

Georgia State University Research Task Force

RETURN TO CAMPUS PLAN

**Michael Eriksen, Task Force Chair
Interim-Vice President for Research
& Economic Development
Submitted May 11, 2020**

Georgia State University
Return to Work Plan
Research Task Force
May 11, 2020

Georgia State University has a growing, diverse and vibrant research portfolio. Research awards have doubled over the last five years and research expenditures have exceeded \$200 million for the last two years. FY20 was on pace to be the highest year ever in terms of research awards, and then COVID-19 occurred. In March 2020, we “ramped down” our on-campus research activities, encouraging all researchers possible to continue their research remotely and off-campus. For laboratory and other research that had to be conducted on-campus, we initiated an ‘essential researcher” program where Colleges recommended which researchers were required to stay on campus (and thus deemed essential) corresponding to a number of criteria, some of which were conducting coronavirus research, preserving cell lines and organism well-being, etc. As a result of this research ramp-down effort, all non-essential researchers left campus and continued their research remotely, including the majority of laboratory researchers, with a small fraction of researchers remaining on campus.

We are now at the point of fully re-opening the research enterprise and allowing faculty to return to campus in a safe, planned and phased manner. There are a number of principles that will guide our “return to work” plan, guided by the recommendations of the Research Task Force, appointed by President Becker.

As we plan to return to work, the following **principles** guide our recommendations:

- The **safety and welfare of all faculty, staff and students is of the highest priority.** COVID-19 mitigation guidelines provided by the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should be followed.
- Research activities should **continue to be conducted remotely whenever possible.** Research activities that return to campus should be based on explicit criteria such as the need to access specialized laboratory or computational equipment that cannot be accessed otherwise
- Return to work **plans will be developed by Departments and Colleges** and submitted to the Research Task Force and the Vice President for Research for review, and forwarding to the university Re-Opening Coordinating Committee, chaired by the President, for approval.
- A major goal of our return to work strategy is to **reduce the density of faculty, staff and students in research areas.** This can be accomplished by following social distancing guidelines, phasing-in the periods for returning to work (based on Departmental and College priorities) and considering other density-reducing strategies such as scheduling

researchers to work in shifts and determining work that previously was done on campus, but can be done equally as well remotely.

- To the extent possible, follow the recommendations from GPH and CDC to determine proper return-to-work schedules and will endeavor to be consistent with the phased-approach outlined by the White House Coronavirus Task Force. Thus, frequent diagnostic testing and monitoring absence patterns will be essential in determining the timing of return to work. In consultation with state and local health departments, if local pandemic parameters do not improve, or if a surge of infection is detected, the previously enacted “ramp-down” procedure (i.e., identifying essential researchers) will be reinstated.

In accordance with these **principles**, Departments and Colleges will develop a plan for researchers to return to work with the following elements:

- With the goal of reducing density and acknowledging the need of certain faculty to be back on campus (based on need access specialized equipment, etc.), **identify researchers that need to return to campus in the first wave of return**. While not necessarily corresponding to official public health phasing recommendations, plan for one-third of researchers that need access to campus to return by June 1, one-third by July 1, and one-third by August 1. In completing this plan, encourage faculty that can conduct research remotely, to continue to do so.
- In order to **monitor compliance** with efforts to reduce density in research environments, consider a process of requiring research employees to complete a log when entering research facilities, or monitor swipe card data when appropriate.
- With the goal of providing optimal health and safety conditions, **describe the procedures for complying with GPH and CDC public health guidelines** regarding social distancing, hand hygiene and the use of PPE, including how these practices will be monitored, communicated and encouraged.
- For the purposes of protecting human subjects, **limit all human subject research and encourage non face-to-face contact whenever possible**. When face-to-face human subject must occur, all GPH and CDC mitigation and safety directions must be followed. Please consult the GSU Office for the Protection of Human Subjects for additional guidance.
- Consider requiring an **online training course** of all research personnel to assure understanding of plan elements, particularly density control efforts, remote work schedules and exposure mitigation recommendations.

In summary, Departments and Colleges should encourage their faculty, students, postdocs, and staff to **work remotely whenever possible** and to **stay home if they feel sick or live with someone who is sick**. However, for work that can only be completed on campus, researchers must adhere to the guidelines below for the safety of everyone on campus. **Faculty are responsible for ensuring their staff and students who are working on their research projects on campus follow all recommended safety guidelines** including, but not limited to, the following actions:

1. Maintain social distancing (six feet or more) between individuals. Alternate work schedules as much as possible when working in labs and other common spaces.
2. Wear masks as possible (cloth masks are acceptable).
3. Wash hands frequently throughout the day.
4. Clean/disinfect commonly used lab equipment and high-touch surfaces immediately after use or at least daily.
5. Avoid touching common surfaces and when it cannot be avoided, wash hands immediately afterward.
6. Avoid touching one's face after touching unclean surfaces.