Policy Recommendation - Subcommittee on Trainee Considerations
08.13.20

Research on the Yale campus during the COVID-19 crisis has been reactivated in phases. These phases are designed to allow for the safe and gradual resumption of research activity across the entire campus as pandemic risks wane, and they can also be used to tighten campus access if risks mount. Phase 1 allows resumption of some on-campus research activities accompanied by social distancing and safety restrictions. Phase 2 allows all on-campus research, still accompanied by social distancing and safety restrictions. Phase 3 represents a return to normal operations. The university administration, with guidance from the public health community, will decide when to move from one phase to another.

The Overall Research Continuity Committee charged a Subcommittee on Trainee Considerations to develop a policy that clarifies the rights of trainees during the COVID-19 crisis. Undergraduate students, graduate students, teaching fellows, postdoctoral associates, postdoctoral fellows, and post-graduate researchers (collectively “Trainees”) may be concerned that faculty advisors, principal investigators, and other supervisors (collectively “Supervisors”) may seek to compel them to work on campus during Phases 1 or 2, prior to their feeling safe or able to do so. Before returning to campus, Supervisors will work with their Trainees to develop a plan for returning to their research. Supervisors must share their approved COVID-19 workplace plans with Trainees. Trainees should be able to access approved workplace safety plans on EHS.

After a review of existing Yale policies and conferral with the Public Health Committee and the Emergency Policy Committee, the Subcommittee on Trainee Considerations recommends applying the following policies University-wide during Phases 1, 2, and 3:

- Trainees may inform their Supervisors that they do not wish to work on campus due to the pandemic. Supervisors should, in these circumstances, request that Trainees work from home. Trainees are expected to agree to such requests, to the extent that conditions in their homes permit.

- Trainees who inform their Supervisors they do not wish to work on campus will not be expected to report to work on campus. Trainees will not be required to provide a justification for this decision. Supervisors must not ask about a Trainee’s health status or for any other form of justification. In conversation with Trainees, Supervisors will develop a remote working plan for Trainees.

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1 The only research that will take place on campus in Phase 1 will occur by approval of the chair, cognizant deans, and the Provost office. Any researchers on-campus without approval will be in violation of campus policy.
2 Subcommittee Members: [supervisors] Lynn Cooley, Michael Crair, Anthony Koleske, Elias Lolis, Kathryn Lofton (chair), Craig Roy; [trainees] Lucy Armentano, Maikel Boot, Erin Borchardt, Maria Del Mar Galindo, Meaghan McGearry, and Ryan Petersburg.
3 Individuals can be a Supervisor and a Trainee, i.e., a post-doctoral fellow who supervises an undergraduate researcher.
• Supervisors must not negatively assess a Trainee based on the Trainee’s decision not to work on campus or a Trainee’s limited ability to work from home. Supervisors must not retaliate against a Trainee if the Trainee decides not to work on campus or if they are limited in their ability to work from home.

• Supervisors and other Trainees must not attempt to coerce, intimidate, or otherwise pressure Trainees who do not wish to work on campus and who/or are limited in their ability to work from home.

• Trainees who believe that a Supervisor has violated these policies may bring a complaint in one of two ways: First, Trainees who feel comfortable doing so may speak with a Director of Undergraduate or Graduate Studies, Department Chair, Faculty Director, Dean’s Designee, or an officer in the Office for Postdoctoral Affairs. Second, Trainees may make anonymous or identified reports through the University Hotline.

• Violations of this policy will be reviewed under Section III.N of the Faculty Handbook and may result in disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, loss of eligibility for leave for one leave cycle, temporary limitations on work with students or trainees, limitations on eligibility for grant funding, reduction in salary, and suspension without pay.

The stipulations in this guidance also apply in cases where research takes place off campus. Fieldwork and off-campus research present additional issues for Supervisors and Trainees to navigate. Pandemic conditions and public health guidance vary widely across geographic regions and can change rapidly in ways that the university is unable to monitor comprehensively. Off-campus research that requires any form of travel may be subject to changing governmental travel regulations and restrictions. Supervisors and trainees planning to conduct research in off campus locations should give special attention to how and when it is safe to resume research off campus, generally erring on the side of caution when conditions are uncertain or where potentially rapid ramp-down would present difficulties. Trainees involved in off campus research who are not comfortable with the safety plans outlined by their supervisors, or who experience pressure to resume research before they feel safe doing so, have access to the same resources for reporting available to those engaged in on-campus research.

4 Director of Undergraduate or Graduate Studies, Department Chair, Faculty Director, Dean’s Designee, or an officer in the Office for Postdoctoral Affairs may also confer with Supervisors and Trainees in their area to encourage best practices and confirm Trainees are not experiencing coercive conditions for their work.