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The University of Southern Mississippi
Work Assignment Guidelines for Return to On-Site Work
June 30, 2020 – Changes Highlighted

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These Work Assignment Guidelines for Return to On-Site Work should guide the implementation of plans to transition University employees from primarily remote work to on-site work at campuses and research sites.

All school/unit plans for return to campuses and research sites require approval by the director, dean, and division's vice president or executive officer and must be implemented in a strategic, phased approach to bring limited numbers of employees back to work on-site in small groups over a staggered timeline. Employees who work in research labs should also follow specific guidance issued through the Office of the Vice President for Research.

These guidelines may be updated frequently as this international public health crisis continues to evolve.

Returning to Work On-Site

A phased approach to return to on-site work will be implemented over a 6-week period (June 1 through August 3, 2020), subject to change according to the directives of the University's executive leadership in response to federal, state, and local COVID-19 restrictions. Personnel will return to University property according to the following plan:

Phase 1: June 1, 2020

- Administrative leaders (deans and higher-level administrators)

    o Administrative leaders will assign their direct reports to Phase 1, 2, 3, or 4 for return to on-site work and inform them of their return date. Leaders will have flexibility to make changes to the schedule as needed.

    o Administrative leaders must identify building spaces to be occupied during each phase. They will ensure facilities and operations within their areas of authority are prepared for the safe return of employees and an effective transition from remote to on-site operations.

Phase 2: June 15, 2020

- Employees as determined and informed by supervisors

Phase 3: June 29, 2020

- Employees as determined and informed by supervisors
- The general use of administrative leave for employees whose functions have been temporarily suspended must be discontinued by June 30, 2020.
- Employees may be assigned to work remotely beyond this date, if applicable according to current federal, state, local, and institutional guidelines.

Phase 4: August 3, 2020

- The original Phase 4 date has been extended from July 13 to August 3, for all remaining employees to return to on-site work, unless granted an accommodation in accordance with current federal, state, local and institutional guidelines.

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All USM employees, including graduate assistants and student workers, are expected to comply with current COVID-19 protocols while on University property. Questions or concerns should be directed to the employee's supervisor. Employees assigned to work on-site should:

- Continue following all applicable institutional protocols and procedures and public health guidelines.

- Keep their University ID with them at all times.

- Limit time on-site to the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, whenever possible during Phases 1-3, unless the assigned work shift or an emergency requires otherwise.

- Continue practicing preventive measures, including:
  - Washing hands often and practicing personal hygiene.
  - Cleaning personal workstations as well as "high touch" surfaces and shared areas following their use.
    - USM will procure and provide cleaning supplies for school/unit use. Refer to COVID-19 Purchasing FAQs for more information.
  - Wearing protective face coverings while on University property, except when working alone in isolated spaces.
    - Protective face coverings should follow current CDC guidelines and will be required in designated buildings or areas and at select events.
    - Protective face coverings may be provided for employees who meet criteria outlined in COVID-19 Purchasing FAQs.
  - Avoiding sharing personal or work items (e.g. phones, computer keyboards, desks, pens, other office equipment).
  - Practicing physical distancing while on all University property. This includes:
    - Holding meetings, including student meetings, via phone, Teams, WebEx, or other technology platforms whenever possible.
    - Refraining from gathering in spaces where 6 feet of distance between individuals cannot be maintained, including individual offices, reception areas, small conference rooms, elevators, break rooms, etc.
      - If physical distancing is not achievable in certain spaces, foot traffic should be redirected where possible, or spaces should be restricted to pass-through only.
      - Advance appointments should be scheduled whenever possible to limit the use of reception and waiting areas. If waiting areas must be used, furniture should be repositioned where possible to ensure appropriate distance between individuals.
      - Lunch breaks may be staggered to assist in physical distancing.

- Continuing to process paperwork (PAFs, PDSs, travel forms, reimbursement vouchers, etc.) electronically to minimize physical document transmittal.

- Follow current COVID-19 Health Protocols and notify their supervisor immediately if they or someone in their household begins experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

Unit supervisors should:

- Ensure employees, including graduate assistants and student workers, are aware of and are following all applicable protocols and procedures, including evolving public health guidance.

