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Sent: Monday, March 23, 2020 7:38 PM

Subject: Update on the research enterprise at UVA



Dear UVA Faculty and those involved in the research enterprise:

Thank you for your patience as we work together to tackle this fast-moving and complex public health crisis. We understand this has been a difficult period, including for those engaged in the important task of research, whether they do their work in a lab or in an office or in the field. As you know, last week, the University [announced](#) extraordinary measures to “flatten the curve” even as we work to continue our missions of teaching, research, and clinical care. The following day, the University [announced](#) that these measures apply to the research enterprise.

This message follows-up on this March 20th [communication](#) from our Vice President for Research, Ram Ramasubramanian. I write to: i) provide two reminders; ii) to clarify the University’s approach to the engagement of graduate students in research during this period; and iii) to emphasize that all engaged in the research enterprise should be preparing for the possibility of a shut down of ongoing research and resorting only to the maintenance of key laboratory assets.

First, two reminders:

- I want to re-affirm the University position on research: As announced last week, the research enterprise should be shifting to **key functions only**—and that task should be complete by tomorrow, Tuesday, March 24th, close of business. Our research enterprise is highly heterogenous, so what constitutes a “key” task will vary across the institution, but the already-announced guiding principles are linked [here](#). In addition, please consult your school and research dean for advice that is appropriate to the context of the research efforts in your school.
- In keeping with the University-wide [approach](#) to “flattening the curve”: All employees, including those engaged in the research enterprise, who can work from home must work from home and their supervisor (here, PI) must require that they do so. Like all managers, a PI can “designate” a category of employees who must report in person to perform key functions. In keeping with efforts to “flatten the curve”, this category must be as small as possible to perform those tasks and the PI must assure that the safest practices are followed.

Second, regarding the role of graduate students in the days ahead:

- As a matter of principle, the University position is that graduate students are—first and foremost—**students**. We understand that in many research programs—conducted in a lab, from an office, or in the field—graduate students are essential to the research enterprise, and that work is part of graduate students’ own aspirations for their future.
- Given their status as students, the rule is this: a faculty member is not permitted to “designate” a graduate student, which would mean that the graduate student must report in person to perform key tasks. This rule is subject to narrow exceptions (decided through a process described below) if the PI/Research Leader and graduate student jointly request an exception.
- **Exceptions: I will, after consulting with others (the relevant school dean, the VPR, and the EVPHA) determine whether an exception to this rule will be granted. Petitions to permit a graduate student to continue in-person work should be submitted by the PI and as the form indicates with the consent of the graduate student to the Provost’s Office by using this [form](#).**

Third, it is critical that all PIs/Research Leaders plan for a shut down of ongoing research. We do not know if or when that might occur; as has happened in some other states, it is possible that the decision will be required by a government order over which we have little control. Given this, it is crucial that researchers have a plan to preserve the vital material that is essential for research (for example, animals, cells, continuously-run instruments and machines, special materials, and reagents). This task of preservation and planning will assure that, if we must pause our ongoing research, we will be positioned to return to this important endeavor whenever the pause is over. Believe me, all of us wish we could predict if and when we might have to shut down ongoing research; but we do not yet know. I assure you that we will continue to keep the UVA research community up to date in the days ahead.

Thank you for your patience and generosity of spirit during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Liz Magill, Provost