

Guidelines for Graduate and Professional Students in Research and Creative Spaces at MU

As the campus reopens for classes for the 2020 Fall Semester, graduate and professional students and their faculty mentors/PIs/supervisors need to be aware of additional protocols and requirements for students working in research facilities and areas.

Often research and creative spaces, including centers and core facilities, are in confined areas where social distancing is difficult, and in some cases, not possible. We want to make sure graduate and professional students (hereafter referred to as students) are aware of the precautions faculty mentors/PIs/supervisors and chairs/directors of departments or centers have put into place to keep faculty, staff, and students safe. Additionally, students may need to visit common research facilities and interact with other researchers outside of their own team and need to know the protocols. Some research areas have capacity limitations, and the director needs to know how many people are approved to work to ensure that the density of personnel does not exceed the maximum capacity at any given time. Directors/department chairs, building coordinators, and research center/core facility directors need to know who is working in their research areas for critical communication with students, staff, and faculty.

All students doing work in research facilities and creative spaces are required to complete the [Return to Work form](#) on eCompliance and receive formal approval before working on campus. This includes students registered for research credit, including independent studies that may involve research or creative works; students receiving a stipend, salary, or research scholarship/fellowship; and students who are volunteering. Research areas and facilities are defined as laboratories, research work rooms, creative spaces, interview rooms, and other facilities where faculty-mentored and independent student scholarship occurs.

Students should first contact their faculty mentors/PIs/supervisors prior to going into any research or creative workspace. Students should then discuss social distancing policies and safety procedures specific to their research/creative work area. Some areas are operating on a shift system where team members are assigned to certain days and times so as not to exceed capacity of the space. Please take into consideration additional safety concerns when discussing the ability to work “after hours.”

When students have been verbally approved by their faculty mentor to work in a designated space, students will need to complete the [Request to Return to Work Authorization form](#) found on eCompliance, which will then be officially approved by the faculty member and either the department chair or center/core facility director, as appropriate. Please keep in mind additional information and approvals may be needed if students work in multiple locations (e.g., a wet lab and a satellite greenhouse). Students must use their MU email and password to gain access to the on-line form.

When students receive an email from MU RESEARCH eCompliance indicating on-site work authorization has been approved, that email should be forwarded to their faculty mentor/PI/supervisor and the students may then begin working in the approved space, following the work schedule and safety procedures agreed upon with their mentor/PI/supervisor.

Students may continue to conduct aspects of their research or creative work that can be conducted from home (e.g., literature searches, data analysis, writing, artwork) while approval is being processed.

Additionally, students must complete both

- [student training](#), and
- [employee training](#)

Recommendations and Reminders for Students and their Faculty Mentors

Students should read and follow all guidelines outlined in [MU Research and Creative Activities Restart Plan](#). Guidelines include maintaining a 6-foot distance and wearing a face covering (or mask, depending on what is required for particular spaces) when moving from location-to-location and in common research or creative spaces. It is especially important to remember social distancing protocols and sanitation when entering and using a facility utilized by multiple teams.

While there may be times that students need to enter a research or creative space not affiliated with their own team, it should only be for research or creative purposes or use of resources. Gathering for social interaction with peers or other scholars is not encouraged. Additionally, only students and staff authorized to be in research or creative spaces should enter those spaces. Friends and family members are not permitted to visit these areas.

Students who have permission to work in research or creative areas are expected to follow an outlined protocol to keep themselves and others in their team safe. Additionally, social distancing behavior outside of the space is just as important to maintaining the safety of others as it is inside the space.

Engaging with research mentors/Pis/supervisors and others on a research or creative team is an important part of the academic experience and socialization as a scholar. While social distancing policies are in place, face-to-face meetings are difficult. Students are encouraged to meet with faculty mentors/Pis/supervisors and their colleagues virtually (e.g., Zoom, Teams, email, telephone), rather than in person. Students should set up and attend regular meetings with their faculty mentor, PI/supervisor, as well as attend team meetings with their research or creative team. Students are encouraged to set up their own regular virtual meeting time with research peers to support each other's progress, share tips, and maintain social connections and networking. Research teams or smaller groups may wish to set up a weekly virtual coffee break or lunch to take the place of daily casual conversations that are no longer possible.

Additionally, students who need to visit with a faculty member who has their office inside a research area (e.g., one needs to walk through a research lab to get to an office) should only do so after making an appointment and confirming that they will be able to meet at least 6-feet apart. There are offices where this is not possible and alternate arrangements should be made. Students waiting to see a faculty member should not congregate in hallways or research or creative spaces, unless a specific area has been designated for this purpose. In general, most individual meetings will take place virtually. "Dropping in" in person unannounced for faculty office hours is not encouraged.

Everyone in the Mizzou community is expected to take proactive steps. It is important to maintain at least a 6-foot distance in classrooms, corridors, laboratories, studios, recreation areas, common spaces, elevators, stairwells, and social settings. Face coverings need to be worn at all times when there is the chance of encountering someone, which includes all common areas and when walking through hallways. Frequent sustained (20 seconds) hand washing with soap (preferable) or hand sanitizer will minimize the risk of picking up the virus from a surface and transferring it to your face. In addition, monitoring personal health and staying home if feeling unwell is crucial to protect the safety of our entire community.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I filled out an eCompliance form this summer and it was approved. Do I need to reapply for approval?

