

## On-Campus Research: Status and Plans

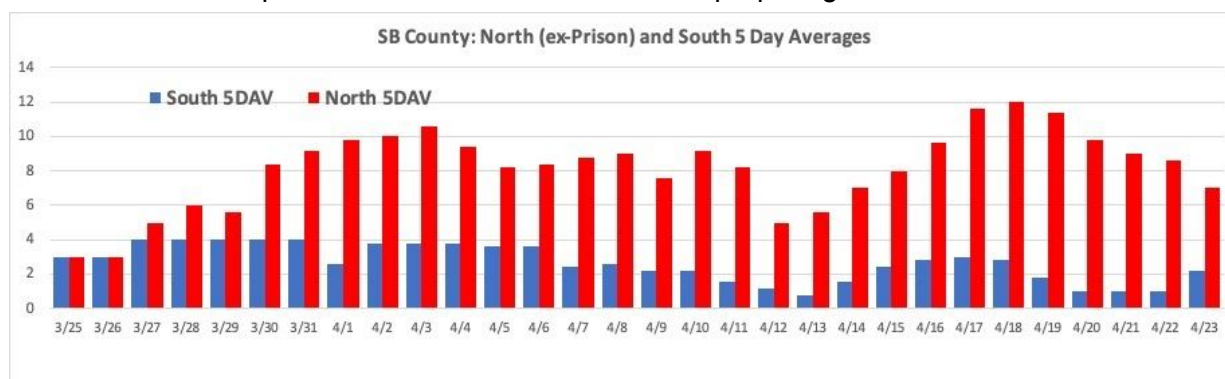
Dear Colleagues,

April 24, 2020

**We are writing to you about work underway to prepare for a phased return of research.** We want to first thank you for having quickly shut down most on-campus research in March. This was very difficult for all of us, but together with other mitigation steps, it has helped to reduce the number of COVID-19 infections in Santa Barbara County.

**The risks associated with business-as-usual are even greater today** than they were when we shut down on-campus research in March. At that time the virus was migrating and we anticipated its imminent arrival. Now it is here, with confirmed cases mostly in the North County but also here on the coast as seen in the figure below, and there are more people infected than the number who have been confirmed. The risk of infection and severe illness will remain until the majority of the population has become immune via vaccination or recovery from infection. We need to learn to live with and manage those risks.

**The purpose of Shelter-in-Residence (SIR) orders was not to make it safe to go back to business as usual.** Rather, it reduces the surge in infections that would otherwise occur and overwhelm the medical system if nothing had been done, and it buys time for us to prepare to adapt to a new way of life in which one must be constantly on guard to avoid infection. The former is called “flattening the curve” and our region may be demonstrating this to some extent now, as seen in the plot. The latter is what we are now preparing to do.



### Carrying out research in a high risk environment.

As noted above, the danger from this virus will remain high until reliable and proven medical interventions (e.g. vaccinations) are widespread many months from now. High levels of testing, contact tracing and subsequent self-isolation can be very helpful for managing the situation and minimizing impacts but these are also not likely to be in place for many months. We know that our campus is not immune to these risks. As reported in the Chancellor’s April 18 memo to campus, we have already had a case of someone carrying out research on campus who tested positive for COVID-19. Fortunately, the facility where this research was being done has the most

rigorous and well-monitored mitigation requirements of any approved research program on campus and there is a very low probability that anyone else has been infected. Nevertheless, this case serves as a warning and reminds us that much has to be done before we can safely increase research. However, with proper training, materials and equipment, good procedures and monitoring technology it should be possible to gradually and safely increase research activity on campus.

**We are now drafting a plan for a phased and managed return of research.** The phased plan draws upon the expertise of many institutions, including all of the UC campuses and national laboratories. It will include guidelines for how we will mitigate risks under various conditions and spell out the criteria for deciding which activities are to be added in each successive phase. Training will be provided to educate researchers about how the virus spreads and also provide our current knowledge about the best practices we have found to minimize risk. We plan to ramp research up slowly enough that we can establish a track record for safe and stable working environments in each phase. We will also review and improve protocols and carefully assess how they should be modified as activity increases.

**The plan will be thoroughly reviewed** by the Chancellor's COVID-19 response team, the Deans, Department Chairs and Institute/Facility Directors as well as EH&S, Biosafety, Academic Senate (CRPP), Administrative Services, the Library, and select teams of researchers to ensure that it is in compliance and safe in all respects. The Department Chairs and Institute/Facility Directors together with EH&S personnel and building managers will play a crucial role in the implementation of the plan by assuring that research in the buildings they manage is scheduled and monitored in a manner that will minimize population densities, while also including excellent sanitation, social-distancing and use of face-coverings. It will be important to carefully monitor and coordinate all activity. Training modules will help prepare researchers to work as safely as possible. Concurrently, the campus is working to establish its own capability to conduct testing and contact tracing as part of a larger plan to manage a controlled return of other members of the campus community.

**A very crucial part of this program is experience.** We have roughly 90 essential maintenance and 50 essential research tasks that were approved to proceed during the current shutdown. These tasks were very carefully documented, reviewed and amended to be sure they are extremely safe. They will continue while we prepare for the next phase which could begin as early as mid-May. We will review them and learn from experience. Establishing a track record of activities without spread of infection will be an important demonstration of our ability to be safe on campus. Should the contrary be true, the return of research could be delayed significantly.

**Much needs to be done to prepare to carefully and strategically ramp up research on campus. We want to assure you that this planning work is underway.** Health is our top priority. Assuring that we can do an ever-increasing amount of research while protecting the health of everyone involved is challenging. We ask you to please be patient while we formulate a plan that is thoroughly reviewed and ready to go. With luck, and continued adherence to our current mitigation steps, we may be able to start the first small steps toward increasing research on campus relatively soon.

Sincerely,



Joe Incandela  
Vice Chancellor for Research



David Marshall  
Executive Vice Chancellor



Pierre Wiltzius  
Dean, Mathematical, Life, and Physical  
Sciences



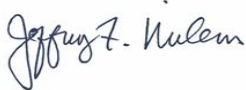
Rod Alferness  
Dean, College of Engineering



Steve Gaines  
Dean, Bren School of Environmental  
Science & Management



Carol Genetti  
Dean, Graduate Division



Jeffrey Milem  
Dean, Gevirtz Graduate School of  
Education



Charlie Hale  
Dean, Social Sciences



John Majewski  
Dean, Humanities and Fine Arts