**University at Buffalo: Research Ramp-up Plan**

UB’s researchers are passionate about their work and about the university. Thanks to our Principal Investigators, UB conducts premier research, attracts signature talent, leverages federal grant funding, and transacts licensing and technology transfer, all of which are critical to our position as a top-tier research university. They, like all of us, anxiously but cautiously await the ability to return to their work on campus.

It is in the same spirit that UB labs and research facilities closed – that of maintaining the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff – that they will eventually reopen. However, while the closure of non-essential research facilities occurred seemingly overnight, the same will not be true as we ramp up research activities at UB.

To that end, we intend to gradually increase research activity in a phased-in manner as state and local safety restrictions become more permissive. It is likely that research activities may be among the earliest to resume on campus. UB’s Research Ramp-up process and progression through the phases will be determined by the UB President and the Vice President for Research & Economic Development, at the direction of the governor and SUNY Chancellor.

**Essential Guiding Principles in Our Planning:**

1. Follow the cognizant Local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives regarding social distancing and public travel.

It is fair to expect that there will be intermediate phases of increased allowable activity between essential activity and a full return to normal. These intermediate phases will each last a minimum of two weeks with the additional possibility of returning to more restricted activity if infection rates rise.

1. Protect the health and safety of the research workforce and our human research subjects.

Consider that safety within research spaces must be rigorously maintained and monitored, travel and field research may require special consideration, and all faculty and staff should continue to work remotely when possible. Researchers should plan for uncertainty as to when return to research spaces will be safe.

1. Minimize the disruption to ongoing research, thereby allowing PIs to implement research activities in ways that are consistent with their timelines and responsibilities to funding entities.

PIs are required to prepare detailed plans outlining safe return of research in their groups. Such plans will be submitted to Department Chairs and the responsible Associate Dean of Research (ADR) for approval prior to restart of activities.

1. Protect the careers of trainees and early stage researchers that are especially vulnerable to a prolonged shutdown.

Consider priority to those with time constraints: to complete degrees, with term appointments (e.g. post-docs), tenure or career reviews, and visa restrictions.

1. Protect undergraduate students in particular from unnecessary risks associated with returning to research activities.
2. Implement a fair and transparent process that ensures as rapid a research restart as the public health conditions permit.

Establish social distancing and density limitation guidelines for different kinds of research space. (e.g. biological sciences labs vs. social science or arts and music creative spaces).

1. Ensure as rapid a research start as public health and safety conditions permit.

Implement flexible scheduling and expanded hours to facilitate social distancing and reduce density. Plan for supply chain issues on restart (esp. safety gear). Ensure core facilities and support centers are ready for restart. EH&S and those designated as responsible for the various research spaces in buildings must work to ensure that the infrastructure and physical layout of spaces are compatible with the research plans prepared by PIs.

**UB’s Phased Approach to Ramping up:**

UB Research Ramp-up Phase 1: Preparation (Community COVID activity has stabilized such that relaxation of restrictions for the region has begun, preparing for research return.)

* Safety guidelines are established for return that are specific to locations (community spaces, offices, labs and centers).
* Allow core facilities and service/support centers to design and implement plans to reestablish scalable activity (based on demand levels).
* Expand on-campus resource access while following established safety procedures (e.g. computer labs & libraries).
* PI Ramp-up Operating Plans developed and submitted for approval to Department Chairs

UB’s Research Ramp-up Phase 2: Limited expansion beyond essential research (Community COVID activity continues to decline such that state and community restrictions are being further relaxed.)

* Expand beyond essential research activities to include time-sensitive research**,** e.g. grant expirations, trainees about to finish and graduate or move to next position, seasonal data, field research depending on site restrictions. These personnel priorities are determined by PIs and included in their operating plans.
* Should include guidelines for maintaining low-density measures issued by EH&S, perhaps staggered shifts or alternate days.

UB’s Research Ramp-up Phase 3: Further research expansion, safety guidelines maintained (Community COVID activity continues to decline, reliable testing is widely available, regional restrictions are further relaxed.)

* Expand to additional research activities that can still be carried out while maintaining safety guidelines. Need to consider which non-essential human subject research can resume – will require that conditions provided in the Guidance for Human Subjects can be assured.

UB’s Research Ramp-up Phase 4: Normalcy (Widespread testing and vaccine available? No or minimal community restrictions.)

* Return to normal activity.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

The start of the ramp-up process and progression through the phases will be determined by the UB President and the Vice President for Research & Economic Development. In order to best consider and maintain health and safety guidelines, PIs will continue to be the responsible local authority in carrying out their approved research restart plans. They will have personal supervisory responsibility, which means that they are in charge and have authority over the research, scholarly and creative activities carried out in their lab, space, facility, classroom, etc. PIs are, therefore, responsible for assessing physical space and scenarios to understand possible dangers involved for themselves, staff, students, etc. Once they have assessed potential hazards, these must be either addressed in their plans or communicated to their department chairs and ADRs if higher action is needed.

