The coronavirus (COVID 19) reminds us that health isn’t solely a private, personal thing. Humans live in groups, and everyone’s health relies to some extent on everyone else’s.  Possibly the most urgent message from this situation is that we have to take care of ourselves and each other. In that spirit, I’ve drafted some responses for our office.

While, as President Pescovitz points out in her message to campus, there is no cause for panic, there is certainly reason for due diligence and pragmatic planning.  As I write this, there are no cases in Michigan, and we all seem pretty healthy.  Moreover, my point here isn’t to remind you to wash your hands, etc; other authorities have spoken to those self-care strategies.  Do check official OU announcements; the President’s office has the responsibility for setting university response policy. What *we* need to clarify is how we “do research administration” under these circumstances.

There are three possibilities that I see. The first is that nothing changes at Oakland University because of COVID-19.  This one would be unqualified good news from a public health standpoint. And, of course, we already know how to do research administration in this environment.  All would be well.

The second possibility is that we get a “shelter in place” order.  None of us is sick in this scenario, we hope, but we would all stay home to prevent possible spread of the virus. Under these circumstances, we could/should use technology to do as much of our collaboration as is humanly possible.  Specifically,

* Zoom for video meetings - for staff meetings and meetings with faculty, etc.
* Login every day using the vpn
* Email (obviously) and all the on-line portals that we use all the time, anyway
* Documents are already stored on the shared drive, which is in the cloud
* For phones, we can do one of two things: share cell phone numbers or use a service like Google Voice (VOIP).
* Real time messaging/chat function

In this scenario, we should each check-in daily.  It’s not that I’m worried that you won’t be working; it will just be good to hear that you are all ok. I will take care of starting a daily email check-in with everyone’s names on it.

When we are cleared to return to work, we will have plenty of clean-up to do.  For one thing, grant documents will have migrated onto personal computers, since not everyone has a docking laptop.  Those will need to be moved to the shared drive and then deleted off your personal machines. Red books will need to be updated with any post-award documentation, and probably much more.

My assumption here is that deadline-driven tasks such as submissions and progress reports would continue. If these are disrupted, that would happen at the federal or State level, and in a context that sponsors either initiated themselves or are well aware of.

The third possibility, the most worrisome, is that one of us gets sick. Of course, we would be worried about our sick colleague.  From a workload standpoint, though, while technology can simulate a shared work environment, it can’t replace YOU.  So, please don’t get sick. Failing that, we will have to reduce the services that we offer. We are all sufficiently cross-trained that we can pitch in on either pre- or post-award should the need arise.  However, we could really only offer compliance checks and submission services on the pre-award side and routine post-award set-up, monitoring, and reporting. (I’m still wondering if invoicing could happen at all.) Four people cannot do the work of five - at least not for very long.  If we need to activate this third scenario, I will take care of contacting sponsors and getting an announcement onto our website and out on social media. If I’m the one who is sick, then Dave will take care of this. Yet, even in this context, I’m assuming that the mission critical, deadline-driven activities will continue unless federal or State sponsors interrupt them.

If either scenario two or three comes into play, each of us should change our email signatures and our voicemail messages to reflect the changed circumstances of the office.  I (or Dave, in my absence) will provide you with some language to use, so that we’re all sending the same message to our faculty and other stakeholders.

And when we come back to work and everyone is healthy, we will have an office gathering to celebrate.

Remember, it is likely that our worries will come to nothing – as worries so often do. Think of these plans as Just-in-Time activities. We’ll know what and how to implement these ideas, should the need arise.

Near-term Action Items

* + Be utterly vigilant about making sure that Cayuse and the shared drive are updated with information that you and/or your colleagues might need. If we can’t get to campus, we must be able to access our data.
  + Be sure you know how to use Zoom
  + Ensure that the Sponsored Program staff contact information for this program is available to you.
  + Be sure you know how to check your work voicemail from home.
  + Let’s share phone numbers right away - and please do indicate if you want us to “lose” the number after the virus emergency is over.  Really, you’re typically under NO obligation to be permanently available to each other. There would be full understanding and cooperation if you ask us to remove your number from our lists when all is well.  But in the short-term, we need to be able to talk to each other.
  + Add real-time chat to your browser and link up with your colleagues.

If there is something I’ve failed to consider, please let me know!