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FAQ Regarding Essential Activity Guidance and Requests

Revised 4/22/20

Current Guidance (Effective 4/8/2020 - present):

<https://umaine.edu/research-compliance/covid-19-guidance-for-researchers/>

Essential research and scholarly activity (that require working on campus or in the field) are now limited to the following areas:

- Research and scholarly activity that is critical to the health of the public
- Research and scholarly activity of national or state importance
- Research and scholarly activity that involves the protection of valuable resources such as cell lines, animal lines, instrumentation requiring regular attention, etc. which cannot be shut down and must be kept going at a basal level
- Research and scholarly activities that directly support current [Business and Operations designated as critical infrastructure \(PDF\)](#) in the Governor's mandate; *general university research and scholarly activities in those designated areas would not typically qualify as "essential"*.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1) Can you provide additional clarity about the definition and examples of essential research?

The current definition was developed in response to [Governor Mills' Stay Healthy at Home executive order](#) which requires all Maine people to stay at home through April 30th, unless to leave for an essential work or activity. The definition was written to allow some flexibility for researchers to make a case of essentiality for their research and/or scholarly activity, and is in-line with, and in some cases more generous than, other institutions in the northeast who are only allowing critical maintenance activity to happen on campus.

Examples of some of the requests approved to date:

- (Fieldwork) Deployment of weather stations in Maine blueberry farms and field scouting for disease. Data provide real-time information to blueberry growers to help them time fungicide application to control diseases in their fields.
- (On-Campus) Numerous requests for periodic access to maintain critical equipment and check on incubators, freezers, chem stores etc.
- (On-campus) Numerous requests to maintain cell, fish and mouse lines to maintain critical stocks.
- (On-campus) Several requests related to activities supporting public health in battling COVID-19 (3-D printing of PPE, production of hand sanitizer for area hospitals etc.)
- (On-Campus) Tick Lab operations
- (Fieldwork) Apple Integrated Pest Management Program. Provides growers with advisories based on real-time observations from ~20 orchards in the commercial apple production area. Growers depend on this information to make immediate pest management decisions.

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Examples of some of the requests that have been or will be denied:

- Research performed by graduate students needed to graduate or complete a thesis
- Agriculture research that will not inform Maine on-farm decisions during the 2020 growing season (i.e. cultural management experiments and variety trials)
- Research being performed where social distancing has not been demonstrated in the request or cannot be maintained
- Research being performed in order to get preliminary results for a future proposal submission
- Submission requests that lack clarity or sufficient detail

2) What is the institutional approval process for essential activity requests?

Requests are reviewed first by the applicable College or Center. If approved by the College/Center, OVPRDGS will review the request and make a final determination, which will be communicated by OVPRDGS to the individual with a copy to the applicable college/center.

OVPRDGS team reviewing the requests:

- *Chris Boynton, Director of Research Administration*
- *Amanda Ashe, Director of Research Compliance*
- *Tammy Crosby, Special Assistant to the VPRDGS*

Note: Should the OVPRDGS team reviewing requests be unable to reach consensus, the VPRDGS will review the request and make the final determination.

If an individual wishes to submit an appeal, they should initiate the appeal with the applicable College or Center with the additional information to be considered; the appeal will be handled via the same review and approval process as the initial request.

3) When should submitters expect notification of approval or denial?

Review of essential activity requests have been designated as a high priority by OVPRDGS; ideally the goal is to provide a response within 24-48 hours, however much is dependent upon how quickly it is reviewed by the College/Center and the complexity/scope of the request. Tammy Crosby sends a reminder to the College/Center if she has not received a determination within 2 days.

4) Please provide more about how the information provided by researchers will be used. Will the form be used as a data collection tool as well as a method to inform directors and deans if research is essential?

Yes, to both: Directors and Deans (or their designees) will be conducting the initial determination regarding essentiality before the request is reviewed by the OVPRDGS team and will also be copied on the communications with the final determination. Further, the

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approved requests will be shared with Safety Management, Facilities and Public Safety so that each area is aware of the activity on campus or in the field.