



University of California, Merced
5200 N. Lake Road | Merced, CA 95343
209-228-4723

GRADUATE DIVISION

June 11, 2020

Dear Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Researchers:

On June 10th, our COVID-19 Campus Research Operational Plan was approved by the Merced County Public Health Department. This plan has been in development since the beginning of COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders, and it is based on extensive consultation with stakeholders across the campus, system, county, and state. You can find the complete document and associated materials here:

<https://ucmerced.infoready4.com/#competitionDetail/1817044>. Below is a brief summary of the plan that highlights information most relevant to our graduate and postdoctoral researchers.

The overarching goal is to enable research activities to resume as much as possible while mitigating health risks due to COVID-19, based on county health guidelines. The plan focuses on research activities that must be done on campus, in the field, or in the community—research that can be done remotely should continue to be done remotely. The plan includes phases of research relaunch based on public health conditions in the county and state. We were in Phase 1 during campus lockdown and shelter-in-place orders, and we are transitioning to Phase 2 this summer.

The general principle of Phase 2 is very low-density occupancy of research spaces and buildings with social distancing and sanitization measures in place. The plan has extensive guidelines for PIs to follow as they work with their research groups and faculty colleagues with whom they share research spaces. Operational plans must be approved by the relevant department chairs, school deans, Vice Chancellor for Research, and Provost before they can be put in place. The approvers will review plans not only in terms of safety but also equity and inclusion, as outlined in the guidelines.

Two important principles are to prioritize access to research facilities for junior scholars who are most affected by delays in research progress, and to ensure that no one feels compelled to work on campus or in the field during periods of stay-at-home directives. Campus guidelines and processes for accommodating workers with health conditions can be found here:

http://policies.ucmerced.edu/sites/policies.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/policies/interim_policy_on_physical_mitigation_and_reduction.pdf.

Research will resume under Phase 2 restrictions in the coming days and weeks, as the buildings are prepared, the necessary equipment is put in place (e.g. sanitizer), and staffing is ready to go. It will be a slow process at first, but with hard work and good fortune, the process will accelerate over time. For specific information about your research space, please communicate with your faculty advisors and collaborators.

We understand that COVID-19 has created significant stress and uncertainty for everyone on campus, especially our junior scholars. Some of the stress may stem from delays in training and research progress, some may stem from worries about economic and job market conditions, some may stem from concerns about visa and immigration timelines, and some may stem from health concerns in returning to campus. Getting our plan approved by the county health department was a big step forward—now all the stakeholders can work on their specific plans to safely restart research activities as necessary. Graduate and postdoctoral researchers are

important stakeholders and faculty will work with their group to create plans that satisfy everyone's constraints and needs as best as possible.

If you have any questions, we will have a townhall for graduate students and postdocs on June 16th at 1pm (zoom info forthcoming), or you may email graddean@ucmerced.edu.

On behalf of the Research Relaunch Workgroup,

Sam Traina, Vice Chancellor for Research

Marjorie Zatz, Vice Provost and Graduate Dean

Deborah Motton, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research

Michael Scheibner, Chair of the Committee on Research

Josh Viers, Associate Dean for Research, School of Engineering

Chris Kello, Associate Dean of the Graduate Division