



GRADUATE DIVISION

University of California, Merced
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209-228-4723

March 16, 2020

To all Graduate Students and Post-Doctoral Scholars (and copying Graduate Group Chairs and School Deans),

I know that this is a time of immense stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. All of us at UC Merced are trying to maximize safety and flexibility. In terms of general guidance on COVID-19 and the university's response to it, please see <https://emergency.ucmerced.edu/coronavirus>. I also recommend this article that lays out the science of the need to act quickly: <https://medium.com/@tomaspueyo/coronavirus-act-today-or-people-will-die-f4d3d9cd99ca> and [Worst-Case Estimates for U.S. Coronavirus Deaths](#) (behind a paywall).

I want to respond to a number of questions that have come to me, so please bear with me as this is a somewhat lengthy note. The situation is very fluid, and responses that I provide today may be outdated in a day or two. I will do my best to keep you informed as we move forward during this emergency.

Your Scholarly Activities

After spring break, all courses—graduate and undergraduate—will be conducted via remote teaching methods for the remainder of the Spring Semester. The faculty remain in full control of the curriculum and are encouraged to redesign their teaching methods as appropriate given the emergency nature of these changes.

We are aware of the particular impact junior scholars face from disruptions to their fieldwork, potentially failed experiments, delays in completion of deadlines now that they are caring for children at home, navigating a distance-based world, and so on. For now, we have asked faculty to think carefully about what work can be done while engaging in appropriate social distancing. We also know that research productivity is being interrupted due to the COVID 19 emergency, and that this may delay your progress towards academic goals, including time to degree. Please be assured that your faculty and the Graduate Division will take these unusual circumstances into consideration in reviewing your progress.

Major graduate exams (e.g., advancements, qualifying exams, thesis/dissertation defenses) may all be held virtually. The Graduate Division and Office of Information Technology are working together to make this as simple as possible for you. The forms required for these exams may all be signed and delivered digitally (wet signatures will not be required).

For those of you working with human subjects or animal subjects, please be sure to read the following notices, which provide the most current guidance:

[COVID-19 Humans Subjects Research Guidance](#)

[COVID-19 Animal Subjects Research Guidance](#)

Whatever type of research you conduct, please document changes in protocols so you can write up your methods sections of papers appropriately. Depending on the changes, you may also need to have your modified protocols approved by appropriate review board (see guidance above).

Your Employment

Your employment in Spring will NOT be reduced in response to COVID-19 planning.

GSRs: GSRs are asked to work with their PIs to ensure maximum social distancing is taking place, given the work you do. Please try to work from home when you can, spread out in labs, and minimize close contact with others. Start with making contingency plans for research continuity with your PI. If that doesn't work out or you do not feel comfortable having those conversations, please reach out to your Graduate Group Chair, graduate support staff in the schools, or Maria Nishanian (mnishanian@ucmerced.edu - academic counselor in the Graduate Division) to help you.

The faculty have received additional guidance from the Office of Research. Should there be disruptions to operations, the University may have limited ability to assist with research continuity issues. For example, the availability of supplies may lag during the resolution of a health crisis.

While the campus plans to provide researchers with access to their space until such a time as it is deemed to be unsafe or is prohibited by state or federal directives, **researchers should be prepared for a partial or total cessation of all laboratory-based research.** As outlined in a directive from the UC Office of the President, **in no event should researchers take reagents, chemicals, biologics or any other laboratory equipment or materials *other than laptops, data storage devices, etc.*, offsite (e.g., to their homes) during a curtailment.** Should there be a closure, it is expected that you will continue to work with your PI on research projects—writing up literature reviews, planning for next grants, etc.

TAs: As you know, teaching assistants are under contract to work a set number of hours, depending on the percentage of appointment. **After Spring Break, ALL instructional activity will be delivered remotely. This includes all types of instructional formats – seminars, laboratories, etc. – and all forms of assessments – exams, tests, quizzes, performances, etc.** Many faculty simply do not know how much time particular tasks may take or how much undergraduates may be reaching out to you. Please keep your instructor of record informed of your work schedule in the event that they need to step in and do additional work themselves, or request additional resources from their department. The [Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning](#) has a number of resources available to you on their website. We encourage use of Zoom and CatCourses, and remind you not to use tools that require payment by students, collect personal information (including biometrics) from students, or put any student information (e.g., grades or test scores) on non-UC Merced systems. Please do not use YouTube to deliver instruction, as UCOP has specifically disallowed it for UC educational purposes.

