

**Q&A Faculty Teams Live Event – Research and Graduate Education
July 23, 2020**

Graduate Assistant/Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant Questions:

Are there restrictions right now for hiring new GRAs or staff technicians for completing research projects?

Externally funded projects with open, budgeted positions can hire GRAs and staff technicians. Because the hiring freeze remains in place generally, these hires will need to follow the approval process put in place by the Provost in April.

A large number of graduate students in the HESA program work in Res Life and Student Life graduate assistantships. I hope that no students will get sick, but if one does, what will that mean for time off? Are GAAs bound to similar sick leave policies as full-time staff? Does the required student quarantine fall under EPSL? I'm concerned about sick graduate students having their pay reduced.

Graduate Advisor Assistantships (GAAs) are similar to Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs). Those in fulltime (20 hr/wk) 9-month appointments have one week of personal days off and those in 12-month appointments have two weeks of personal days off. These days may be used when sick. If a student becomes ill and remains so for longer than their allotted personal days, the Graduate College will work with the program to try to find resources for up to an additional two weeks on a case by case basis. GAAs are not staff positions so EPSL does not apply.

Are GTAs with CDC risk factors allowed to do their teaching remotely?

Any GTA with a work assignment appropriate for doing so can teach remotely with permission of the department/program and the faculty their position supports. A GTA with CDC risk factors should let their program know and negotiate a teaching assignment that could be done remotely.

Can you summarize the requirements for non-lab GTFs who will be coming to campus to teach, use campus resources, etc. (e.g., testing, quarantine, staggered office hours, OSHA training)?

Any graduate student coming to campus for any reason, including to teach, do research, take in person or mixed courses or use facilities (such as the library) must follow all of the state [Safe and Healthy Return to Campus Guidelines](#) including completion of VOSHA training, signing the [Green and Gold Promise](#), wearing a face covering, observing social distancing, washing hands frequently and complying with the Covid-19 testing protocol required of all on campus students.

Clarification on work from home policy for GTAs: Many lab and dept resumption plans include a staggered calendar for the student presence in labs and offices. Does this mean all of these students must file for a work at -home permission for the rest of the time? or is the resumption plan automatic approval?

GTAs should have a thorough understanding of the requirements of their position. Students should get explicit guidance from the faculty or department whose courses they support as to the expectations of the 20 hrs/wk they devote to this activity, whether in person or remotely. We suggest this be provided in writing. There is no requirement of an additional work at home permission for the rest of the time as occurred in spring. That was a change in the activities mid-semester. Note that it's possible the University will need to shut down again. If that happens, new guidance would be issued.

Will GTF students (non-lab GTFs) working remotely be asked to complete a contract similar to what they filled out in the spring?

No. See previous answer.

Will it be permissible for on-campus offices for GTAs (typically shared by 2-3 students) to stagger their use? E.g. can they schedule remote office hours and hold them in their office as long as no other people are physically present? Can they schedule use of their office to study (alone) if they are waiting between in-person teaching or courses?

GTAs (actually, all graduate students) who share an office may need to stagger their use to maintain social distancing. The process and rules for doing that should be set locally. We strongly advise against having any in person office hours; these should be handled remotely.

Would graduate TAs with CDC risk factors fill out the same form as faculty to request to do their TA work remotely?

There will likely be a slightly different form/process. We will send that out when available. But it is a good idea to let your program/faculty know now so you may be able to negotiate a remote assignment.

Would we need permission from the graduate college to allow a GTA to teach a class remotely from out of state if some circumstance made it necessary?

For a domestic student, no. But faculty need to know where the student is, as does payroll since taxes are paid to the state in which they are living in when they do the work. An international student must remain in the Burlington area without explicit permission from OIE.

Will there be help in purchasing technology to help teach remotely (graduate students and faculty). For example, purchasing a touch-screen for easy writing on a virtual whiteboard?

A discussion of needs for remote teaching for GTAs is on-going. Some programs will be providing touch screens such as a Wacom tablet to their TAs. A standard UVM policy is not yet available but it's likely there may be devices that could be shared/rented. More detail will follow.

