

## Memorandum

**DATE:** March 16, 2020  
**TO:** Directors of Graduate Programs  
**FROM:** Dr. Peter J. Harries, Dean, Graduate School  
**RE:** GAs and COVID-19  
**CC:** Deans, Associate Deans for Academics

One area where there have been numerous questions with regards to COVID-19 relates to Graduate Assistants (GAs), which include Teaching, Research, and Graduate Extension Assistants. Given that the university is currently open, research activities can continue on campus, although most teaching has moved to an on-line format. Below are several approaches/best practices that are aimed to provide guidance as to how to deal with these situations within what is a quickly evolving landscape.

First and foremost, the safety and well-being of all university community members must be the focus of any approach to addressing the issue. Therefore, any plan that is developed should be formulated using this element as a central, guiding principle, and research mentors should be flexible and understanding when developing plans with GAs. It should be remember that GAs are first and foremost students and, although employed by the university, they are not typically university employees

Especially for GAs that are members of a high-risk group (e.g., those that have pre-existing health conditions, are care providers for people in high-risk categories, etc.), plans should be made for those individuals to perform research activities remotely (e.g., data analysis, computational work, literature reviews). It should be further noted, that the events and uncertainty surrounding this pandemic are stress inducing and all attempts should be made to reasonably accommodate a range of issues that already or may exist.

### Teaching Assistants (TAs)

TAs should consult with their instructors to determine how their roles might change given the mandate to move most instruction to an on-line format. For those teaching laboratories that may be difficult to move effectively on line, please consult the lead instructor/coordinator to determine how the instruction will continue. TAs are encouraged to use Zoom or other types of on-line communication. For more information:

<https://eit.ces.ncsu.edu/eit-video-conferencing-with-zoom/>

### Research Assistants (RAs)

Given the specific research requirements and approaches taken by various faculty and research groups across the campus, it is difficult to develop a comprehensive approach that encompasses all elements and particulars related to the specific needs of all labs. Advisors and their students should be in regular communication to establish how the research efforts will continue.

In addition, below are several elements to be taken into consideration with respect to RAs:

- Which elements can be accomplished remotely either partially or entirely
- How can the time that RAs spend in the lab be staggered to increase social distancing

- For procedures, processes, and instrumentation that will require regular on-site attention, identify personnel who are necessary to complete those functions, and:
  - Prepare a description/list of essential components
  - Determine the people who can perform those tasks, with contact information as well as potential back ups
  - Develop detailed standard operating procedures for those tasks
  - Share the information with your research group