- Ensure provided hand sanitizer is placed at entrances and in common areas. Refer to COVID-19 Purchasing FAQs for more information.

- Post established University signage to educate employees and encourage positive behaviors for helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Refer to Human Resources' COVID-19 Employment FAQs for current guidance on leave and pay policies, including policies regarding care for children and other family members. Children of employees are not permitted on University property during a USM COVID-19 response status of Blue or higher.

- Limit access to buildings to employees, including graduate assistants and student workers, to the extent possible. Ensure employees keep building entrances locked until Phase 4 of the return to on-site work plan.

- Ensure that all property accounting and property control standards are followed as employees begin returning to work on-site. This includes:

  o Ensuring University property that was temporarily approved for transport to remote work locations is returned and accounted for immediately upon each employee's return to on-site work.

  o Ensuring University property that was purchased during a remote work period is appropriately tagged and entered into property control systems no later than August 31, 2020.

Graduate assistants or student workers may not be inappropriately pressured or coerced to return or remain on-site to work.

- Graduate assistants and student workers may be assigned continued remote work according to these guidelines.

- All graduate assistants and student workers, including those continuing to work remotely, are expected to meet reasonable expectations for employment and academic progress.

- Units should consider these requirements carefully when determining whether to hire graduate assistants or student workers. Supervisors should advise prospective graduate assistants or student workers of specific on-site job requirements that cannot be done remotely (i.e., filing), so the prospective employee can carefully consider such job requirements before agreeing to accept a position.

- Units should refer to [Human Resources' COVID-19 Employment FAQs](#) for current guidance on Federal Work-Study student workers.

Continued Remote Work

- Employees who are assigned to work remotely must:
  - Maintain communication with their supervisor and be prepared to report to work on-site or engage in telephone or video conferencing as needed.
  - Complete an [Agreement to Work Remotely](#), which clearly outlines guidelines for employees and supervisors during this period, including an expectation that Remote Work Logs ([available from HR](#)) and status reports must be maintained consistently and show clear evidence of engagement in job responsibilities.
  - Remain conscious of how their activities reflect on the University.
  - Establish a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection, if applicable, to log in to some systems through off-campus connections. More information is available on iTech's website: [usm.edu/itech](#)

Administrative Leave

- <mark>The general use of administrative leave for employees whose functions have been temporarily suspended must be discontinued by June 30, 2020.</mark>

Additional Supervisor Guidelines

Supervisors should:

- Ensure employees, including graduate assistants and student workers, who continue working remotely understand their specific work arrangements according to the University's Work Assignment Guidelines and consult [Human Resources' COVID-19 Employment FAQs](#) with questions.

- Continue to evaluate work assignments at least weekly for all employees who are working remotely, including graduate assistants and student workers.

- Ensure that a unit's work quality, efficiency, and productivity remain uncompromised, regardless of whether employees are working remotely.
  - All unit offices must maintain plans to ensure incoming phone calls are routed to an appropriate individual during regular business hours.
  - Units must use established remote work signage templates to:

- Post clear contact information on main office entrances if an office will not be staffed for any period during regular business hours.

- Post clear access instructions and/or contact information on buildings if buildings will be closed for any period during regular business hours.

  o Units that receive financial payments must ensure compliance with standard internal controls.

  o Units must follow official COVID-19 Communication Guidelines.

  o Units must review and update web pages to reflect modified hours of operations and services where applicable. Units may email web@usm.edu for assistance with critical changes.

- Ensure hourly employees, including graduate assistants and student workers as applicable, continue to maintain accurate time documentation and continue to approve time according to payroll schedules.

- Ensure that monthly employees continue to track leave time and supervisors approve leave time.

- Be aware that hiring processes may be delayed while the University is operating at a Yellow, Orange, or Red COVID-19 Response Status. Essential hiring needs must be discussed with the director, dean, and division's vice president or executive officer for direction on next steps.

  o Graduate assistants and student workers should not be hired during the summer unless specific work has been identified for them and they will be fully engaged. Units should contact the Graduate School or Human Resources to discuss further.

- Ensure that all University employees enable Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA).

  o Employees should register for MFA immediately by submitting a work order, calling the help desk at 601-266-4357, or sending an email. Detailed set-up instructions are available on iTech's website.