



# THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

## Thompson Rivers University Research Recovery Guidance

*This guidance is an extension of the [TRU Research Advisory with Guidelines for Research Continuity](#), Updated August 2020.*

Please Note: Until further notice, for all research-related activities, the University's published Safety Planning Guidelines should be followed, with Campus Visits necessary for research currently limited to 3 hours maximum:

**Campus Visits (from 15 minutes to 3 hours max):** for these visits to take place, the school or faculty dean must first approve and forward the approval (including date and start/end times) to the Office of Safety and Emergency Management at [osem@tru.ca](mailto:osem@tru.ca). ***This approval process is necessary*** so that appropriate cleaning measures occur after the faculty member leaves their office and the building. It also ensures that Security is aware that the space is occupied. These initial limitations are in place to ensure our compliance with the ministerial order and to avoid WorkSafe BC fines.

For those who need to be on campus to effectively do their work (i.e., extended visits to campus), authorization is required from either of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) director Matt Milovick (VP, Administration and Finance) or deputy director Christine Bovis-Crossen (Provost and VP, Academic and Research).

To obtain approval, employees and researchers are to make their request to their dean/department head who would make the request to the EOC director or deputy director. Any group returning to campus will be required to develop and implement a return-to-work safety plan which follows WorkSafeBC guidelines.

To ensure research continuity, and in anticipation of a staged return to campus, a longer term ***Research Recovery Guidance Plan*** has been prepared by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, reviewed by the Senate Research Committee and Provost's Council, and approved by the Provost's Office and the Office of the President. The guidance presented draws upon a literature review of best practices and research recovery plan language developed by multiple universities across North America, and is adapted here to suit local conditions. The plan further incorporates key wording from the Principles and Plans for the Resumption of Research Activity, developed as part of the BC COVID-19 Go-Forward Plan for BC's post-secondary sector.

## Overview

### **The University's Commitment to Research Recovery Planning and Support.**

We are aware that the negative impacts of COVID-19 may be far reaching in terms of their impact on research programs and individual research productivity. Examples cited by faculty and students include lost opportunities, delayed career progression, and impeded trainee development, in addition to the expenses associated with pausing research projects and creative endeavours. TRU recognizes research as a priority area, essential for the maintenance of program quality and currency, student training, institutional reputation, civic engagement and community impact, and the completion of graduate programs. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies, with support from the Provost's Office, will be working with municipal, provincial, and federal governments, funding agencies, business and industry partners, community partners, university partners, RUCBC, and our own university faculties to mitigate these impacts by creating supports and opportunities designed to maintain current research activities and ensure enhanced future research activities, especially in the areas of student research training and high impact experiential learning. An emphasis on developing research partnerships is seen as crucial to achieving these ends. The University has initiated policies and Letters of Understanding providing for extensions of internal grants, extensions of Tri-Agency grants, flexibility with tenure clocks and sabbaticals, promotion of government programs (e.g., CERB, enhanced student work opportunities), the continuation of student research funding, and the implementation of new granting opportunities (e.g., The Interior Research Universities Coalition Health Research *Rapid Response Fund*, established in partnership with BC's Ministry of Health). Similar research partnerships are being actively pursued with other government ministries and agencies, and with the City of Kamloops.

Although some research activities are able to transition remotely, research often depends on access to research facilities such as laboratories and libraries. To balance the need to maintain physical distancing and respect provincial health guidelines while maintaining research and graduate education, the following guiding principles for resuming research activity are recommended:

1. Recognize that the health and well-being of faculty, students and staff is paramount
2. Enable research to move forward while minimizing infection risk to researchers
3. Employ a phased and coordinated approach