Graduate Education Questions:

My focus is on graduate education in the classroom. Have the undergraduate requirements been modified for graduate students? What applies? What doesn't apply?

The only difference between undergraduate and graduate requirements is that graduate courses that are in person or mixed may continue in that format after Thanksgiving, while all undergraduate courses must be remote. Final exams for graduate courses that are in person or mixed may be given in person. But note that if an undergraduate student had been given permission to register for the graduate course, then the faculty must provide remote instruction after Thanksgiving and a remote final exam for that undergraduate.

With undergraduates leaving campus at Thanksgiving, is there a similar policy concerning graduate return after the break?

See previous question.

Graduate Clinical Experiences Questions:

Are there guidelines for clinical practica experiences as students work with clients/patients across settings? Thinking about graduate students working in CAPS, at UVMHC, Appletree Bay and the Eleanor Luse Center.

Yes. In collaboration with the Office of General Counsel a subcommittee of the Faculty and Academic Affairs UVMStrong advisory group has prepared a checklist for students entering into a clinical placement along with an agreement for the sites to sign. These documents will be distributed along with a memo providing guidance to academic programs

Graduate Student Questions:

How do graduate students designate the "at home designation" or remote designation in Banner that was referred to? Is there a deadline for them to do this? Where is the policy regarding graduate student exercising a home option available?

A form will be available by August 14th to be turned in to the Graduate College by August 24th. They will be asked to attest that they have only remote course work and no on campus research or teaching activities and that they will not come on campus for any reason other than to go to the Center for Health and Well-Being. When that has been approved, the Graduate College will put the "at home" designation on their Banner record and they will be excused from the Covid-19 testing protocol. Failure to comply with the attestation will be adjudicated through the Center for Student Conduct. Additional information can be found in the [Fall 2020 Learning options for graduate students](#) document sent to students on July 20.

If graduate students are predominantly choosing to/need to work from home, what are the protocols for coming to a campus building only to use a printer/scanner or to use computers labs with more powerful machines than student's own laptops. Essentially, is there a "mostly from home" option?

There is no “mostly from home” option. If they will need access to campus at any time in the semester for any reason other than to visit the Center for Health and Well-Being, they may not select the “at home” option.

Is the Burlington quarantine support program still in existence? Or does UVM have a way to help grad students who are moving here in August survive quarantine for 14 days? (groceries, prescriptions, etc)

Yes, the Burlington support system is still in place but may change as we progress towards opening. Stay up to date with the “What Students need to Know” page linked off the “Fall 2020 Return to Campus” page on the UVM website. If they have special needs, they can reach out to the Graduate College or their graduate program to discuss their needs.

One of my concerns is how we are going to help those students that get sick. Will graduate students get mental health help, additional pay if their symptoms last for extended periods of time? What are we doing for them when they get sick?

We will use protocols already in place for when students get sick. Mental health services are available through the Counseling and Psychiatry Services (CAPS). The Graduate College will liaison between the Center for Health and Well-Being, the Vice Provost and Dean of Students’ office and the student’s faculty to arrange acute accommodation for course work on a case by case basis. If the student is funded by a GTA, GRA, GAA or predoctoral fellowship gets sick the Graduate College will include the funding source in the discussion.

Will graduate students be tested for the virus at the same rate as undergraduate students?

Yes.

Research Questions:

What are the contingencies for research if another shutdown occurs?

The UVMStrong Research and Graduate Education Working Group is developing a set of “Risk Level” requirements that will provide researchers with guidance about what activities and personnel are permitted under different levels of community infection risk. These guidelines cover low, moderate, high, and extreme risk situations. Each risk level will have activities that can and cannot be performed at that level, or personnel exclusions that must take place due to

increased community risk. For example, if risk levels become “high”, undergraduate participation in lab, field, and clinical settings is automatically suspended and all lab/team meetings must be completed remotely. A draft version of these stages is being vetted by a range of campus constituencies and, once completed, will be made public to the UVM community. This will allow researchers to anticipate and plan for changing conditions. A panel of informed stakeholders will meet weekly to determine, based on data from campus, hospital, and state sources, whether to raise/lower/maintain the current risk level. If changes in risk level are required, the campus will be notified and researchers will be required to modulate their activity according to the guidelines. The goal is to avoid a complete shutdown of research under most circumstances by adjusting research activity to a level that matches the risk present in our community.

