March 9, 2020

Dear Graduate Students,

Earlier today, the University issued new guidance in response to COVID-19 that will impact graduate students in their various roles as learners, teachers, and researchers. In particular, all courses, including graduate courses, must move to an online format beginning the week after spring break and until at least April 5th. I’m writing now to provide you with additional information regarding the next steps we are taking to ensure the health and safety of our community.

The McGraw Center, in consultation with the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School and the Office of the Dean of the College, has developed a website that provides strategies during periods of disruption for courses (including graduate courses), direct instruction, and communications with students conducting research. Faculty have been directed to consult this website, and we want to make sure you are aware of it as well.

Additionally, faculty have been instructed that they should accommodate any graduate students serving as AIs (Assistants in Instruction) who this week may need to begin teaching remotely because of special medical concerns. For graduate students serving as ARs (Assistants in Research), labs are asked to adopt best practices concerning social distancing. The expectation is that research will continue at this time, although lab practices may need to be adjusted. ARs with special medical concerns should be accommodated. The steps the University is taking will not impact your funding. Additional information about research continuity has been sent to all PIs by the Dean for Research and is attached here for your reference. The Dean for Research will be hosting virtual town halls on March 11 and March 12. Information about them can be found in the attachment.

All on-campus events are discouraged at this time, and large events scheduled before April 5th must be canceled or postponed. Where small gatherings continue, members of the University community are asked to practice social distancing.

As necessary, the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will work closely with staff in departments and programs to accommodate and approve any Ph.D. general exams and Final Public Oral (FPO) exams that may need to be offered by videoconference.

The University is not able to approve or support international travel at this time, and we also currently recommend against domestic travel by air or train. Graduate students who are studying or conducting research in absentia are in most cases best served by remaining in place; if such graduate students must
travel, they should communicate their plans to their department or program and update their Concur registration.

All graduate students are asked to continue to monitor the University’s Emergency Management website dedicated to COVID-19 response and guidelines. University Health Services (UHS) remains open and available to you. We recognize that some students may be experiencing anxiety or stress related to concerns for themselves, family, or friends. Please remember the many campus resources available to support you, including Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) and the Office of Religious Life chaplains. CPS, like all of UHS, is open and available if you need support; students may call (609) 258-3141 to arrange an appointment with a counselor or schedule an initial consultation through myUHS. Virtual CPS counseling sessions are being offered as well.

Staff members within the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School are also here to assist you in whatever ways we can, and we encourage you to reach out to relevant staff if we can be of assistance. Please bear in mind that Graduate School staff are also practicing social distancing and seeking to move interactions online where possible, and so we appreciate your patience and flexibility as we work to support you.

Sincerely,
SJL
From: Pablo Debenedetti, Dean for Research
Robin Izzo, Executive Director, Environmental Health and Safety
To: The Princeton Research Community
Re: COVID-19 planning for research continuity

As President Eisgruber noted in his recent letters, cooperative planning is key to protecting our community and minimizing disruptions due to COVID-19. The dean of the faculty and vice president for human resources shared in their March 5 letter that further communication regarding research operations and facilities would be coming. With this memo, we are asking all Principal Investigators and directors of laboratory facilities to develop contingency plans for their own labs and offering some guidance for doing so. We also invite all members of the research community to participate in upcoming virtual town hall meetings to learn more about University planning and to ask questions.

While the course of the COVID-19 situation remains unpredictable, we have seen a range of actions play out around the globe, including closures of universities and quarantining of groups of people. Disruptions on our campus have been limited so far, but now is the time to think through the impact of such scenarios on your research operations.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the event of staff shortages, shut-downs of specific buildings, or closing of the entire campus, the University will make every effort to maintain essential services to research buildings, such as power, heating and cooling, and information technology. In addition, Laboratory Animal Resources and Environmental Health and Safety will maintain critical functions. It follows that people responsible for these essential operations will be stretched further than usual and will thus have essentially no ability to help support research within individual labs. In addition, general support services such as maintenance may be delayed.

Faculty who lead research groups and facilities are responsible, and best-positioned, for planning how to operate smoothly in a disrupted environment or how to safely curtail research. In particular, we urge you to think through how you would cope with a lack of people who can physically be in your lab and disruptions in supplies of materials you need to run your labs. Part of good planning will be to establish clear communications and roles within your group for addressing these questions.

Planning Scenarios

While it's impossible to predict exactly what to plan for, it could be useful to consider disruptions that last two weeks or more, across a few general scenarios:

- What can you do to implement social distancing in your research? What would it take to stagger work times in the lab, increase distances between people to six feet or more for extended work times, or find alternatives to write-up spaces in close quarters?
- What would you do if just your group or building were quarantined or unable to come to work?
- What would you do if the entire campus were closed (except for maintenance of essential services as listed above)?
- What supplies are critical to your operations and how can you best protect against disruptions in the availability of those materials?
- What changes would be required in your operations if core facilities and other fee-for-service resources, such as clean rooms or machine shops, were not available?
In thinking through these questions, you might further consider:

- How would you organize a system where you were allowed to send an individual person, one at a time, into the lab to perform essential functions? Such functions might include research animal monitoring and care, cell culture maintenance, or equipment maintenance. (One lab, for example, reported using a Google calendar to organize and communicate visits.)
- How would you assign such roles?
- How would you communicate needs within the group (Slack channels, email, etc)?
- Are there areas of cross-training that could be organized in your lab, making your operations more robust?
- Are there people in other lab groups, separated enough that they might not be affected by a quarantine in just your group or building, who could help maintain critical operations in your lab?
- Are there cell lines or tissues that could be preserved by freezing? If so, how long would it take to do so?
- How long would it take to shut down equipment and experiments? Have you documented the safest and most expeditious procedures for doing so?
- Are there remote control monitoring devices or back-up power supplies that would help maintain critical equipment?
- Even with essentially normal services of electricity and other utilities, brief outages could occur. What special contingencies might arise if such a disruption occurred when your lab was unoccupied?
- Have you reviewed this contingency planning and emergency procedures with all researchers and staff in your group?

In all cases, we urge you to keep the safety of yourselves, your lab group members, and the broader community foremost in your mind. For information on basic safety practices and planning, please see updates and FAQs at the University’s website for COVID-19 information.

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL MEETINGS

We encourage you to join us for one of two virtual town hall meetings -- 4:30 p.m. March 11 or 2:30 p.m. March 12.

Thank you for your care and thoughtful attention to developing contingency plans.