4. Make sure that practical and safety considerations dictate which activities are allowed in any given phase and space (including occupancy limits for laboratories and other research facilities to enable strict physical distancing)
5. Plans for research activities must be informed by and adapt to evolving recommendations from provincial health authorities regarding best practices to prevent transmission of COVID-19. Until such time as authorities allow for less physical distancing requirements, if any work can be done remotely (data analysis, discussions, etc.), do it remotely
6. Do not congregate or meet in person unless absolutely necessary
7. Ensure that equity is considered in evaluating how to plan and conduct research resumption
8. Prioritize junior researcher productivity and security ( untenured faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and undergraduate research students) to protect the careers and training opportunities of vulnerable populations
9. Provide special supports for the mentoring and continuity of undergraduate research
10. Implement physical distancing, cleaning of shared spaces / doors / instrumentation
11. Encourage open communications and reporting of concerns, including protocol breaches, suspected illnesses
12. Make sure that employee who have concerns about returning to work have an opportunity to discuss such concerns with their supervisor, Human Resources, and their employee group as appropriate
13. Ensure that the planning and execution of fair, transparent, and accountable processes for access to research spaces engages the research community in the identification of needs and the finding of solutions that support our research mission
14. Ensure that plans to re-engage research activities anticipate changes in guidance and make provisions to adapt, including the possibility that access to campus may be variable
15. Recognize that the phased resumption of activity may need to be reversed and stricter curtailment conditions imposed in response to public health guidance or changes to the situation on our campuses

**We need your help staging TRU's research recovery.** Currently most of TRU's research is being conducted remotely by faculty and students. Supports are being offered by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies to help adjust research projects and programs; and special attention is being given to

undergraduate and graduate student research continuity, ensuring ongoing support for students and their faculty mentors. There are only limited approvals in place for essential personnel to manage and access on-campus spaces for critical research and COVID-19 related activities.

We are now asking you to reconsider your *research continuity planning* with an eye toward an eventual staged return to face-to-face meetings, selected field work activities, and renewed access to labs. The first stage, when announced, will be defined as “Phase 1 Resumption: Low Density.” Phase 1 is characterized by limited access for those that require on-site resources for their research programs. Strict physical distancing measures are undertaken within research and common spaces, with handwashing and PPE deployed as per provincial guidelines and recommendations.

During this stage we anticipate that there will be a minimal on-campus presence for research operations. Access to campus will be limited and coordinated, with lab and research centre groups working in shifts, limited (maximum 25%) density in lab spaces managed through approved plans, and no shared uncleaned surfaces. *Initiation of the first stage will be coordinated in consultation with TRU’s Emergency Operations Centre, informed by the provincial guidelines, including WorkSafeBC and public health protocols.*

**Everyone has a role to play.** The University recognizes that our PIs and graduate research supervisors are in the best position to craft a research-group-specific implementation plan for the different stages of research resumption. Please use your judgment to customize these guidelines to your specific situation. In turn, academic departments are in the best position to assess these proposed plans, and to work with departmental PIs and supervisors to implement. Approval on a case-by-case basis by the faculty Dean, along with approval of Faculty/School plans by both the Office of Research and the Office of Safety and Emergency Management, will ensure commonality of principles in implementing approaches across the university and coordination among multiple departments/labs/centres using the same building.



**This guidance is evolving.** Our overarching goal is to ensure the safety of our students, faculty, and staff while increasing research activity in a phased approach as public health guidance and safety conditions permit. We anticipate

that a phased re-engagement of campus research activities will require a long-term transition with the restart process **scaled gradually**. Due to the need to have a complete understanding of all of the work taking place on campus, eventually **all PIs** and graduate supervisors will be required to update their Research Continuity Plans as a prerequisite for ramping-up access to on-campus facilities. We understand that the disruption to different types of on-campus research varies significantly across research areas. For the time being, much of the initial guidance below is intended for experimental research labs, as we expect computational, theoretical, and non-experimental groups to continue with remote work until further notice. We do expect this guidance to evolve over time. Please continue to check back for updates.

## **Suggested Practices**

As a result of COVID-19, researchers resuming operations must first develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan. The Office of Safety & Emergency Management has now developed [Safety Plan Instructions and Templates](#) and [Exposure Control Plans](#) to aid researchers in developing their own specific safety plans.

