Dornsife College of Letters Arts and Sciences

RESEARCH RESTART PLAN
FOR NON-EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY RESEARCH

This plan is developed in consultation, and adherence with, the following:

COVID-19 guidelines by the CDC, State of California, Cal-OSHA, City of Los Angeles, and USC EH&S, HR, Provost’s office, and DPS

and

USC Guidelines for Resuming Campus Research Operations

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7/1/2020
This document supplements the Dornsife plan for experimental laboratory research already approved by the Operation Restart executive committee.

Plan Stipulations

In order for research to resume, the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences ensures the following requirements have been met and detailed in this document:

1. This college-level plan has been distributed, and communicated to, all researchers, and will be updated as needed.

2. The college approved department-specific research plans that include detailed protocols for physical distancing of all researchers, de-densifying research buildings (as well as marine research vessels, field vehicles, and field camps used for field research) up to the allowable levels of the given phase, disinfectant use, and other cleaning practices in shared spaces. These plans have been reviewed and approved by the school’s department task force committees, department chairs (or section heads in Biological Sciences), and by the appropriate Divisional Dean.

3. All researchers planning to work on campus, or in the community or field, will have completed the required “informed consent to return to work” form provided by the University at the end of the Trojan Learn module prior to returning to campus.

4. All researchers planning to work on campus, or in the community or field, will have completed all TrojanLearn modules relevant to research resumption.

5. All researchers identified by PIs to perform work on campus, or in the community or field, have been told that they cannot return until instructed. They have been informed on the requirement for PPE use and daily TrojanCheck logging.

6. University-approved signage will be posted in school research buildings and areas before research in those buildings can resume.

Risk Mitigation

Each department provides a detailed plan enabling their researchers (faculty, postdoctoral trainees, technical staff, graduate and undergraduate students) to return to campus. These plans include all researchers now wishing to carry out research other than remotely from home - the majority of Dornsife researchers will in fact remain working remotely from home. Plans address how returning faculty and research groups will achieve physical distancing (10 feet strongly preferred, 6 feet minimum) in their labs and offices, avoid any congregation of researchers, how they will monitor compliance and how they will consider specific situations in their buildings (common spaces, kitchens, bathrooms, stairwells, and elevators). Each plan should carry the endorsement of the
department chair. On approval, department chairs are tasked to distribute these plans to all researchers within their department.

To establish or revise a departmental plan, each department chair requests a plan from each principal investigator (a Principal investigator denotes a faculty member who supervises a research group) once they decide to return either to campus or for field- or community- based research. Each plan must include group PPE requirements, names and contact information of all designated researchers, spaces assigned to the PI with square footages, peak and average occupancy, and proposed occupancy during this COVID-19 restart phase. In addition, each PI is required to describe and illustrate how physical distancing will be managed within the research spaces they manage.

If return to research for a faculty member only involves their own access to their office, this can simply be reported by the department chair in the overall department plan.

Human subjects researchers have been directed that, whether conducted on campus or in the community, they must indicate how the safety of research subjects will be protected and must be approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). A check-list of questions (dealing with pre-screening, follow up calls, what PPE will be used in interview, documentation of subjects and how contact tracing would be performed if researcher is later found to be COVID positive) as well as attestations about human-subject based research should be completed by the PI as part of their restart plan. The checklist is available from the dean’s office. The department will review and approve the checklist and individual plan, seek approval from the divisional dean and then the individual protocols demonstrating Dornsife approval should be provided to the IRB.

For field-based research, plans include safe practices when traveling in vehicles (e.g., boats, off-road vehicles). Some groups conducting field-based research will be coordinating with researchers from other institutions. Research plans and risk mitigation strategies will be shared among groups from different institutions prior to deployment to the field. In some cases, a lead institution (e.g., operator of a research vessel) will dictate safety protocols; all researchers will need to follow those minimum requirements. However, where USC’s plans are more stringent, those policies will be adhered to.

Each field research plan is reviewed to ensure that only critical field work on US soil, in US waters, or in international waters will be carried out during phase 2. Only essential post-field work sample processing will be carried out immediately following the return to USC. For this sample processing, the same safety regulations that apply to experimental lab research (PPE, social distancing, disinfection, hygiene) will be followed.

**School research restart coordination structure and process**

The Divisional Deans in Dornsife are coordinating research-return plans in each of their areas of scholarship. For the Natural Sciences and Mathematics, this is Stephen Bradforth (Physical Sciences and Math) and Jan Amend (Life Sciences). Peter Mancall is Divisional Dean for Humanities and currently Interim Divisional Dean for Social Sciences.

