

# Principles and Framework Guiding Phased–In University Research Activity at SUNY Poly - Utica Campus

## Preface:

Our initial focus is on managing access to research spaces to be found on the Utica campus and academic offices. Research labs include, but are not limited to faculty labs (DON 2106), common use labs (DON 2157, DON 2151 and DON 2149), CGAM laboratories (G155, G157, G160, G163, G225 and G227), the Donovan second floor interview rooms (DON 2262 and DON 2266), Kunsela Hall lab spaces i.e. KH C228.

This document is intended to supplement [State](#), [SUNY/RF](#), and [Campus](#) guidance on reopening, with a specific aim toward procedures and expectations for research-related activities.

1. Guiding Principles
  1. *Follow the cognizant Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives to shelter-at-home and implement social distancing.*
  2. *Protect the health and safety of the research workforce, emotional as well as physical.*
  3. *Protect the careers of early stage researchers for progression or tenure review.*
  4. *Undergraduates are students first, researchers second.*
  5. *Implement a fair and transparent process for granting access.*
  6. *Ensure as rapid a research restart as the public health conditions permit.*
2. Phased and Permitted Activities
3. Tiers/Phased Approach
4. Appendix A – additional details on phasing.

## Guiding Principles

**Overarching Goal:** To keep everyone safe, while increasing research activity in a phased approach as safety measures become easier to maintain.

Our framework is informed by the following principles and observations.

**Principle #1:** *Follow the cognizant Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives to shelter-at-home and implement social distancing.*

- Observation: Public health authority (PHA) directives became more restrictive over time (recommendations, urgent recommendations, requirements, stricter identification of essential businesses and closures), as well as been updated with clarification of allowable activities like exercise, and use of face coverings, wherever social distancing

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<sup>1</sup> Liberal use of a draft guidelines developed by University of California was made in development of this document.

cannot be maintained. We expect that “loosening” will look like a similar process in reverse.

- Observation: The Mohawk Valley Region of New York is currently in Phase 4 of the NY Forward Regional Restart Program. While we hope the region will continue to progress, we must be prepared to start at Phase 3 or even move back to Phase 2 in the event of a significant increase in the number of cases. Nevertheless, higher risk groups—that can include older faculty and staff, or any age group with underlying health conditions—will likely benefit from a shelter at home longer policy. State guidance on re-opening activities can be found [here](#).
- Conclusion: We can expect the State and National plans to influence the local decisions of City and County Public Health authorities based on local and regional conditions. Between “only essential/minimal activity outside of the home” and “return to business as usual,” there will be intermediate phases of increased access, with reasonable time between phase changes, with the possibility of returning to a more restricted phase should Covid-19 infections again rise.

**Principle #2:** *Protect the health and safety of the research workforce, emotional as well as physical, and the health and safety of our staff, faculty, and students.*

- Observation: No researcher or student should feel they are being compelled to work on campus or in the field during periods of broad shelter-at-home directives. Safety within laboratories must be rigorously maintained due to the added challenges of cleaning such spaces, with adequate access to PPE and other safety related supplies. Campus Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) must be made aware of all research activities resuming within university spaces.
- Observation: Limited access is likely to persist for some time, and researchers will need to adapt to longer term access requirements including a planning document. State and National guidelines suggest that full back to normal access should only be restored once there is more pervasive testing and contact tracing capabilities. Ultimately establishing immunity, through serological testing or an effective vaccine, will facilitate a full return to business as usual, but it is recognized that this time frame is not yet determined and must be balanced with guiding principles.
- Observation: Given that the relaxation of access constraints is locally determined, it may be especially challenging to ramp-up projects that are distributed across sites or which depend on international collaborations. Campus guidance on re-opening can be found [here](#).
- Observation: A number of research projects have successfully and safely transitioned to being remote, requiring infrequent or no access to university spaces. While also recognized as important and essential, research that can be conducted remotely is not considered in the tiers discussed below. Furthermore, even if research can be conducted at home, we recognize that research productivity will be affected and is likely to be done in a less efficient way.
- Conclusion: Researchers should plan as best they can for the inherent uncertainty of when a return to research spaces will be done with reasonable safety and how future events might affect this.

**Principle #3:** *Protect the careers of early stage researchers.*

- Observation: To the extent that it is possible under the public health authority directives, as access restrictions are relaxed, priority to return to research spaces should be given to those researchers who cannot work remotely and are under time constraints to complete degrees, term appointments (e.g., graduate and postdoctoral researchers), or for tenure and other career reviews.
- Observation: In book-based and other impacted disciplines, extension of the tenure clock is available to faculty members wishing to stop the clock.
- Conclusion: Institutions should be sensitive to the consequences of reduced access to research spaces, including on-campus offices, and the dramatic impact this will have on careers, particularly of young researchers.

