

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

ACADEMIC CONTINUITY PLAN for RESEARCH in response to COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The University of Pretoria strives to maintain a safe and sustainable academic environment for postgraduate study and research, in support of the mission of the University.

In recent weeks, the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has widened, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared that the outbreak has now become a global pandemic. This affects us all, and the University of Pretoria (UP) is closely monitoring the situation. The safety and well-being of our students and staff are paramount, and we are taking proactive steps to help ensure that we have a plan of action to address a possible outbreak on campus. UP has established a task team to assist with the implementation of our plan of action.

To minimise the spread of the virus, we have drawn up a plan and have put the necessary preventative measures in place to provide protection, support and assistance.

This plan on research continuity is consistent with ensuring that there is minimal risk to staff and students. The plan sets out a framework to allow research activities at UP to continue, and research productivity to be sustained as far as possible, during times when activities are limited by the need to reduce contact between groups of people.

1. PLANS RELEVANT FOR ALL RESEARCHERS

Research activity will be continued as far as possible, while the number of people present in any research facility at any particular time should be minimised. This means that researchers should work off campus when possible, and use the on-campus research facilities only when necessary.

Deans of Faculties, in consultation with Heads of Department, research directors, and supervisors, will consider and make decisions on how best to manage the use of research facilities. These are Faculty-specific considerations, and plans must be established whereby Deans, HoDs, Directors, supervisors and research coordinators are fully informed as to when researchers are going to be on the campus, noting that:

- It is recognised that researchers may need to be on campus for a number of reasons related to specific work required for completion of their research programmes, including the following:
 - To access laboratories where they need to conduct essential experimental work
 - To access research facilities where experimental materials require maintenance (such as chemical reactors requiring regular attention)
 - To ensure that biological materials are maintained (e.g., cell cultures, plant collections)
 - To ensure that animals are tended appropriately
 - To access specific research facilities that they cannot access from home or residence (such as specialised computer programmes)
 - To attend critical meetings of research groups.

The following measures will be in place:

- For all UP students and staff, any access to any campus requires that the individual has an active access card which will be scanned at the gates
- In research facilities, all normal safety measures remain in place and should be strictly adhered to (see Section 5 below)
- In addition, the special hygiene measures which have been advised to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus must be strictly observed (see: <https://www.up.ac.za/coronavirus-updates>)
- Wherever possible, research should be conducted online and off campus, rather than on campus, especially if using shared offices or research facilities
- Where the research requires essential experimental work in laboratories and research facilities, researchers can come to the relevant campus and use the relevant facilities.
- Research requiring access to remote and/or on-site specialised computing infrastructure will continue, with online communication between members of research groups.

However:

- The number of people working in a shared research facility must be minimised by putting in place arrangements and schedules to manage times when researchers come to work in the facilities. The occupancy target for laboratories is recommended to be approximately 25% of normal occupancy, at all times.
 - Meetings of research groups should be conducted online wherever possible, and where physical meetings are essential they should be limited to small groups.
- Research leaders and Directors of all research Institutes, centres and units must arrange to limit the number of researchers using a research facility (such as a laboratory or shared office) at any one time (see above).

Research schedules

- This will require the establishment of a schedule or roster for researchers (including students) to come into the research facility at specified times and to work for specified periods. These rosters must be strictly adhered to.
- The research leaders and Directors must coordinate these rosters and be aware of which researchers are using the facilities under their management, at any time.
- Rosters for researchers using research facilities must be accessible to HoDs, Directors and Deans so that they are aware of who is present in the facilities at any time.

Faculty-specific arrangements

- There may be additional Faculty-specific arrangements regarding access to particular campuses, research facilities and parking. These should be communicated to researchers by the Dean.

Access to the UP farms and off-campus research facilities

- The experimental farms and other off-campus facilities are University of Pretoria research facilities and it is essential that the core functions and care of animals, plants and equipment be maintained. This includes the continuity of long-term research projects.
- The Faculties involved in use of these facilities must compile plans to manage activities on the experimental farms and remote facilities during times of limited access as appropriate, including documenting the need for some staff and students to be present to perform the essential activities.
- In addition, plans should include provision for a skeleton auxiliary staff team if necessary.

2. PLANS RELEVANT TO POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS, POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS, AND SUPERVISORS

This section outlines approaches to ensure that postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows can safely continue their research activities during periods when time spent on campus needs to be minimised.

In the interests of the health of the community, there is a need to limit contact between groups of people. However, it is necessary, in many cases, for postgraduate students and fellows to come on to the campus and enter certain buildings, in order to conduct experimental work and to complete research projects, and we recognise that many postgraduate students and fellows are working towards completion of research projects under tight time constraints.

Postgraduate supervision

The following measures will be in place:

- Coursework, whether regular semester-based or block-week sessions, will continue online only
- Meetings between students and supervisors for supervision purposes should be conducted online wherever possible
- Where their research requires essential experimental work in laboratories and research facilities, students should come to the campus
- Both student and supervisor should be aware of the periods when access to the campus will be essential for purposes of conducting experimental work.

In addition:

- Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made between postgraduate students and supervisors to ensure that online and/or electronic communication mechanisms are in place and available at all times.
- The Memorandum of Agreement which the University requires to be agreed between student and supervisor must contain a workplan which should include (or be amended to include) plans for periods when the student will be working off campus.
- If students and/or supervisors are not familiar with *clickUP*, training should be provided.