For the *Natural Sciences* departments, a task force structure was established for the phase 2A experimental restart phase. These same task forces are being used to evaluate returning PI computational/data plans (Chemistry, Physics, Quantitative Biology, Earth Sciences) and field research plans (Earth Sciences, Human and Evolutionary Biology, Marine and Environmental Biology). For those departments without experimental research activity, *i.e.*, Mathematics and Psychology, the department chairs are responsible for reviewing all PI plans.
For the **Social Science and Humanities** departments and institutes, department chairs or institute directors are responsible for the review of plans for researchers wishing to return to campus.

The review and approval process includes checking how physical distancing was practically achieved in each PI plan and how PPE was being made available. Where necessary revisions are requested prior to approval. Department chairs provide to their divisional dean copies of all PI plans, a summary table, and a document describing how their review and approval were carried out. For faculty only requesting access to their offices, this should be denoted in the overall department plan. The appropriate Divisional Dean reviews each departmental report, the individual PI plans as appropriate, the proposed research activity level and physical-distancing guidelines used. In complex cases, the Divisional Dean meets via Zoom with a task force and department chair to discuss and fully understand the plan. A formal memo is issued approving each departmental plan.

Departments are required to identify and assign a **workplace coordinator** who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and the potential impact on the workplace. Until such assignment is provided to the Divisional Dean, it will be assumed that the department chair or section head has that responsibility. This individual will work with the building coordinators defined below and in Appendix B.

Each Divisional Dean will receive a bi-weekly report and meet with building monitors as necessary to review infractions and to understand what enforcement actions have been applied. The Divisional Deans will also meet with their department chairs (or section heads in Life Sciences) at least monthly over the summer to inquire about issues that have come up, and to share best practices. Reporting of violations, knowledge of new infections, and any serious concerns held by a department chair or section head must be communicated to the appropriate Divisional Dean.

Once research restarts in a department, the local task force (or department chair in departments where task force are not used) will be tasked to

- work with building monitoring teams who will carry out random spot inspections of each lab up to three times weekly (detail in Appendix B).
- verify that disinfection procedures to high-touch surfaces, restrooms and any other shared space are adequately occurring
- perform more specific technical consultations with laboratories where guidance is sought on best practice with specific procedures or to resolve disputes on safe practice.
- perform weekly review, any issues of non-compliance reported from the spot inspections by the building coordinators.
- provide periodic review of guidelines and progress in faculty meetings. Any changes to guidelines and practice should be communicated to the Divisional Dean for approval.

**Behavior Modification and Training**

As part of the required TrojanLearn modules researchers will also have access to EH&S training videos. PIs will be tasked with providing specific instruction to their supervisees of any modified practices that should be used under the research return, for example in field-work or community research.

As part of departmental plan approval, departments must provide updated instructions to PIs that clearly define compliance policies, enforcement actions, and how infractions will be handled (see Appendix C). PIs are encouraged to regularly communicate with their groups the importance of everyone determining to make their research and field experiences as safe as possible, and that sanctions will occur if they do not.
Researcher Consent

Dornsife is describing phase 2 research return as opt-in for its researchers. PI’s are being asked to designate researchers returning to work, and each individual at the end of the TrojanLearn module must provide an informed attestation that they understand the risk of return. No student or postdoc can be compelled to come to campus to perform research or perform community or field research without opting in.

During research phase 1, Dornsife developed a confidential conversational email process to determine a graduate student’s comfort with being on campus, including their transportation plans. It was made clear to a student that if at any later time, they became uncomfortable with coming to campus they were free to contact the Divisional Dean of Natural Science to express that concern.

In phase 2, students and postdocs who do not wish to participate in campus-based, community-based or field-based work do not need to provide a reason for their preference, but their supervisor will need to agree that they can continue to perform required research (data analysis, paper writing, proposal preparation, coordination) remotely. If a supervisor does not agree that a doctoral student can perform their research adequately remotely, each case will be referred to the Dornsife College Dean of Graduate Education. If a supervisor does not agree that a postdoctoral trainee can perform their research remotely, they can contact the Divisional Dean who will consult with Human Resources to understand employment ramifications and work out an appropriate remedy. The Provost's Postdoctoral Scholars office will also be informed.

In phase 3, Faculty, and staff who identify as being at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 due to age or underlying health conditions, or have family members in the “high risk” category, temporary accommodations will be granted to the extent feasible. Staff and faculty with concerns should contact their supervisors, department chairs, HR partners, or deans of faculty. One possible solution for a graduate student who is at higher risk is to request a graduate-school leave of absence.