You may also consult the [Educational Continuity site for Faculty and Instructors](#) and the [Educational Continuity site for students](#) for additional resources. TA's are encouraged to [schedule consultations](#) on using various technologies for remote instruction.

International Research and Travel

International graduate students needing to travel for any reason should be in touch with the International Affairs Office. As of March 12, 2020, the university has curtailed all **non-essential** domestic or international travel until further notice, and most domestic and international conferences are cancelled. Contact your sponsor regarding refunds for cancellations. If you must travel, please register all University related business travel with [UC Away](#), which allows the University to provide aid to you if something were to happen to you or within your destination country, regardless of nature, and the UC will work to get you back to the U.S. at no cost to you. If travel reservations were made using the University Connexus Travel program, trip registration in UC Away is automatic.

Research in foreign locations should be paused due to current travel restrictions. All proposed travel to high-risk countries, including those with a [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Warning Level 3 \(widespread community transmission\) or Level 2 \(sustained community transmfission\)](#), must have prior approval from [Risk Services](#) and the

[Provost's office](#) before making travel arrangements. Please consult UC President Napolitano's most recent [travel directive](#) for more information.

Your Wellbeing

This is a difficult, stressful time. Please remember to be kind to others, and to yourself, and to remember our [Principles of Community](#). Globally, stress, anxiety, and worry are high. Now, more than ever, is the time to care for one another and to remember the inclusive and supportive culture we have all worked so hard to build for so long together. Please remember that UC Merced has no tolerance for bullying or discrimination.

In an emergency, call 911. If not an emergency, contact the UC Merced Health Center and Counseling and Psychological Services if you need them. The Advice Nurse may be reached at [209-228-4192](tel:209-228-4192), 9 a.m. - 4:30p.m. Monday-Friday, excluding holidays or campus closure dates. If your call goes to voicemail, leave a message and the advice nurse will get back to you promptly. You can also use our secured messaging system for non-emergent matters through [myHealth](#). To speak to an advice nurse after clinic hours contact [209-228-2273](tel:209-228-2273) and follow the prompts to speak to an after-hours nurse. Students covered by UC SHIP can call the 24/7 nurse line 24-hours a day, seven days a week and speak confidentially to a registered nurse. These nurses are trained to help you make more informed decisions about your health situation. This number is also on the back of your member ID card.

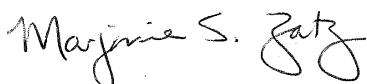
We encourage you to take a break during Spring Break and get some rest. We strongly encourage you NOT to do any non-essential travel during the break. Should you choose to leave Merced, please be prepared not to return, given the dynamic nature of travel restrictions and quarantine requirements.

Let me also pass on the following recommendations from my colleague at UC Irvine:

- Have zoom dates with friends. This can be a good time to totally decompress or to chat with people about your research. You can even have remote writing hangouts, and we will host some of these through the GPSRC.
- Get outside! Although we do not recommend touching playgrounds, park benches, and so on without a good scrub, going outside for a walk, run, or just to sit in the open air for a few minutes can make a big difference. Please look out for and help your friends with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities. Just getting out might not be as simple for everyone.
- Create structure for yourself so you can feel productive and engaged in your work while at home. Divide your work into tasks that take at most 90 minutes, rather than a full day labeled "write dissertation."
- Brainstorm best practices with your friends and share them online through Google docs, Slack, or whatever else you want to try.
- For those of you caring for kids, parents, or partners during this time, don't be alone, even if you are physically isolated. Have a virtual date via video call. Check in with an online support group.

On behalf of all of us in the Graduate Division, please do all you can to stay healthy and safe and to keep your loved ones safe. In turn, we will do all we can to minimize disruptions so you can continue with all your successes!

My best to all,



Marjorie S. Zatz
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education
Professor of Sociology