How often do we need approval for adjusting our lab COVID-related hazard control plan? It seems we are getting new elements and clarifications every week. For example this week we have much more detailed guidelines on the type of masks we can use during close contact work in the lab. Do I need approval to change the mask from an N95 to an ASTM 3?

Researchers should keep their respective dean’s offices apprised of changes and updates to lab safety protocols and plans. Full re-review by the Office of Research is not necessary unless the overall plan is modified substantially. Updated lists of research team members should be provided to the respective dean’s office, and should be updated on the lab safety portal. Issues such as changes in mask type or changes in personnel do not require full re-review.

My understanding is that moving an approved human subjects protocol to implement eConsent requires IRB approval. That is, the change in consent form, requires approval. Is this correct?

All changes to consent procedure require the approval of the IRB, include moving an existing in-person consent process to an electronic/online process.

Has the committee had any discussions of committing UVM resources to helping ensure that contract-based grants (those that require completing deliverables for grant increments to be paid) can be completed, especially when these grants are coming from state agency sponsors and serving our land grant mission? For example, I have two of these grants on which we risk over spending travel funds with required distancing and spending out grad student support without being able to complete contracted tasks. Might a reduced F&A rate, especially while we are using at-home resources to complete work, be something OVPR and central admin would consider to allow us to stretch limited funds and deliver on grant products?

This process will need to be addressed on a case by case basis. Funders may provide some flexibility in how funds are used, and changes in F&A recovery can be discussed as possible options. It is important to approach your dean’s office as soon as it is apparent that such shortfalls will occur. Dean’s offices can reach out to OVPR for guidance and possible assistance in this area.

Graduate student stipends on grants continue to be paid, as they should, even if the research has slowed or stalled; is there any news about potential for relief funding to extend the student's stipend, either governmental or from any grant sponsors, so students can complete their delay theses/dissertations?

At present, graduate stipends can continue provided the GRAs continue to contribute to meeting overall grant goals. There is no provision currently with NIH, NSF or other large federal funding agencies to provide extra funds to GRAs after the end of the budget period and once grant funds are expended. Several federal funding proposals have called for the creation of “with cost extensions” to address this issue, but none of these have been fully approved by congress or federal agencies. Researchers should update their respective deans and the dean of the graduate college on those cases where it appears graduate students will run out of funding for their GRA positions prior to completing the work required by the project (and/or necessary for the completion of their degree).

If one's research is interviews done REMOTELY, does one need pandemic approval to commence that research, or just go ahead as long as you've passed IRB?

Remote-only human subjects research that has received IRB approval can continue/resume under current circumstances and will likely be allow to continue even if additional restrictions to campus based activities occur.

What are the protocols for when a task/job requires closer than sixfoot proximity. Things that might require multiple sets of hands for instance.

At our currently level of COVID-19 risk (we are in a “low risk” environment at the moment), projects that involved intentional physical contact can continue provided clinical guidelines for safe operation (described in the lab safety plan) have been approved and there is an IRB approval in place. If risk conditions worsen, such activity may be suspended even while other “socially distant” research activities are allowed to continue.

Undergraduate Research Questions:

For undergraduate research, as long as everything is being done remotely (e.g., interviews on teams) and passes IRB, is the research good to go ahead without any additional permissions?

IRB approved human subjects research that is carried out remotely is approved to resume, provided that the procedure used is the same one that was approved by the IRB. Projects transitioning from in-person research to remote forms of interviewing much notify the IRB of the change and submit a change request.

How should I handle requests for new undergrads to get their research careers started by working in my LCOM lab for credit?

Lab access is a PI / Lab Director decision. Undergraduate research is critical to our educational mission and is encouraged. Undergraduates who have decided to resume in person classes (i.e. they have not chose the “fully remote” option for the semester) can be readmitted to labs at present. PIs interested in hosting undergraduate researchers or overseeing undergraduate research projects should obtain approval from their dean’s office and maintain an updated list of all URA lab participants.