

RESEARCH TOWN HALL
WEDNESDAY 1 APRIL 2020 AT 9:00 AM
VIA ZOOM

Dr. Kathy McNutt thanked everyone for joining the town hall and shared rules for the meeting. She advised that Research will be meeting every Monday. She thanked Dr. Nick Jones for the Graduate Studies Town Hall on March 31st (up to 90 participants). She also thanked the Library for their support to students. The important thing is everyone's safety.

Research labs are shut down except critical labs. We are working with Health and Safety to create a Risk Assessment Form for low level risks, which will hopefully be finalized by the end of the week.

This town hall is about hearing from you.

1. Concern raised over student employment, Co-op work terms and credits. What can be done?

We don't have answers to this yet. We will bring this to the Council Committee on Research on Monday to address these issues. CCR is ideally suited to play an advisory role.

2. The following three concerns were brought forward:
 - a. Communication concerns on the Website especially for students for whom English is a second language.
 - b. Extension of grants – is this being done centrally or is each PI to contact the funder?
 - c. Is there a central protocol for working safely with COVID-19 (e.g. WorksafeBC has published some guidelines – appended to these notes).



Sally Gray's area will be handling contracts. In terms of extensions, faculty should work with their research facilitator in the Research Office.

3. Further clarity required regarding risk assessments and access to labs. Should we invest more time in doing a risk assessment or not?

Health and Safety are working on work-place safety protocols. Students can be included in a risk assessment submitted by a faculty member. We have to maintain safety standards set by the Province. The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research have drop-in zoom hours if students need to reach out.

4. Dr. Peter Leavitt is currently working on a risk assessment; if approved, he will have a protocol for working safely under pandemic circumstances. He noted that Sask Water Security Agency is continuing field sampling this summer but restricting to one person per vehicle.

5. What are the distinctions, with respect to employment under pandemic circumstances among graduate student, undergraduate student and technical staff (e.g. summer students are employed as technical staff)? Would it be different if we hired non-student summer staff?
6. Questions raised regarding tuition for spring/summer classes and graduate students having to pay for another semester due to time lost this semester.
7. Dr. McNutt read an e-mail she received regarding colleagues opening labs too soon. The e-mail expressed their support for keeping students out of labs.

The health and safety of everyone is the number one thing going forward. We will look at this on a case by case basis. Getting this right will be very difficult. We encourage everyone to be thoughtful.

8. Concern raised regarding limited funds for graduate students; international students are essentially stuck here. There is a financial risk to students if we delay (ie. living expenses, etc.), but there is pressure to maintain safety.
9. Comment made that no researcher would risk the lives of trainees in order to continue research. What will the situation look like in 5 to 7 months from now? In some cases, there are no alternative non-lab projects for students. Some labs are biosafety level 2; probably the safest place in the city during a pandemic. Looking for guidance if research is suspended for a few months. Actual lost time will be much greater than that.

USRAs can be delayed to the fall. We are receiving new directions from Government on a daily basis.

10. Comment made that delaying until the fall won't help. Data collection happens over the summer. Feels that this situation must be resolved with urgency.
11. Health professionals are collecting the data on-site; and receives that data. Is a risk assessment required in this case?

Risk assessment not required; continue as usual.

12. It was identified that there are several different types of fieldwork. The decision was made early not to do fieldwork this season.

We are watching government's guidelines regarding fieldwork. We also look at the Geological Society guidelines. We need to be patient. Every situation is going to be different.

13. Institutions across Canada are having the same conversations. Council Committee on Research will reach out to other institutions. Patience is requests while they develop protocol, processes and guidelines.

14. It was suggested that a checklist be developed for researchers to self-screen whether they should submit a risk assessment or not.

A checklist/safety assessment is under development right now. Suggested including guidance notes into the form.

15. Dr. Doug Farenick advised that he will be participating in a national virtual meeting for Deans of Science later today and will share outcomes from the meeting.
16. While delaying USRA may not work for all; it will work for some.
17. It was suggested that we think holistically about risk and safety; doing fieldwork versus what else a student might be doing. Are they actually safer working outside the university? What does return to research look like once the pandemic has passed?

Council Committee on Research will take a look at the larger conversation/picture. Adjusting to a new normal will require a lot of innovation.

18. Concern raised about the impact of the pandemic on the economy and availability of research funding in the future.
19. ALARA principle identified (as low as reasonably acceptable) with respect to risk. Risk bar is currently high. As the pandemic extends in time, will it always be that high or will some sort of ALARA approach be applied?
20. Concern raised regarding graduate student tuition. Suspension will add at least one term to their degree. Is there any way to waive tuition?

Will bring this forward to the University Executive Team.

21. Suggestion made regarding another virtual research town hall?

Everyone supported the idea of another town hall; perhaps once CCR has some feedback/progress to report on these issues.

Dr. McNutt thanked everyone for participating. We are resilient. Stay safe. Reach out if you need to.