Building and facilities coordination

In buildings housing multiple departments (or departments from different schools), the chairs of the departments housed in common buildings are to coordinate to address any shared spaces.

Building monitors have been assigned by Dornsife and are managed by Alfonso D’Onofrio, Director Dornsife Architectural Services. These monitors are tasked with random inspections of research spaces in their designated buildings. See Appendix B for the names of coordinators and the structure of inspections.

Elevators – for most elevators, ideally one person should occupy the elevator at a time although university guidelines allow a maximum occupancy of two. Larger freight elevators may be large enough to accommodate 2 or more people using appropriate physical distancing. Researchers should follow signage provided by EH&S.

Bathrooms – occupancy in bathrooms should be limited and should follow signage provided. For example, 1 person will typically be allowed in a 2 stall bathroom at a time. In a larger bathroom, every other stall should be closed. Researchers will be instructed to follow signage posted by EH&S.

Floor and stairs direction will follow signage supplied.
Policies for Discipline-specific research

Archives and Sample Repositories

During Phase 2, principal investigators wishing to access external archives, collections in institutional sample repositories, or other research involving in-community settings that does not involve contact with human subjects, must seek approval from the cognizant Dornsife divisional dean. Investigators are expected to present in their PI plan a description of the safety measures in place at the off-campus sites, and measures that the investigators will take to protect themselves and other individuals at the site.

Libraries

The USC Libraries are actively supporting researchers during time away from campus. The Libraries are providing digital content and physical materials for research. A process for requesting physical materials from the USC Libraries can be found at https://libguides.usc.edu/idd/covid-19

Social Science and Humanities Research

Investigators who expect to have direct interaction with human subjects in community/field settings are expected to abide by the public health guidance/requirements issued by city, state, and other governmental agencies. If the guidance/requirements specify, for example, that a minimum of 6 (or 10) feet must be maintained, that masks are required, that a room that allows for this type of distance is used, that groups no larger than 10 congregate, those would be minimum requirements for human subjects research and a description is expected in a PI’s plan. Investigators must determine if specific infection mitigation practices are in place at each of their community research sites prior to starting/re-starting research, and ensure that appropriate measures can be achieved to protect research personnel as well as human subjects and staff at sites, including highly vulnerable populations (e.g. older adults, persons with health issues).

Revisions to pre-existing IRB documentation is required if IRB approval was previously obtained before the COVID crisis. PIs are expected to complete an attestation as part of their IRB submission process. Principal Investigators have the responsibility for collecting and storing data for the purpose of contact tracing in off-campus community settings in accordance with university protocols. The process by which they will do this is to be indicated in the PI plan and approved by department chairs and the cognizant divisional dean.

Field Work

Field work is an outdoor, off-campus research activity for the purpose of geologic mapping or the collection of samples, specimens, and/or data. It often also includes the use of field stations, research vessels, or other ‘indoor’ structures. For safety reasons, field work usually requires more than one person. It also usually requires the use of a vehicle to reach a field site, many of which are in very remote locations. Examples of field work include, but are not limited to, mapping or sampling a geologic terrane, scuba or snorkel diving in shallow waters, submersible diving in deep waters (not permitted in phase2) and sailing on research vessels. Not included in field work, as the term is used here, are visits to sample repositories, off-campus or non-USC research facilities, libraries, collections (but see above) or any locations in foreign countries.
PIs and departments whose return plans involve fieldwork should request the Field Work checklist from the Dean’s office which covers travel safety, social distancing in travel and field situations, and ask about where individuals will be staying and the form of transportation.
For field work, including time in vehicles, we have allowed 6 feet separation, but only if essential. In some cases, special exemptions may be necessary where field site idiosyncrasies are unavoidable. The Divisional Dean meets with each of the task force leads as well as their department chair/section head to review and approve any exceptional criteria used.

In directions to faculty, it has been made clear that undergraduates cannot be included in field-based research during the summer. All PI plans are reviewed specifically to verify no undergraduate students, or volunteers are included.

As stated above, in phase 2, field-based research is considered an opt-in decision by an individual researcher. A policy where a researcher does not need to explain why they do not wish to participate in field work is designed to protect at-risk and vulnerable individuals and ensure fair treatment. Individuals should work with Dornsife and University Human Relations to understand policies in this area.