## **Physical distancing**

To enable strict physical distancing, Facilities has established [occupancy limits for laboratories and other research facilities](#).

Implement measures to restrict the number of people within research facilities and within shared common areas at any given time.

Lab facilities may be used in shifts to stay within occupancy limits provided that appropriate cleaning and maintenance can be scheduled between shifts.

Initial occupancy limits will enable strict physical distancing. Subsequent increases in occupancy will be predicated on direction and guidance from the Provincial Health Officer. Institutions must be prepared to rapidly scale back research activities or move to full curtailment of research activities if necessary.

Signage will be posted to guide circulation within buildings, and enhanced cleaning protocols will be enacted in conjunction with janitorial services, as per WorkSafeBC guidelines.

Other Considerations:

1. Limit laboratory access to essential personnel and activities to minimize density and reduce the risk of disease transmission.
2. Postpone non-essential research and non-essential visitors from the laboratory, centre, meeting room.
3. Work with your team to prioritize essential vs. non-essential studies, and adjust expectations and plans in light of reduced laboratory time.
4. Consider having teams share responsibilities, so each person can easily cover and share other teammates' research as needed.
5. Continue to rely on virtual meetings for any group discussions, even if you're in the same building.
6. Reduce the density of researchers in the group. Reduce to ~1/4 of 'fully operational' occupancy. Ideally, create three sub-teams and isolate sub-teams to distinct schedules (e.g., Team A works M-W-F, or mornings), to reduce cross-team contact. Strive to limit the connections between these subgroups.

## Implement Best Practices to Reduce Transmission of Infection

### COVID-19 Transmission Prevention Guidelines

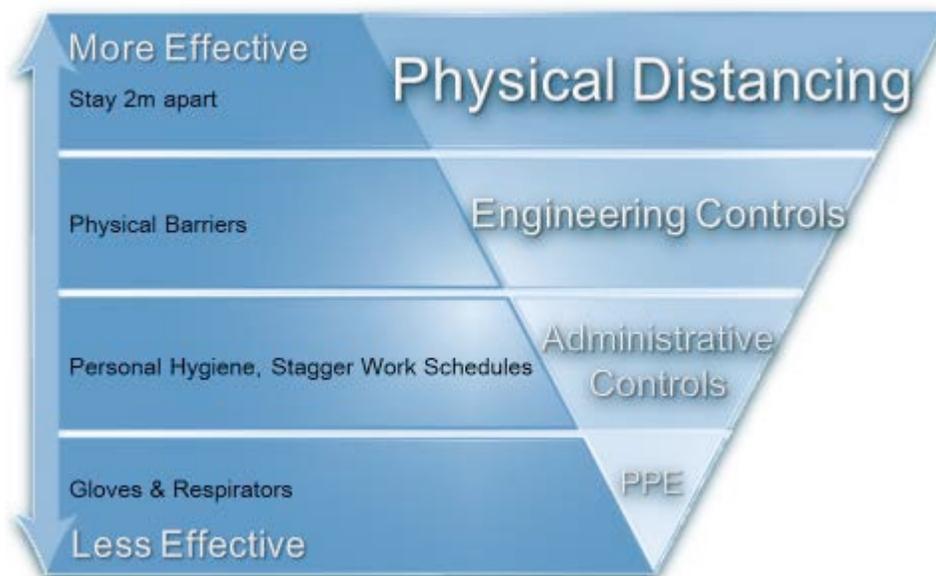


Figure 1: Hierarchy of Control for COVID-19

Figure 1 outlines examples of general COVID-19 transmission prevention guidelines or hazard controls outlined in the ECP, following the hierarchy of controls, which are based on current provincial and federal requirements. These guidelines should be used as controls during the risk assessment of critical tasks to mitigate the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Any controls that are chosen to mitigate identified risk should follow the

hierarchy of controls presented in the COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan beginning at the most effective strategies.