**Principle #4:** *Undergraduates are students first, researchers second.*

- Observation: Engagement of undergraduates in research should only be permitted under the most exceptional of situations. These may include the situation in which (1) the undergraduate student is an essential team member for the project, (2) the project itself has been authorized for access, and (3) the work of that student must be performed in person in the research space, and (4) no other work can be assigned to that student that can be performed remotely. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and the student must be an employee of the college.
- Conclusion: For the safety of students and those they interact with, undergraduate students should adhere to shelter-at-home directives from the Public Health authority.

**Principle #5:** *Implement a fair and transparent process for granting access.*

- Observation: The policies on conditions and priorities for granting access should be rational, non-arbitrary, and made public.
- Observation: While the vast majority of people who have been granted access are following the social distancing rules and maintaining low density within research spaces, a small number of abuses may be inevitable. Enforcement will be by periodic inspection of authorized spaces by EH&S, and security check in lists, building access, and the engagement of Deans and Department/Constellation Chairs applying discipline to abusers.
- Conclusion: Social distancing and density limitation guidelines for different kinds of activities in research spaces will be distributed based on State and PHA guidelines and institutional needs.

**Principle #6:** *Ensure as rapid a research restart as the public health conditions permit.*

- Observation: To implement social distancing and to reduce density of research personnel in university research spaces, consider permitting flexible scheduling for building and lab access, schedule staggered work days or work shifts, plan to extend EH&S, janitorial, and facilities support as needed.
- Observation: Plan in advance for supply chain issues on restart. Under no circumstances should safety be sacrificed due to lack of adequate supplies, such as the type and quality of PPE.

- Observation: Researchers, EH&S, and campus leaders must work in concert to ensure that local infrastructure and physical layout of research spaces within buildings are considered during ramp-up.
- Conclusion: Develop flexible work schedules, plan in advance for any supply chain issues, consider access to research facilities along with other space needs (restrooms, meals) to maximize social distancing, and coordinate across with EH&S and within departments (i.e. use of shared calendars to schedule lab time).

### Phases and Permitted Research Activities

Public health directives and the current state of the health care and Covid-19 public health response systems determine the timing as to when any given institution in its local context is permitted to move up or down between phases (See Principle #1 above). Before allowing greater researcher access to labs, and other research-required spaces, a plan for meeting social distancing directives is necessary.

Some elements to consider for such a plan may include (*this list is intended to be illustrative*): scheduled/work-shift access; required facial coverings for social distancing; maximizing distancing between occupants; depending on size of research space and nature of activity therein, density limits such as no more than 2 researchers per bench (if necessary), researchers maintain appropriate social distancing, maximum number of faculty allowed to enter into office or library spaces, maximum numbers of individuals per lab unless further density is justified and approved; disinfecting books or materials after use by researchers; disinfecting work surfaces after use; and so on.

Conclusion: Faculty will be asked to complete a re-opening form, please take the following phased approaches into account when filling out this form.

### STAGES APPROACH

A Stage 1 restriction represents access restricted to only the maintenance of critical research capability. We estimate this to be 5-10% of normal access.

A Stage 2 restriction represents access restricted to critical and high priority activities. We estimate this to be 15-35% of normal access.

A Stage 3 restriction represents a degree of relaxed access, as permitted by the public authorities, with priorities given to time-sensitive research activities. We estimate this to be 35-50% of normal activities. **The college expects to be able to accommodate this level of activity in early August.**

Stage 4 Re-evaluation

Stage 5 Re-evaluation

Stage 6 represents a return to business as usual, full campus activity.