As was the case when research facilities went into hibernation mode, PIs, Department Chairs, Associate Deans for Research, and Deans made critical decisions. The same is true of the research ramp-up phase: PI generated research plans need to be reviewed by their Department Chair and ADR prior to restarting research. Our objective is that this be a de-centralized process: PI to Department Chair (who may have to coordinate across buildings and facilities where their faculty operate), and then to Associate Deans for Research, and finally to Deans as necessary.

**Detailed Phase Plans:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **UB RESEARCH PHASE** | **GENERAL CONDITIONS** | **Anticipated Activities** | **TIME PERIOD** |
| 1 | Community COVID activity has stabilized or lessened such that NYS restrictions are being relaxed.  Essential staff who are eligible to carry out in-person work return gradually but still at a low level compared to normal.  (~10-30% of normal activity is expected) | **This is principally a facilities ramping-up phase to prepare labs for restart using minimal staffing.**  Only essential research is permitted and should be approved by department heads and Deans.  Human subject study restrictions still in place, field work or research requiring travel still highly restricted.  Checklist is provided by EH&S to facilitate safely reopening labs.  Guidelines for physical distancing in labs, disinfection, scheduling and PPE, etc. are in place and must be observed (see EH&S guidelines and Guidance for Human Subject Research).  PIs and lab directors are responsible for using these guidelines to prepare operational safety plans for their lab spaces and activities and coordinating with their departments and ADRs for approval.  PIs can utilize the EH&S supplied Laboratory Ramp-Up Checklist to prepare their labs and spaces prior to Phase 2.  Central purchasing of face masks and cleaning/disinfection supplies in place; includes an allocation process based on stated UB priorities.  Strict guidelines for disinfecting common spaces needs to be carried out by custodial services and communicated to staff for reassurance.  Core facilities and service/support centers (including LAF) ramp up capacities, re-establish on-campus resource access. | Determined by UB administration pursuant to NYS guidelines -  Establishing guidelines and plans should be ongoing until Phase 2. |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PHASE** | **GENERAL CONDITIONS** | **Anticipated Activities** | **TIME PERIOD** |
| 2 | Community COVID activity is declining such that state & local restrictions on public activities are being further relaxed.  In-person research activity gradually returns with staggered scheduling to a low-to-moderate level compared to normal.  (<50% of normal activity is expected) | Expansion beyond essential research activities to include and **prioritize** **time-sensitive research,** (e.g. grant expirations, trainees about to finish and graduate or move to next position, seasonal data from field research depending on site restrictions; exceptions include those meeting human subject restrictions; research requiring travel is still highly limited.)  Continue to work remotely whenever possible.  Still no UGs or volunteers in labs except for essential employees.  Maximum number of researchers who can be at research sites at any given time limited as required for social distancing. (See EH&S Laboratory COVID guidelines.)  Implement staggered work schedules to help maintain low personnel density.  Guidelines to maximize safety, including physical distancing, disinfection, scheduling, and PPE must be observed.  Plans for sudden return to Phase 1 should be in place in case needed. | NYS and UB further lessens restrictions relevant to on-campus activities. Likely to be  1-3 weeks following start of Phase 1. (Note that these timelines are not predictable.) |
| 3 | New cases of COVID-19 are stably lower, COVID-19 testing and contact tracing fully meets clinical and public health targets, such that community/NYS restrictions are further relaxed.  In-person research activity gradually transitions to a moderately high level compared to normal.  (Up to 75% of normal activity) | **Most types of on-site research are allowed, except as limited by restrictions for human subject research and travel.**  Continue to work remotely whenever possible.  Continue staggered work schedules to maintain low personnel density.  Guidelines to maximize safety, including physical distancing, disinfection, scheduling, PPE must still be observed in most instances.  Guidelines established where physical distancing is not possible, including art and music studio spaces (e.g. mandatory COVID-19 testing, reliable treatments available, more stringent PPE requirements; guidelines to follow).   * Expand to all research activities that can be carried out while maintaining safety guidelines. Resuming of human subject research activities will require that conditions provided in the Guidance for Human Subjects can be assured. Note that modifications in human subject research need to be approved by IRB. * Possible return of undergrads to labs (TBD by campus-wide planning efforts).   Plans for sudden return to Phase 2 should be in place in case needed. | TBD – will depend on continued relaxation of NYS and UB restrictions.  Recommendations are wait 2-3 weeks after Phase 2 in order to allow for Phase 2 to be tested. |
| 4 | Vaccine or treatment widely available and shown to be effective; used in combination with widespread testing and identification of new COVID-19 cases, with quarantining  In-person research activity close to normal. | No or minimal state restrictions.  All types of in-person research are allowed, subject to travel restrictions and/or local conditions/restrictions. | TBD, but likely after 1/2021 |

**Supporting Documents:**

* Human Subjects Research Guidance
* Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research & Scholarly Activity Ramp up Guidance
* EH&S Policy re: Lab occupancy under COVID-19 Conditions
* EH&S Laboratory Ramp-up Checklist
* PI Operation Plan Template
* Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document