

15 June 2020

Dear graduate students and faculty:

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with information regarding WSU's efforts to ramp up laboratory and in-person research and scholarly activities. On June 5th, Vice President for Research Chris Keane and Interim Provost Bryan Slinker shared an [email](#) with the WSU community about a staged return to on-site research, scholarship, and creative activities. I encourage you to read the current version of this [guidance](#).

The principles underlying the guidance document are to:

- Prioritize and protect the health and well-being of WSU students, faculty, staff and research partners;
- Minimize the spread of COVID-19 while serving our communities responsibly;
- Protect the careers of students and early stage researchers, including graduate students, post-docs and junior faculty.

Each principal investigator or research leader is required to certify the Guidelines and Checklist provided in the document and submit them to their department chair or local campus unit director. These certifications are also to be posted in the research space.

I want to highlight a few guidelines in Appendix I of the guidance document:

- Research activities that can reasonably be carried out remotely should be conducted remotely (e.g., using phone, Zoom or Microsoft Teams).
- Individuals *must* stay home if they feel sick.
- Personnel should maintain physical distancing (defined as separation by a minimum of six feet) and limit their presence to spaces essential for their work functions.
- To maintain a low personnel density, flexible scheduling should be employed when feasible.
- Researchers should practice appropriate hygiene and sanitization protocols. Wearing of face coverings (respiratory etiquette masks) has been mandated for all WSU researchers.
- *Research personnel shall not be pressured, explicitly nor implicitly, to physically return to work to conduct research on-site. All research personnel on site must have consented to do so. Questions can be directed to HRS, the Ombudsman, or the Graduate School.*

The last bullet requires consideration of the fact that graduate students on an assistantship have dual roles as student trainees and employees. Graduate students on an assistantship are required to perform a minimum of 20 hours per week effort on the duties assigned in order to be eligible for the associated stipend and tuition waivers. Separately, graduate students enrolled in 700 and 800 research credits are required to make satisfactory progress on their research; the typical expectation for a credit hour is one hour of contact time and two to three hours of additional independent effort.

There is a complicated network of considerations and concerns surrounding the staged return to on-site research, scholarship, and creative activities. It is important that a student's health, safety, and family care be balanced with scholarly productivity and progression toward degree completion. Success will require compromise and effective communication.

The Graduate School highly recommends implementation of the following best practice.

- At the beginning of each semester, the student and advisor should have a detailed discussion of the expectations associated with assistantship duties and research credits.
- The conversation should address:
 - the duties and expected outcomes for the student to successfully complete the assistantship and be reviewed favorably for continued support.
 - the goals, results and milestones that the student must accomplish to earn a satisfactory (S) grade for research credits.
- The student/advisor discussions should then be summarized in a written document agreed upon by both parties.

In the event that an advisor and student cannot reach an agreement regarding expectations for research/scholarly goals and on-site activities, the usual steps in the grievance process may come into play. These are summarized in [Chapter 12](#) of the Graduate School's Policies and Procedures manual, in particular [Chapter 12E](#) on student rights and responsibilities.

If a student has a concern about being pressured to return to an on-site setting because of safety issues related to COVID-19 (whether it be personal vulnerability as part of a high-risk group, or living with someone in a high-risk group), the following steps should be pursued.

- If conversations with one's research advisor cannot resolve the concern, the next step is to attempt resolution at the departmental level. Appropriate contacts would be the director of the graduate program, the department chair or the departmental ombudsman (if one has been appointed). Another source of support and guidance is the student's faculty advisory committee—a resource that is often under-utilized by graduate students.
- If resolution at the department level is not possible, there are university-wide points of contact. The university's [ombudsman](#) office is an independent, neutral entity charged with listening to and guiding students, faculty and staff in resolving concerns. Other options include the relevant college associate dean or associate vice chancellor for research/graduate education or similar designee of the college dean.
- If the above avenues for resolution are unsuccessful, concerns can also be brought to the dean or associate deans of the Graduate School. We will engage in conversations with the Office of Research, Human Resource Services and the Access Center as necessary and appropriate.

As more information becomes available, I will endeavor to communicate further with graduate students and faculty.

Best regards,

LMG

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Dean of the Graduate School