### Re Opening Research Plans:

- Faculty will receive a re-opening form to develop their return-to-research plan. Plans should be flexible enough to enable the swift ramp down of research to an earlier phase in response to changing circumstances.
  - Plans should be submitted using the [Google Form](#). Plans will be reviewed by the Office of Research, your respective dean, and EH&S. Please allow 2 business days for a response from the Office of Research. You will receive an affirmation of your plan or objections to be edited and addressed.
  - Plans must comply with physical distancing requirements and should provide for the lowest density of people reasonable to carry out research.
    - All work that can be done virtually/remotely should continue to be done virtually/remotely, including gatherings, including group meetings, and even one-to-one discussions.
    - Consider staggering work schedules as needed to maintain low personnel density
- Plans for cleaning/sanitizing labs and research work spaces upon restarting work
  - Research teams utilizing shared space must coordinate their plans
  - Researchers should appropriately sanitize lab spaces after use in both faculty and common use labs.
  - Utica campus EH&S will provide ONLY general PPE/disinfectant/hygiene issues for campus-wide deployment (e.g. basic face coverings for employees / students, hand sanitizers, classroom disinfectant provisions). For research projects, PIs should purchase PPE and sanitizing material through Dave Manore, or they can engage with their Dean to determine need and availability department-wide.
- Any personnel returning from out of state must follow [current guidance](#) on 14-day self-quarantine prior to reporting to campus – these individuals should work from their place of quarantine to the greatest extent possible even if they are asymptomatic.
- Screening procedures should be followed as indicated in campus directives including Return to Work guidance. Daily screening questionnaire and training have been distributed by EH&S.
- DO NOT restart research that requires PPE without first ensuring/acquiring an adequate supply of PPE. Start ordering PPE now, if necessary, to have on hand for restart if current stock on hand is insufficient.
- Carrying out research should be limited to **SUNY Poly employees and registered students** – volunteers should not be allowed to conduct research until Stage 5 (or 6) is reached.

- All restart planning must consider the needs of employees/students with current disability accommodations or those who will require new accommodations.

### **Additional Considerations for Field work Research**

Prior to restarting field work it is highly recommended that researchers consult:

- SUNY-wide guidance for off campus research and field work, pages 4-5 of the “SUNY and RF Research Restarting” Guidelines and Resources: [SUNY and RF Research Restarting: Guidelines and Resources](#).

There are many considerations unique to field work. The SUNY ESF field work review and approval form: [SUNY ESF Restart Research COVID-19 Plan](#), provides excellent guidance on the type of information and risks field work may pose. Similar information is requested on the SUNY Poly Re-opening research form. In addition, all field documentation such as field safety plans (included in the Re-opening research form) should be updated to reflect changes to protocols related to social distancing and hygiene in the field. These new protocols should be communicated to the research team (collaborators, students, post docs, etc) prior to any restart.

In addition to following the guidance provided, individuals conducting research outside of the SUNY Poly Campus should remember to consider the following:

- Ensure the Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives support the restart of work at the field site(s) in question
- Although not on campus, researchers should complete the [Daily COVID-19 Screening Form](#) prior to participating in any research activities.
- If research requires the collection and transmission of items between individuals or locations, develop appropriate procedures to minimize the number of individuals and frequency of exchanges to protect the health and safety of those involved (e.g. disinfection of containers, no contact drop offs)<sup>2</sup>
- Researchers may be approached by curious community members who may or may not follow public health directives - it is recommended researchers design activities to minimize the possibility of unsolicited interactions (e.g. consider shifting work schedules to off peak hours)
- SARS-CoV-2 has been detected in surface water bodies but viability of the virus in the water is currently unknown<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, activities which include contact with surface water bodies, particularly those with potential discharges of untreated or partially treated wastewater, may pose an elevated risk and proper PPE and disinfection protocol is recommended<sup>2</sup>.

2. Draft protocols for organizing and protecting researchers / volunteers in the field and laboratory (Bronx river alliance, Sarah Lawrence College Center for the Urban River at Beczak, and Riverkeeper):  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oauzJl3y5mVrpwcm26Vvq7ZX3PeIGWK7/view?usp=sharing>

3. Water Resources Institute communication regarding SARS-CoV-2:  
[https://wri.cals.cornell.edu/sites/wri.cals.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/Final\\_Draft\\_062820.pdf](https://wri.cals.cornell.edu/sites/wri.cals.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/Final_Draft_062820.pdf)

### **Additional Considerations for Human Subjects Research**

COVID 19 poses a unique challenge for those conducting Human Subjects research. It is imperative that the health and safety of the participants, researchers, staff and campus are prioritized in considering the restart of this type of research activity. Prior to restarting research activity, the investigator should revise their research in accordance with all applicable current guidance on COVID-19.

For questions on how to revise or submit new protocols and what additional items need to be considered for human subjects research please contact the IRB at [IRB@sunypoly.edu](mailto:IRB@sunypoly.edu).