1. Elimination
2. Substitution
3. Engineering
4. Administrative (Education and Training/Safe Work Practices/scheduling)
5. Personal Protective Equipment

Please refer to the [TRU COVID-19 Safety Plan instructions](#) for more information

1. Once established, distribute your safety plan and work schedule to your team.
2. Laboratory staff should consider the operational rules developed to be an extension of the laboratory safety plan and PIs should ensure that all members of the lab understand what is expected.
3. **Lack of compliance with the policies will result in revocation of laboratory/centre/meeting room access privileges.**

### **Be Prepared for Illness**

Anticipate the possibility of illness on your team. Ensure all lab members who return to the lab are aware of their reporting obligation in the event one of them either contracts COVID-19 or comes into close contact with someone who has tested positive:

### **Be Prepared to Ramp Down**

Be prepared to shut down or rapidly ramp down on short notice. Given the possibility that research will have to be scaled back again with little notice, we encourage you to ramp up projects that can be ramped down quickly and with relatively little cost and complexity.

**Human Research** Research Ethics Boards will provide direction to researchers involving human subjects during COVID-19. This direction may include direction to cease in-person interviews and focus groups, as well as appropriate privacy

directions for technology supported participant interviews. Research that engages human subjects in close proximity, whether in the lab or beyond it, should **NOT** resume until it can be undertaken safely.

Any proposed changes to research protocols, throughout the phased research recovery period, must continue to be approved by the Research Ethics Board. Please contact [Debbie Krebs](#), TRU's Ethics and Compliance Officer, to discuss any proposed changes and use the [Research Continuity Planning & Recovery Form](#).

### **Animal Research**

Communicate with the University's Animal Care Committee leadership and facility managers to ensure consistency of guidelines for ramping up of research using animals.

### **Field Research**

During Phases 1 and 2, Field Research will be

- Expanded on a case-by-case basis
- Dependent on local, domestic, and international conditions/restrictions at field sites
- Dependent on travel restrictions, ability to travel safely, and physical distance at field sites

At this time and in the near future, all research that can be undertaken from home should continue remotely. Where needed and justified—and here the risk of excluding participants and cultural considerations will be reviewed—PIs and Faculty Supervisors should present plans to Department Chairs, seek input from Divisional Committees (where formed), and approval from academic deans / Research Office / Office of Safety and Emergency Management. Approval for off-campus research recovery plans will be based on the ability of a field site or third-party site to accommodate the protocols and physical distancing guidelines established for on-campus research spaces. The research recovery guiding principles detailed in this document will apply to off-campus research that is carried out at a third party hosted site and will need to follow any additional restrictions set out by this host organization. As with on-campus research, any proposed changes to field research protocols involving human subjects must continue to be approved by the Research Ethics Board. Please contact [Debbie](#)

[Krebs](#), TRU's Ethics and Compliance Officer, to discuss any proposed changes and use the [Research Recovery Request Form](#).

### **Phase 2: Resumption Phase 2, Medium Density**

Expanding access to higher numbers of researchers will be predicated on direction and guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and will be considered only if COVID-19 spread does not occur after a sustained period in Phase 1.

***During an anticipated Phase 2 Research Resumption, per person occupancy of research spaces will be limited to 50% of normal occupancy.***

Physical distancing protocols will be maintained and handwashing and PPE guidelines will be followed. In Phase 2 Research Resumption Medium Density, gatherings will be permitted to the degree that Provincial guidelines are relaxed to allow such activities.

During this second phase, PIs, Graduate Supervisors, Department Heads, and Deans will work with the Office of Safety and Emergency Management and the Research Office to further develop coordinated temporal distancing or shift approaches, allowing buildings to remain below 50% normal occupancy.

### **Phase 3: Resumption Phase, Managed Return**

With guidance from the Provincial Health Officer, if COVID-19 spread is not observed on our campuses after a sustained period in Phase 2, TRU will consider returning research activities to normal levels, with the proviso that physical distancing and PPE protocols can be maintained.

In all cases, TRU must be prepared to rapidly scale back research activities or return to strict curtailment in response to public health guidelines and/or changing circumstances on our campuses.