A: No. However, if you are switching to a new faculty mentor/PI/supervisor and/or work site, you should update your eCompliance form and add that information.

Q: I am in a program that requires lab rotations. Do I need to get approval for every research setting?

A: Yes. You should update your eCompliance form each time you are preparing to rotate labs.

Q: I have been hired to do routine tasks for a research group and will be working in a research area (e.g., watering plants, coding data on a lab computer). It is not my own research. Do I still need to complete an eCompliance form?

A: Yes

Q: My research involves computer analysis that can only be done in an office on campus (e.g., using a restricted data set) with my mentor. I do not work in a lab. Do I need to complete an eCompliance form?

A: Yes. The space you work in is considered to be research space and falls under the responsibility of your faculty mentor or a research center. The Return to Work Authorization Form is not just for work in science laboratories.

Q: I am a GTA and have a desk in my department. I am not required to conduct my research or creative activities at that desk. Do I need to complete an eCompliance form?

A: No. Your department will know that you have been assigned a desk. Although you may use that desk to conduct some of your scholarly work, you are not required to be in that space in order to participate in research or creative work activities. Graduate student designated spaces on campus for TAs likely have protocols for using them, and you should refer to those expectations in order to occupy the space.

Q: I am able to conduct my research virtually and only need to use the library to do my project. Do I need to complete an eCompliance form?

A: No. If you are not doing work in a designated research or creative works space, you do not need approval. If you have questions, please talk with your faculty mentor.

Q: I have completed the student COVID training on Canvas. Must I also complete the [employee COVID training](#)?

A: Yes. There are a few modules that are similar in both trainings; however, there are also important differences that are critical to understand based upon the nature of your responsibilities at any given time.

Q: How is the eCompliance Form different than employee training?

A: The eCompliance Form is specific to your situation, includes your faculty mentor/PI/supervisor in planning a safety protocol, and provides a method for the University to know who is working in research and creative areas. The training modules are designed to ensure that all members of the campus community understand the health and safety policies, guidance, and procedures to facilitate a safe return to campus.

Q: I am trying to find a research team to join. Do I need to fill out an eCompliance form before visiting with a potential mentor and touring the research or creative space in person?

A: No. However, you must make an appointment with the faculty mentor ahead of time and follow all safety guidelines. Once a faculty mentor has agreed to take you on as a student you must complete the eCompliance form before beginning in-person.

Q: A faculty member has encouraged me to shadow someone working in the research or creative space before committing to a project. Must I fill out an eCompliance form and get approval first?

A: Yes. Sustained presence in a research or creative space needs to be documented for building density regulations, tracking, and general safety assurances.

Q: My faculty mentor/PI/supervisor is willing to approve me to work in the research or creative space; however, for personal reasons I do not feel comfortable doing so. What are my options?

A: Students are not required to work in research or creative sites if they believe their own health is at risk. In some cases, students may be able to work out arrangements for alternate research and scholarly projects that may be completed at home. However, some projects may require in-person work—in the cases of voluntary, for-credit arrangements, or student employment (excluding assistantships) students may need to opt out of the experience for the semester, which may result in withdrawing from a course or no longer receiving a salary. Students are encouraged to explore options with their faculty mentor, research program coordinator, advisor, or director of graduate studies. In some cases, it may be possible to reassign the student to an activity that does not require in-person work. However, graduate assistantship stipends should be honored, unless the student is dismissed for cause (and unrelated to COVID concerns). In order for their health insurance coverage to continue to be subsidized by the University, a student must continue to receive their stipends.

Q: I collect my data/conduct my research or creative activities off campus. Will I be allowed to do so?

A: Please talk with your faculty mentor/PI/supervisor about issues involved in conducting work off campus, especially if it is at a non-University site.

Q: I need to drive to get to my research site. Are there special recommendations I must follow?

A: Yes, you should drive yourself, or if that is not possible, wear a face covering in a shared vehicle and sit far apart.

Q: My mentor/PI/supervisor has suggested we meet off campus at a coffee shop to review my work face-to-face. Is this ok?

A: Meetings with research team members should occur virtually or maintaining a 6 foot, masked social distancing protocol. Meeting off campus to avoid university safety recommendations is not encouraged. As an MU student you have the right to decline this type of meeting and offer to meet virtually instead.

Q: I notice other research team members are not practicing safe behavior. What should I do?

A: If you are not comfortable reminding them, you should speak with your faculty mentor/PI/supervisor who can address this situation. Persistent concerns can be reported confidentially or anonymously on the [Health and Safety Concern](#) form and/or brought to the attention of the director/chair.

Q: I noticed that a research personnel from another lab are crowding a common space that I need to use, and I do not feel safe entering that area to do my work. What can I do?

A: Talk with your mentor/PI/supervisor first so that they can talk with the chair or center/facility director. If you wish to report this beyond your mentor, you can make a report on the [Health and Safety Concern](#) form.