2 April 2020

TO: University Research Council

FROM: Dr. Michael Van Scott, Interim Vice Chancellor

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance: Personnel on Sponsored Projects

Overarching Principle: All classification of employees (faculty, non-faculty EHRA, postdoctoral fellows, graduate assistants) may continue to be paid from active grants and contracts if they are able to continue working on the project while complying with state, local, and institutional restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Special Leave: UNC System Office and ECU have extended the provision for special leave through April 30, 2020. This provision allows supervisors to place non-mandatory employees - including postdoctoral fellows and technicians - on leave with pay if that employee cannot conduct duties assigned to them. This provision applies to institutional funds, including state appropriations and trust funds such as F&A. Some federal agencies have approved paying special leave from grant funds provided the employees are not compensated differently than other employees at the institution. ECU’s published provision for special leave enables payment for personnel on grants and contracts awarded by these agencies (e.g., NIH and NSF). As projects funded by these agencies ramp down due to the increasing prevalence of COVID-19, personnel may be placed on special leave and continue to be paid from the extramural funds. Before committing to this course of action, principal investigators should speak to their associate dean for research and their representative in the Office of Research Administration to confirm that the sponsor supports payment of special leave. Payment of special leave will reduce the amount of funds available to restart and complete the project. Although there is active advocacy at the federal level to have additional funds added to project budgets to reimburse the expenses incurred by suspension of the projects, including the paid special leave, such additional funds are not certain. Nonetheless, principal investigators should document these costs to inform future reimbursement requests if the advocacy is effective.

Non-student Temporary Employees: As of April 15, non-student temporary employees at ECU will no longer be eligible for special leave. As ECU curtails special leave for these employees from state funds, non-student temporary employees paid from grants and contracts will also become ineligible for paid special leave. Regardless of funding source, non-student temporary employees will not receive compensation if they cannot perform duties required of the position due to stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements.

Student employees (assistants and hourly): Students conducting research, including but not limited to graduate assistants and hourly employees, will continue to be paid from grant and contract funds. At the end of this semester, student employees will no longer be eligible for paid special leave. Regardless of funding source, student employees will not receive compensation if they cannot perform duties required of the position due to stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements.