

Frequently Asked Questions

During our live research forums, as well as in the interim between then and now, UM's Office of the Vice Provost for Research has received a number of questions related to the current pandemic and its effects on research. Below are responses to some of those asked most often.

Awards and Grant Funding

- 1. The fringe benefit costs, which we request on NIH and other grants, are used in part to cover retirement contributions. Will these rates decrease now, since UM suspended the institutional contribution to the 403b plans? Similarly, will our grants receive a discount on overhead since we are mostly working from home and not at the labs?**

It is true that one of the factors going into the annual calculation of Composite Fringe Benefits (CFB) is UM's payment into retirement plans. There are numerous other components, of which health insurance is a major factor. CFB rates go up and down each year, but no major grant re-budgeting is required. If the rate goes down and a grant is paying less in personnel costs than anticipated, the PI would in most cases be able to move monies between categories without requesting prior approval from NIH. Our "overhead", or Facilities & Administration rate, is negotiated with the cognizant federal agency based on real and documented costs to our research enterprise over a base year. This rate changes only when the rate is re-negotiated.

- 2. Will extensions be provided on other (non-PRA) internal awards?**

Decisions on extensions for internal awards are made by the awarding office (e.g., OVPR, CTSI). Contact the office that provided the award for their individual policy.

Human Resources

- 3. If schools remain closed, how will the university accommodate faculty/staff returning to work who have children to care for at home?**

Contact your supervisor for questions about childcare resources/accommodations.

- 4. Are promotions of non-faculty research staff allowable under current HR guidelines?**

Yes. The hiring freeze does not apply to positions that are fully grant-funded.

Human Subject Research

- 5. How can I obtain informed consent and HIPAA authorization remotely?**

Updated information on obtaining consent remotely can be found here:
https://www.uresearch.miami.edu/assets/pdf/research-resources/conducting-research-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-20_04_20..pdf

6. Do we have to change the protocol and Informed Consent Form for phone/Zoom consenting?

If the protocol does not describe the remote consent or visit process, the investigator should submit an updated protocol (or updated local protocol) that describes the remote procedures. The updated protocol should indicate that the researchers will perform these procedures remotely only during the COVID-19 pandemic. PIs should obtain IRB approval for the remote process before obtaining consent from new participants remotely. When the PI must re-consent participants, and there isn't sufficient time to obtain IRB approval before a participant must re-consent, the PI can obtain consent from existing participants remotely without prior IRB approval. However, they must report the procedure as a protocol deviation on an RNI form, and also submit a modification if they will need to obtain remote consent from other participants.

7. Does IRB prioritize review/approval for COVID-19 related research? Is IRB implementing any procedures to expedite or exemptions for temporary changes in clinical research practices for screening and recruitment in studies that can be continued safely during COVID-19?

The HSRO is working as quickly as possible to complete the review of all submissions. However, many of the submissions we are receiving now are related to COVID-19. Investigators are submitting a large number of new studies, modifications to existing COVID-19 studies, and revisions to studies to address issues presented by social distancing. We are prioritizing COVID-19 submissions during the pandemic; however, given the volume, investigators might experience delays. The research teams must do their part by quickly responding to requests from HSRO staff for completion of required training, biosafety submissions, and disclosures of financial interests. The HSRO must coordinate all of these ancillary reviews, and a quick response from investigators reduces the burden on everyone.

Research Trainees

8. Does the hiring freeze affect postdoctoral positions?

Yes, unless your project is extramurally funded. Hiring of researchers, including postdocs, who are 100% funded on external grants will still be possible.

9. I have a graduate student who works as a research assistant, and she will receive her degree this summer. I would like to keep her employed next academic year; she is available as many institutions have postponed faculty hiring. How can I keep her employed as an hourly Research Assistant?

If the position is extramurally funded, the individual can be hired as a staff member or as a temporary employee. Hiring faculty should consult their unit's HR representative: <https://www.hr.miami.edu/about-hr/contact-hr/index.html>

10. If this pandemic will severely restrict research for a number of months, will there be opportunities for graduate students to get an extra year of funding to finish their degrees?

Students should contact their graduate program directors and/or their associate deans of graduate education for information on potential additional funding.

11. To take advantage of the current remote work and critical research requirements, would it be possible for graduate students to take summer courses and receive the corresponding credits?

Yes, many of the departments offer graduate courses which students can take. Graduate students should consult with their graduate program directors.

COVID-19 Research

12. Is there a UM website page where we can find information on researchers conducting COVID-19 research, as well as funding opportunities for research around COVID-19?

You can find information on projects funded by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research here: <https://news.miami.edu/stories/2020/04/fast-tracked-research-projects-aim-to-respond-quickly-to-mitigate-effects-of-covid-19.html> and projects funded by the Miami Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) here: <http://miamictsi.org/coronavirus>

If you are a researcher interested in joining a conversation with other researchers conducting research on COVID-19, you can join the CTSI's COVID-19 Discussion Forum, which supports research collaboration and information sharing. The forum is open to all UM faculty, staff and students. To join the conversation go to Microsoft Teams (<https://teams.microsoft.com>), log in using your @miami.edu email address, and search "teams" for the *COVID-19 Discussion Forum* (direct link: <https://bit.ly/COVID-19Forum>).