

May 19, 2020

Restarting On-Premises Research, Scholarly and Creative Activities at Western

On May 1, the Governor announced an [extension of the “Stay Home Stay Healthy” directive through May 31](#), along with a [4-phased process to reopen the State](#). Research, scholarship and creative activities (“research”) are core missions of the University and can help contribute solutions to some of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus while speeding recovery after the pandemic. Over the coming months Western’s research programs will begin ramping up again as phased restrictions are gradually lifted. Stringent requirements will remain in place to ensure workplace safety, and changes will happen cautiously and gradually. We will continue to monitor public health guidance closely and, should conditions require it, research activities will be scaled back down.

Through June 14th Western will continue to operate under [current guidelines](#). During this period, a limited range of on-premises research activities may occur on Western’s Bellingham campus, upon [approval](#) of custom hygiene, safety and access plans within the context of this [decision tree](#). On-premises research activities at Western’s other locations follows guidance from our host institutions.

After June 14th, as Washington State transitions to later stages of the Governor’s [“Safe Start” plan](#), the University will begin moving to a broader phased approach that will apply to all areas of research, scholarship and creative activities, inclusive of activities beyond the narrow scope currently allowed. This approach will guide which researchers may return to worksites and under what conditions they may return. It will also align with the Governor’s 4-phase approach, and the University’s broader planning.

Within the ICS structure a group is developing a toolkit to assist researchers and programs in developing transition plans for a gradual resumption of on-premises research activities. We hope to have this toolkit ready near the end of this month. The aim is to provide guidance to researchers and programs on how to prioritize resumption of activities, resources for creating plans to ensuring a safe working environment for both researchers and support staff, and approval processes. It is a complex task with numerous intersecting pieces.

An important question at this stage is what to expect for summer. Although many aspects cannot be known with certainty at this point, broadly speaking, we expect that once we enter Phase 2 of the Governor’s plan and after June 14th a wider range of on-premises activities will begin to become possible. Social distancing and other prophylactic measures will continue to be required, limiting the number of individuals who can occupy a given space, and requiring other restrictions. Daily health screenings, reporting of suspected COVID-19 exposure, self-quarantine requirements and PPE such as face coverings may be required in some circumstances. These limitations may require extending work hours to accommodate occupancy limits and prioritizing of activities. Significant limitations on human subjects research are likely to [remain in place](#) During Phase 2. We do not yet know about fieldwork or research-related travel. As is currently the case, in Phase 2, core facilities such as Scientific Technical Services as well as centralized support groups such as Environmental Health and Safety, Research and Sponsored Programs, Public Safety and Custodial Services will continue to support approved activities, though certain services may remain limited. Most buildings on Western’s Bellingham campus are expected to remain locked. In Phase 2, many researchers who can work remotely should plan to continue to do so. No one can be pressured to carry out on-site research if they are concerned about their safety, the safety of others, or if they have home-care obligations. Your HR representative can help you with any difficult situations in that regard.

As the University begins planning for a gradual resumption of on-premises research, scholarly and creative activities, health and safety concerns will remain paramount. We will continue working to provide as much guidance and support as possible to aid researchers and programs in their planning, with more specific guidance expected near the end of the month.

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