The following conditions will apply for students and postdoctoral fellows accessing the campus during periods of limited contact:

- Postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows must be registered, to be allowed to use any research facilities
- Postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows must motivate through their HoDs to the Deans for approval to be using research facilities on campus during times when access is limited
- Deans will maintain records of which postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows are coming to the campus
- Postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows will be allowed to enter the campus if they have been given authorisation through the Deans of their faculties

Responsibilities of supervisors:

- Deans, through the HoDs and Directors, are advised to give each postgraduate student and postdoctoral fellow a signed letter confirming that the student/fellow is authorised to be working on the campus, and providing details of the work, envisaged dates and times when the student or fellow is likely to be on the campus, etc. The letter should include the contact details for the supervisor.
- For health and safety (and security) reasons, supervisors are requested to ensure that postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows make every effort to complete their work in the laboratories during the working hours agreed upon in terms of roster for the respective research facility
- Supervisors are responsible for the postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows who are working under their supervision. This includes ensuring that the students are fully informed of all relevant measures and normal precautions to ensure their health and safety in the laboratory/research facility, and of the procedures to be followed in the case of changes in health and safety conditions.

3. ACCESS TO LIBRARY, INFORMATION, AND IT FACILITIES

3.1 Library and information services

- The libraries and the associated study centres on all campuses will be closed during the corona virus outbreak period.
- All of the online services will be available and library staff will be on duty to assist online with any library queries.
- There will be a generic email address for queries.
- Researchers and students s can contact the relevant Information Specialist or use "Ask a Librarian" for library assistance.

3.2 Information technology

The open computer labs will be closed and researchers and students should access information services via online systems.

3.3 Communication plans

- Students and researchers will be informed by email, or through the UP electronic communication media, of any relevant information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, and campus access.
- The messages will specify if it necessary for a campus is closed.
- Communication between students and supervisors should be maintained as outlined above.

4. GENERAL GUIDELINES REGARDING COVID-19

All members of the UP community should make sure that they are aware of the information provided by the University (see : <https://www.up.ac.za/coronavirus-updates>)

4.1 Precautionary measures

- Adhere strictly to recommendations regarding hygiene
- Watch and take note of University information and recommendations
- Be aware of fellow students / researchers and their state of health
- Practice social distancing
- Minimise access to the campus to go to research facilities
- Set up online contact groups to coordinate use of research facilities.

4.2 In the event of partial closure or a need for containment

- Adhere strictly to recommendations regarding hygiene
- Watch and take note of University information and recommendations
- Limit access to essential activities in research facilities
- Identify skeleton staff who can access the campus to attend to essential research activities
- All researchers are advised to self-monitor and self-quarantine if they suspect that they have been exposed to the coronavirus.

5. GENERAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS TO BE IN PLACE AT ALL TIMES

5.1 Responsible persons

- At all times, every laboratory must have a trained individual who is responsible for the laboratory (referred to as the *person in charge*) and its use. The University's normal Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations require that each laboratory has OHS Safety Representatives who are in charge of safety in the laboratories. These individuals should ensure that at all times when the labs

are in use they, or another designated individual who is also trained, are present and can take responsibility in case of emergencies.

- Everyone working in a laboratory must be fully informed as to who is in charge and be instructed that they are required to obey the instructions of the person in charge should any emergency arise.
- Individuals who have the role of person in charge must ensure that they are completely familiar with the particular hazards associated with the work being done in the laboratory, and with the materials and equipment that are in the laboratory.
- Individuals who have the role of person in charge must ensure that Emergency Exits are available at all times that the laboratory is in use.
- All laboratories are required by law to have two exit doorways. These must both be accessible and functional.
- The University's normal Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations require that everyone working in a laboratory should have been instructed on safety measures and emergency procedures appropriate for that laboratory.
- Faculty and Laboratory Managers must ensure that all users are fully informed of relevant safety measures.
- The Dean must have at hand the names and contact details of Individuals who have the role of persons in charge of the laboratories in their faculties.

5.2 Communication channels

- Contact details for Safety Representatives must be posted prominently in all laboratories.
- In the event of a safety-related incident, the person in charge of the laboratory must alert all those working in the laboratory and instruct them as to the course of action that must be taken.
- Once it is safe to do so, the person in charge must notify Security Services and the Head of Department and/or the Dean of the events and also what measures they have taken.
- All laboratories should establish WhatsApp or SMS groups for staff, safety representatives and managers, to assist with urgent communications.
- If a message needs to be sent to those using a particular laboratory, the message must be sent to the person in charge of the laboratory by the Dean or the Head of Security Services.
- The message must indicate clearly if any areas are to be avoided.

5.3 Access to laboratories

- Security measures must be in place to ensure that entry into any laboratory is controlled. Where necessary, locks must be used – persons in charge must ensure that the locks are functioning correctly.
- Only *bona fide* students and staff should be permitted to be in any laboratory. No unauthorised individuals should be permitted to enter laboratories.
- The person in charge should have full knowledge of who is in the laboratory and for what purpose.

5.4 Instructions to be given by the person in charge, to all laboratory users

In case of an emergency or accident:

- Think before you do anything, stay calm, do not panic.
- If instructed to leave, walk briskly but do not run.
- Do not use lifts to exit the building.
- Keep your personal belongings in one place and keep your working place safe and tidy at all times.
- Should evacuation of a laboratory be necessary and appropriate, students and staff in the laboratory must be told to stay calm, to cooperate with the security staff and Safety Representatives, and to evacuate the laboratory immediately.

6. Escalation policy

If in doubt, the UP Escalation Policy should be used in seeking clarity.