Dear Colleagues,

Recently, you received several communications regarding the approval process by which a graduate student’s or postdoctoral fellow’s work can be designated as essential. For details of these guidelines, please click UAB Office of Research guidance.

When a laboratory requires a trainee to maintain a physical presence in the lab for the completion of their specific studies or to maintain other essential research, a written exception request including a the name of trainee, physical space they would occupy, and justification that the research is essential is required from the PI.

This request must be approved by the following in sequential order as listed below:
- Program Director for Graduate Studies Program (for the graduate student)
- Department Chair (of the PI/advisor)
- School/College Dean’s Office (of the PI/advisor)
- Dean of the Graduate School (for graduate students) OR Senior Associate Dean of the Office of Postdoctoral Education (for postdoctoral fellows)
- The resulting decision will be reported to the trainee, PI, the Graduate Studies/Program Director, and the PI’s Department Chair and School/College Dean’s Office.

To facilitate this process, we have created a simple fillable form that will be automatically distributed to the required parties in the order indicated above. Signatures are managed via “Docusign” software through email, and the process is very straightforward (described below).

The mentor is responsible for starting this process and for filling out the form to request essential training status. To complete this process, you will need the names and contact information for the key individuals listed.

For the description of essential nature of the trainee's work, please familiarize yourself with the criteria required by the guidance of the OVPR (see link above). When describing the essential nature of the work, please describe the time required in lab, measures taken to ensure social distancing, and the type of PPE available/required.

Please keep in mind that any approver in this chain can deny the request. In the event that the request is denied, that approver must contact the mentor and explain the rationale. It is expected that if mentors and trainees do not agree with the need to continue lab work they will work to resolve this conflict. If a resolution is not reached, the program director and/or chair will help resolve the disagreement.

These are unprecedented times. Thank you for your continued flexibility and attention to the seriousness of these matters. Thank you for working with us to protect the safety of our trainees, staff, faculty, and community.
Process for signing the Request for Exception to allow Graduate Students or Postdoctoral Fellows to continue on-campus research via Docusign

1. Complete to signer information on the PowerForm found here:
   a. Enter names and emails of faculty mentor, graduate student or postdoc, Graduate Program Director (if student), Chair and Dean’s signatory as indicated
   b. If requesting approval for Grad Student, enter the name and email of the Graduate School Dean (Lori McMahon, PhD; mcmahon@uab.edu). If requesting approval for a Postdoctoral Fellow, enter the name and email of the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs (Lisa Schwiebert, PhD; lschwieb@uab.edu)
   c. Once contact information is complete, click the yellow box containing the words, “Begin Signing”, on the bottom of the page, which take you to the Docusign page

2. Complete Docusign Page
   a. Check the white box on the top left of page indicating that you agree to use electronic signature, then select the yellow Continue box on the top right
   b. Fill in required contact info
   c. Provide brief description of essential research activities to be undertaken by graduate student or postdoctoral fellow. In this description, indicate availability and use of appropriate PPE and requirement for social distancing.
   d. Once information is completed, PI selects the yellow Sign box midway down on the left side of page, then select the yellow FINISH box on the top right side of page. If FINISH is not selected, the docusigned page will not automatically transfer to the next signee in the chain.

Once signed by the faculty member, the form will route to the signees as listed previously. After all signatures have been obtained, the completed form will route to the Dean of the Graduate School and each signee will receive a copy.