## Appendix A

STAGE	OBSERVED EXTERNAL CONDITIONS	SUMMARY & METRICS	CRITERIA	TIME PERIOD
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Situation unknown and changing.</b>            COVID-19 hospitalizations on the rise, Testing limited, PPE shortages</p>	<p><b>Only research deemed critical is allowed</b>            Researchers must be designated as Critical to be on site</p> <p>On site research activity estimated at <b>5-10% of normal</b></p>	<p><i>Research facilities and field stations are closed, except where personnel are required to protect life safety and critical research infrastructure/capability (maintaining cell lines, animal health, instrumentation, etc).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum staffing.</li> <li>• Authorization for one time access to faculty offices to pick up books and materials, shut down instrumentation, etc. delegated to deans.</li> </ul>	
<b>2</b>	<p>Tracking of COVID-19 hospitalizations still on the rise, testing still limited, PPE shortages</p> <p>Initial Stay Home/Stay Healthy directive in place</p> <p>Hospitalizations are stabilizing in numbers and testing is increasing</p>	<p><b>On-campus access allowed to maintain research capability or prevent catastrophic disruption</b></p> <p><b>COVID-19 related research encouraged</b></p> <p>Researchers must be designated as Essential to be on site</p> <p>On site research activity transitions to an estimated <b>15-35% of normal</b></p>	<p><i>Research access limited to social-distanced essential personnel only for priority research activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life safety and critical research (as stated above)</li> <li>• “Critical Research”, where a delay would have significant financial impacts or catastrophically disrupt the project or protocol. Finish up critical projects - no “new” projects can be initiated on campus.</li> </ul>	
	<p><i>Preparations for next phase</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Necessary core facilities are staffed and operational</i></li> </ul>	



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labs are able to purchase necessary supplies</li> <li>• Social distancing, facial coverings, cleaning measures understood and in place</li> </ul>	
3	<p>Local COVID-19 hospitalizations flatten, then drop COVID-19 testing capacity increases PPE shortages still exist</p> <p>Public health authorities &amp; Governor relax restrictions on 'essential workers'</p> <p>Local schools still closed/ teaching remotely for rest of academic year</p>	<p><b>Definition of "critical" relaxed to include time-sensitive research</b></p> <p>Explore options for Humanities &amp; Social Sciences</p> <p>All research that can be done remotely should continue</p> <p>On site research activity transitions to an estimated <b>35-50% of normal</b></p> <p><b>Plans for sudden return to Phase 1 in place</b></p>	<p><i>Deadline-driven research activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiments close to completion, or deadline driven, whose pause or deferral would lead to catastrophic delay or loss of research results.</li> <li>• Prioritize access for graduate students and postdocs close to completing their degree/term of appointment.</li> <li>• Prioritize research for completion of grants with end dates within 3 months ~Aug31, 2020 (where funding agency has not granted leniency).</li> <li>• <u>Core facilities:</u> restart facilities based on sufficient 'customer' demand (approved projects) where work cannot be done remotely.</li> <li>• Prioritize researchers with deadlines (tenure, degree completion, etc.) Some monitored access to offices for those at critical career points (tenure, promotion).</li> </ul>	

	<i>Preparations for next phase</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Core campus functions are staffed and operational to handle increased load (Security, EH&amp;S, Metrology, AEG)</i></li> <li>• <i>Labs are able to purchase necessary supplies</i></li> <li>• <i>Social distancing, face mask, cleaning measures understood and in place</i></li> </ul>	
<b>4</b>	<p>Local COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decrease COVID-19 testing capacity near maximum of needed capacity PPE more widely available</p> <p>Further relaxation of restrictions - standards for return to normal</p>	<p><b>Gradually expand # of people on campus</b> while maintaining social distancing</p> <p><b>On-campus research allowed, but labs/groups only allowed to operate at 50-70% total personnel capacity, with social distancing.</b> All research that can be done remotely should continue to be, including all seminars, group meetings, etc.</p> <p>On site research activity transitions to an estimated <b>50-70% of normal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	July 2020

<p>5</p>	<p>New cases of COVID-19 are low          COVID-19 testing is at maximum          needed capacity          PPE availability normal</p> <p>Further relaxation of restrictions - standards for activity based on ability to social distance</p> <p>Childcare options available for parents</p>	<p><b>Continued expansion of research on campus</b> while maintaining social distancing</p> <p>On-campus research allowed, but <b>labs/groups only allowed to operate at 70-90% total personnel capacity, with social distancing</b></p> <p>All research that can be done remotely should continue to be, including all seminars, group meetings, etc.</p> <p>On site research activity estimated at <b>70-85% of normal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to offices allowed generally, with attention to social distancing and cleaning</li> <li>• Access to general spaces and all labs with social distancing and disinfection of materials</li> </ul>	<p>TBD</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Vaccine widely available and used in combination with widespread testing and identification of new COVID-19 cases, with self-quarantining</p> <p>No or minimal state restrictions</p>	<p><b>All types of on site normal research operations are allowed</b></p> <p>On site research activity <b>normal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restart normal research operations</li> </ul>	<p>TBD</p>