Supporting the Research Experiences of COLA Undergraduates within UT’s Research Restart Process

Research Restart Process at UT
The University of Texas at Austin has developed a plan to incrementally resume the research activities of faculty and students that were paused at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the university’s core mission of transforming lives for the benefit of society, this plan manages access to research laboratories, shared facilities for animal research, and shared-use (core) research facilities (including computational facilities); on- and off-campus research activity in the arts, humanities, and social sciences; and research conducted in libraries, archives, and collections. The plan has five levels, with Research Level 5 being the most restricted and Research Level 0 being the least. Shifts between levels are decided upon by the Executive Committee of the University of Texas at Austin in accordance with the changing public health environment. For more information, please go to the OVPR Research Restart website and the UT Research Restart Plan and Levels as well as the OVPR Human Subjects Restart website.

Since October 2020, undergraduates have been allowed, under certain circumstances, to engage in in-person research activity that cannot be conducted remotely. The process for reopening undergraduate research experiences is managed by each college.

Please see OVPR Undergraduate Research Restart website for more details and key FAQs about the Undergraduate Research Restart process from the Office of Vice President for Research.

Undergraduate Research in COLA
Large number of COLA undergraduates have been involved in a wide variety of research activities. For the most part, these activities fall into three categories of independent or collaborative research under faculty supervision:
• For coursework, degrees, and certificates (e.g., capstone courses, Bridging Disciplines Programs, honors theses).
• As part of the work-study program or as a paying job.
• To gain experience in research independent of academic requirements or employment.

Across these categories, undergraduates should prioritize any form of faculty-supervised research that can be done remotely. The School of Undergraduate Studies has put out a helpful research remote guide for the various ways that many types of research can be conducted remotely.

For research that cannot be conducted remotely, undergraduates may be allowed to join faculty-led research activities or conduct their own independent research with faculty supervision, depending on the location of research, the risks it poses to researchers and others, and the steps that can be taken to mitigate such risks. Some scenarios will require approval of the COLA Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, who works under the guidelines of the Office of the Vice President Research, but others will not. Additionally, approval for some on-campus activities will depend on extant capacity of researchers in a research space, and approval for some off-campus activities will depend on approval from community partners and adherence to UT travel restrictions. In all cases, undergraduates engaged in-person research on or off campus will need to consent to regular proactive community testing at UT.
How to Resume Undergraduate Research in COLA

Any Type of Remote Research
All research projects that can be done remotely can proceed without formal approval from COLA as long as they meet any necessary requirements (e.g., guidelines of specific majors and programs, IRB approval for human subjects research).

Participation in Faculty-Led Laboratory and Human Subjects Research Projects on Campus
Regardless of the type of research, any faculty conducting a research project in a lab or other on-campus space requires approval from COLA through its formal application process. Undergraduates can be added to an already approved research team or included in a new application alongside other research personnel. Because such on-campus activities are highly regulated in terms of overall team capacity, COLA will allow the addition or inclusion of an undergraduate research assistant based on an overall assessment of team capacity. Please note:

- Additions of undergraduate researchers cannot exceed the 50% workforce density limit at any one time or associated social distancing policies (i.e., maintaining 6 feet separation at all times and adhering to a density of 1 person per 125 square feet of research space).
- If the faculty member organizes a shift-cohort schedule to allow 100% total team capacity (with 50% on-site at any one time), undergraduate researchers must be assigned to a shift and cohort according to the schedule that is set for the team.
- In order to participate, undergraduate researchers will need to consent to regular proactive community testing at UT, both before resuming in-person research and at least once every 14 days thereafter. Undergraduate researchers will be required to show proof of their test results to their supervising faculty. For more detailed instructions to undergraduate researchers about how and when to be tested and to faculty about how to manage undergraduate researchers’ participation in testing, please see OVPR Undergraduate Research Restart website.
- If within-building capacities increase to unsustainable levels, the approval process will have to prioritize some undergraduate statuses, starting with those who need research experiences to complete degrees and programs.
- Like other research personnel, undergraduate researchers must follow double-masking guidelines while working on campus.

Participation in Faculty-Led or -Supervised Human Subjects Research and Field Research Projects off Campus
Many types of research to be conducted non-remotely and off-campus can proceed under faculty supervision. If the undergraduate plans to join a faculty-led project, then the faculty member can add the undergraduate to an extant approved project or include the undergraduate in a new application through COLA’s formal application process. If the undergraduate will be conducting independent research under faculty supervision, then the faculty supervisor will need to submit an application for the undergraduate. In all cases, the application will need to address the many requirements that OVPR has established to regulate human subjects and field research during the pandemic in order to receive approval from COLA.

Such off-campus research, however, will not be subject to capacity restrictions, shift/cohort scheduling, and the potential prioritization of specific types of undergraduate researchers. It will still require undergraduate researchers to consent to regular proactive community testing at UT, both before resuming in-person research and at least once every 14 days thereafter. Again, please see OVPR Undergraduate Research Restart for more instructions to undergraduate researchers and supervising faculty about testing.
Participation in Faculty-Led or -Supervised Research Projects in Libraries, Archives, and Collections

Whether collaborative or independent, research drawing on libraries, archives, and collections that cannot be conducted remotely does not require COLA approval but does require notification of COLA about who is conducting the research and where. Please check with UT Libraries for updates on allowable on-site activities as well as other services and supports for researchers, including the Library Services Continuity Guide. COLA uses a notification system for faculty, staff, and students (with a sponsoring faculty member) to log information about who will be on campus for research and where. That notification system is crucial to managing on-campus activity. Off-campus research in libraries, collections, and archives on campus is allowed if the site allows in-person research and the appropriate travel authorizations are in place. COLA requires that faculty, staff, and students who have been cleared for off-campus research under these conditions use its notification system. The faculty supervisor will need to submit an application for the undergraduate researcher.