EH&S has prepared a Field Research Safety Checklist:
https://ehs.usc.edu/files/Field-Research-Safety-Plan-ff.pdf
Appendix A: Department chairs

Natural Sciences (with non-experimental lab research activities)

Lorraine Turcotte (Biological Science, HEB)
Antoine Bechara (Psychology)
Remo Rohs (Quantitative and Computational Biology)
Stephan Haas (Physics & Astronomy)
James Moffett (Biological Science, MEB)
Frank Corsetti (Earth Sciences)
Surya Prakash (Chemistry)
Eric Friedlander (Mathematics)

Social Sciences

Janet Hoskins, Interim Chair (Anthropology)
Romain Ranciere, Chair (Economics)
Jill Sohm, Interim Director (Environmental Studies Program)
Andrew Simpson, Chair (Linguistics)
Ramzi Rouighi, Chair (Middle East Studies)
Saori Katada, Ann Crigler, Chair/Vice Chair (Political Science and International Relations)
Tim Biblarz, Chair (Sociology)
John Wilson, Inst Director (Spatial Sciences Institute)

Humanities

Kate Flint, Chair (Art History)
John Carlos Rowe, Chair (American Studies and Ethnicity)
Christelle Fischer-Bovet, Chair (Classics)
Erin Graff Zivin, Chair (Comparative Literature)
Brett Sheehan, Chair (East Asian Languages and Cultures)
David St. John, Chair (English)
Margaret Rosenthal, Chair (French and Italian)
Francille Wilson, Interim Chair (Gender and Sexuality Studies)
Roberto Diaz, Interim Chair (Latin American and Iberian Cultures)
Philip Ethington, Chair (History)
Scott Soames/Kadri Vihvelin, Director/Deputy Director (School of Philosophy)
Lori Meeks, Director (School of Religion)
Thomas Seifrid, Chair (Slavic Languages and Literatures)

Brett Sheehan, Ctr Director (East Asian Studies Center)
Lynn Swartz Dodd, Director (Archaeological Research Center)
Vanessa Schwartz, Program Director (Visual Studies Research Institute)
Appendix B: COVID-19 Research Restart Building Monitor Protocol

- ASSIGN BUILDING MONITORS PER APPROPRIATE BUILDING CLUSTERS
  - ACB, SHS – 1 person TBD
  - AHF, PED – Don Bingham
  - HNB – 1 person TBD
  - LHI – Robert Aniszfeld
  - LJS, OCW, SSC, TRF, SGM (Chemistry) - Corey Schultz and Ralph Haiges
  - DNI, SGM (Psychology) – 1 person TBD
  - MCB – Jivin Seward
  - RRI – Rokas Oginskis
  - ZHS – 1 person TBD
  - Wrigley Catalina – Sean Conner
  - KAP - TBD
  - SOS, VKC - TBD
  - THH - TBD
  - MHP - TBD

- MONITORING PROTOCOL
  - Identify series of questions and preprogrammed answers
    - Lab Personnel (compliant/non-compliant/not visible)
      - wearing face masks/coverings
      - remaining a minimum of 6 feet apart.
      - sanitizing common equipment after use.
      - leaving the lab with “lab gloves” on without use of appropriate polyethylene barrier.
      - not washing or sanitizing hands prior to leaving the lab space.
    - Lab Space (yes/no)
      - Ask if adequate PPE available for researchers
      - Ask if adequate disinfectant solution is available
      - Observe if COVID-19 signage is in place

- DEVELOP MONITORING PROTOCOL WEB TOOL
  - Monitors can answer specific questions on website
    - Option requires monitors to have iPads or smartphone
  - Tool has report function on results
    - Maintain database of when buildings visited
    - Shared with USC EH&S

- WEEKLY BUILDING WALKS - Randomized
  - Request guidance from EH&S on frequency (1, 2, or 3 times a week)

- REPORTING
  - Architectural Services gathers the data and transmits any infractions to departmental task force weekly. In addition, reports will be prepared for bi-weekly meetings with the Divisional Deans of Natural Science and Vice Dean of Operations
  - Provide hotline for building monitors to provide concerns anonymously, if it becomes necessary

- TRAINING
  - All building monitors to have both EH&S standard general campus COVID Safety Training as well as Lab Environment training
Appendix C: Safe Workplace Enforcement

Each space approved for research return will be spot check by a staff monitor three times a week. Compliance with all research restart policies will be verified. Failure to comply with guidelines will be reported to the department chair/section head and cognizant Divisional Dean.

If an individual researcher is shown to be out of compliance with the guidelines, the appropriate unit leader will decide on the appropriate sanction. This will be either to give a warning (first and minor violation only) or issue a sanction as follows:

1st offense: Banned from returning to campus, or revocation of field/community privileges, for two weeks

2nd offense: Banned from returning to campus, or revocation of field/community privileges, for a month