

Dear Members of the UNE Research Community,

The Office of Research and Scholarship (ORS), including the Office of Sponsored Programs and the Office of Research Integrity, are available to help researchers in their research endeavors during the pandemic. We must remember that it is vitally important that we work to lower the risk of infection in our community by promoting social distancing and limiting the size of community gatherings. Therefore, we need to severely reduce the number of face-to-face interactions among our faculty, students, and professional staff and find new ways to pursue our research goals during the pandemic.

We understand that your research is important and a valuable part of our students' academic experience. During this time, we urge you to work on productive alternatives to face-to-face work, such as writing grant proposals, writing thesis chapters, analyzing data and synthesizing scholarly output. Faculty should communicate often with their students and professional staff via phone or electronic means to help them feel connected and informed and to help them create alternative plans for staying productive and engaged, especially when they are working remotely.

ORS is collaborating with faculty and their chairs and deans to create Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPS) to address reductions in operations and staffing for the coming weeks. Research PIs should think about what steps need to be put in place for their specific teams in the event that research operations need to be significantly reduced over the next few weeks. These plans should be complete by March 20 to help facilitate implementation and communication.

I know that these are unsettling times for all of us. Thank you for your commitment to your students, your research, and the UNE Community. I also want to thank you for your ongoing collaboration as we strive to address emerging needs and public health concerns during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Houseknecht, Ph.D.
Associate Provost for Research and Scholarship

For specific information relating to University-wide issues and policies, please refer to the UNE COVID-19 website: <https://www.une.edu/alerts>

For research-specific guidance, please see the following information. This information will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Research Facilities/Laboratories

Research facilities and laboratories. In an effort to optimize social distancing, buildings on our UNE campuses will be open/operating under reduced hours, which will be announced soon. **Please check the UNE COVID-19 website regularly for updates on university operations.** Only approved personnel, identified by COOP documents, will have access to these facilities during the pandemic. Time on campus and in the lab should be restricted to essential activities, and the minimal number of individuals should be used. If multiple individuals need to continue on-site work, they should stagger their times and/or practice social distancing to the greatest extent possible. Only those students who are absolutely essential to the project and/or are graduate students performing critical work on their own thesis research will be approved to be on campus and in the research spaces. The approval process for students on campus is described, below. As always, questions relating to laboratory safety should be directed to the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (Ronnie Souza, director EHS, rsouza@une.edu).

Research Involving Animals

IACUC-approved disaster plans for all vertebrate animal research are in place for the University of New England. Animal husbandry staff are working to maintain care of vertebrate animals according to these protocols with the intention of maintaining animal colonies during the pandemic. The IACUC and attending veterinarian are available to answer questions and concerns relating to animal care, as per our usual protocols. Emergency planning for each project and protocol should be adjusted to the potential for months of impact rather than days or weeks. Questions and issues relating to animal research should be directed to the Office of Research Integrity (Ivy Bergquist, Research Integrity Administrator, ibergquist@une.edu).

Research Involving Human Subjects

Given the current COVID-19 outbreak, **human subjects research must be paused** for any project involving face-to-face interaction. This is due to the risk of viral transmission and ethical principles of research and federal regulations for the protection of human research participants. ***These risks must be assessed for each protocol.*** Assessment for this purpose will be conducted by IRB Chair Mary DeSilva (mdesilva1@une.edu) in collaboration with Research Integrity Officer Karen L. Houseknecht (khouseknecht@une.edu).

In general, all studies involving in-person contact with participants or participant travel for research purposes must be paused, effective immediately. Research interactions that do not involve in-person contact or clinical or medical interventions, such as telephone or electronic surveys, or projects involving secondary data analysis, may continue.

Temporary restrictions involving human subjects research are required. Please address questions to the IRB Chair or RIO.

Undergraduate Student Research

Undergraduate research and scholarship is a vital part of the UNE educational experience. At this time, undergraduate research conducted on site in UNE laboratories and related facilities is suspended in order to encourage social distancing. Scholarship that can be conducted online or remotely may continue at this time. Some exceptions may be made for students involved in crucial research that cannot be paused or accomplished by other means. These exceptions need to be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis. The PI and student should petition their department head or program director, and, if the request is approved, it then needs to be reviewed and approved by the appropriate dean and then by the Provost's Office.

Graduate Student Research

Research is a critical part of graduate students' training. However, we want to minimize risk of exposure to COVID-19 for graduate students. Requests for graduate student access to campus facilities will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Faculty wishing to continue utilizing graduate students should refer requests to your department chair or program director for case-by-case consideration. If they approve, it then needs to be reviewed and approved by the appropriate dean and finally by the Provost's Office.

Grant Proposal Submission and Award Management

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) continues to provide its core services during this period. Staff continue to be available, either on site or remotely, to review and approve proposals and perform electronic proposal submission to funding agencies. Accounts will continue to be set up on new awards, as needed. Refer to individual funding agencies' websites regarding deadline extensions and/or guidance regarding post-award spending, extensions, and flexibilities. Grant-related questions during this period may be directed to the director of Research Administration, ngere@une.edu.

Research Funding

Federal funding agencies anticipate significant disruption of research operations due to COVID-19. Guidance is beginning to emerge relating to all aspects of this, including grant submission and review as well as supplemental funding and extensions relating to the pandemic. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) have issued information at the links below. We anticipate similar guidance from other agencies that fund research at UNE. Please coordinate any communication to a sponsor with OSP. Possible reasons to contact a sponsor might include: inability to conduct fieldwork because of travel restrictions, mandatory closures, or personnel shortage; inability to meet the scheduled deliverables or aims/goals/SOW; or absence of PI or key person from the project for more than 90 days.

<https://grants.nih.gov/faqs#/covid-19.htm?anchor=question55753>

https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/covid19/covid19faqs_proposerandawardee.pdf

<https://www.cogr.edu/faqs-regarding-covid-19s-impact-federal-awards-additional-information>