phased approach to reopening research facilities. The original plan involved five stages that moved gradually from more restrictive operations toward normal operations. The plan phased in research by coordinating the easing of restrictions on occupancy limits, library usage, and research activity. This has been successful in restarting research at a limited level, but as we approach the Fall semester we must de-couple some of these restrictions to allow greater access to research facilities. **The original five-stage plan is no longer operative and is replaced by the plan outlined in this document.**

Reopening research is impacted by two major limitations:

1. **Facility Access.** It is critical to limit the occupancy of campus buildings and individual rooms/facilities to reduce the risk of infection. The determination of occupancy limits will consider the various uses of each building in the Fall (including instruction, research, and administration), usage and circulation patterns in buildings, availability of PPE and building support, public safety directives, and the prevalence of the COVID-19 virus.
2. **Restrictions on some types of research activity due to the risks associated with COVID-19.** Restrictions will reflect the balance between health and safety risks, urgency of the research activity, quality of research safety procedures (i.e., safety plans), public safety directives, and UWM's experience in restricting the spread of the virus on campus.

These limitations will result in specific conditions for reopening research. Given the range of building usage patterns and designs, the level of research activity will vary among buildings; therefore, this revised plan envisions varied levels of research activity across UWM facilities.

Fall 2020 Research Reopening Plan

A. Facility Access

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.

Guidelines and limitations for the use of UWM facilities have been developed by the UWM Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Building Preparedness and Operations Team, and approved by the Chancellor, Provost, and Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administrative Affairs.

The process for authorizing access to campus facilities requires approval of (1) a Building Preparedness Plan, (2) a Research Safety Operations Plan for use of a specific lab, facility or office, (3) a unit-level On-Site Work Plan using the form provided by Human Resources, and (4) completion of the online UWM Employee Training and Assentation.

1. Building Preparedness Plan

A key limitation in reopening research facilities is the density and circulation of people, both within individual labs/facilities and in buildings. Thus, the EOC Building Preparedness and Operations Team has established maximum occupancy levels for research spaces and is working with units to develop a Building Operations Plan for each building.

Researchers should expect potentially severe limits on staffing levels during the pandemic. UWM has adopted the following standards:

- **Laboratory spaces:** One person per 400 sq. ft. (i.e., 1 person for spaces up to 400 sq. ft, 2 people for 400-800 sq. ft., etc.)
- **Offices:** One person per 200 sq. ft. (i.e., 1 person for offices up to 200 sq. ft., 2 people for 200-400 sq. ft. if social distancing [6 ft.] can be maintained, etc.).

These standards reflect the need for circulation space and access to shared facilities (sinks, fume hoods) or equipment. The number of individuals may be increased by arranging “shift” work in some facilities, with appropriate disinfection procedures detailed in its Research Operations Safety Plan.

Units (or combinations of units) are responsible for developing Building Operations Plans. The EOC Building Preparedness and Operations Team is responsible for approving plans and can [provide support](#). Once approved, deans and division heads are responsible for communicating and implementing the plans.

2. Research Operations Safety Plans

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

Research Operations Safety Plans must be approved by deans within the context of the appropriate Building Operations Plan. Deans must also ensure that the information about approved research activity is entered into the Research Space Utilization database via the [online form](#). Following the dean’s approval, the plans must be reviewed and approved by US&A.

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](#).
- The [online template](#) for developing and submitting Research Operations Safety Plans is posted on the Office of Research [website](#).

3. On-Site Work Plans

Unit heads must submit On-Site Work Plans that list the work functions and employees who will be working on-site. Human Resources has developed forms for deans and department heads to use to approve employees for on-site work within the parameters of Building Operations Plans. Unit heads can obtain these forms from UBRs or HR Business Partners, and then upload the forms to the [Work Plan Submission](#) site. Deans can also track research space usage with the Research Space Utilization database (noted above).

4. Employee Training and Attestation

All UWM employees are required to complete [UWM's Employee Training and Attestation](#). This training is provided by UWM [University Safety and Assurances](#) and includes a training video, on-site work practices guidance, interim COVID-related health and safety rules, and a symptoms monitoring tool. Information is provided on practices for dealing with suspected and confirmed COVID cases and exposures. Each member of a research team must complete this training no later than the first day they return to the workplace. This requirement also applies to UWM research-related staff who need to come to campus for one-time, short-term access to their facilities.

B. Research Activities

In addition to requiring permission to access research facilities (as outlined above), the University has established several priorities and limitations for research activity during the pandemic, as determined by the Vice Provost for Research in coordination with IRB, US&A and EOC.

Priority for on-site research will be given to three types of research activities:

- **Research related to the COVID-19 pandemic:** A sponsor-funded project will have highest priority if the sponsor requires immediate commencement of the project.
- **Research conducted by early-career researchers:** Specifically, untenured faculty members, graduate students needing to conduct research to complete their degree programs, and post-doctoral researchers. These researchers may need to share facilities using “shift work” due to room or building limitations.
- **Projects funded by external sponsors with designated end dates:** Principal investigators will need to fulfill the award performance expectations within a reasonable time frame. This consideration will prioritize funded projects based on institutional obligations to sponsors.

The initial reopening policy prioritized completion of ongoing projects. With this update, **access may be provided for both new projects and ongoing projects.**

Guidelines for special research considerations are as follows:

1. Libraries

Information on [UWM Library services and resources](#).

2. Field Research

Investigators must have an approved Research Operations Safety Plan and be approved for On-Site Employee Work status (see above). Safety Plans must conform with the [UWM Guidelines for Field Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

3. Faculty Offices

Faculty offices are used for a variety of tasks related to instruction, research, and service. Some disciplines use laboratories or specialized facilities as primary on-site research locations, others do not. However, in almost all cases, faculty offices are critical for research activity due to the accessibility of materials or resources that may not be available from remote locations.

4. Human Subject Research

Human subjects research is subject to the following color-coded levels:

Red	Data analysis, remote/virtual data collection, and other activities not requiring direct interaction with subjects.
Orange	Face-to-face interactions with low-risk populations in the same room that maintain social distance (greater than 6 ft.) or which require close (within 6 ft.) <u>or</u> direct contact for a limited duration (< 15 minutes).
Yellow	Face-to-face interactions with low-risk populations involving more extensive close or direct contact.
Green	No restrictions on human subjects research.

Permissible activities for levels Orange and Yellow Levels include IRB-approved protocols and pilot/feasibility studies that (1) align with the priorities noted under “General Considerations” in this document (page 1), (2) follow UWM’s guidelines for face-to-face human subjects research, and (3) have an approved [Research Operations Safety Plan](#).

C. 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 On-Site Employee 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 checklists and disinfection protocols when they leave the laboratory.
- Must contact their School/College if they believe 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 has COVID-19 symptoms, the following steps are required:

1. The individual must cease work and follow [State of Wisconsin guidelines for self-isolation](#).
2. The individual must contact their supervisor to provide information and arrange to go home.
3. The individual must contact their health provider as soon as possible for further instructions.
4. 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.