



School of Medicine Research Laboratory Space Allocation

Policy Type: Administrative

Responsible Office: SOM Dean

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Policy Statement and Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent, equitable, and transparent process to allocate research laboratory space to faculty members at the School of Medicine (SOM). Research space at SOM is limited and valuable. This policy is designed to ensure research space at SOM is efficiently utilized and appropriately allocated to support the research mission. The policy will also help SOM achieve its faculty recruitment goals by identifying and reallocating underutilized research space.

The SOM Research Space Allocation Policy is required per and compliant with the university's [Research Space Allocation policy](#).

Consequence of noncompliance: Non-compliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

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Who Should Know This Policy

SOM faculty members involved in laboratory research, department chairs and administrators, and members of the SOM Dean's Office responsible for research space allocation and management are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

Research space

This policy applies only to laboratory research space where research experiments are conducted, commonly called "wet" lab space.

Wet lab space

Laboratories that have plumbing, equipment other than or in addition to computers, and ventilation appropriate for storage and handling of biological materials, organisms, chemicals, and drugs, including potentially hazardous material.

Dry lab space

Research laboratories that do not involve the use or storage of biological materials, organisms, chemicals, or drugs, principally where computational research is performed.

Contacts

The Office of the Dean School of Medicine officially interprets this policy.

The Office of the Dean School of Medicine is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by the policy *Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures* through the appropriate governance structures.

Please direct policy questions to the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training in the Dean's Office.

Policy Specifics and Procedures

Laboratory space is a valuable resource that is in high demand with short supply. Its equitable distribution is critical to the School of Medicine research mission. As such, no department, institute or center, member of the faculty, or staff has permanent rights to laboratory space. The Dean of the School of Medicine or his/her designee assigns all space based on the principles described in this document.

Faculty members may expect to have laboratory space adjustments, gaining or relinquishing space over time as productivity and priorities change. The School of Medicine will establish a threshold dollar value of externally-funded research expenditures per square foot of wet laboratory space as the minimum standard for justified space. Further details on this value are found in sections that follow. This document contains additional details regarding justification, policy, and procedures governing the assignment of space and its periodic reassessment. The policy and procedures described herein are primarily intended to identify space that is underutilized. Investigators who require and can justify additional space are considered by their chair and the dean on a case-by-case basis. This document was developed in an iterative process

involving the input of many stakeholders including senior leadership and School of Medicine faculty members and is supported by all chairs of basic health science and clinical departments.

Guiding Principles for Research Space Allocation

- Equitable research space assignments require standardized criteria, considering both current faculty and future recruitment. However, criteria need to be flexible or they will fail to account for variable circumstances.
- Space assignment is governed both by research productivity and by research priorities, including factors such as whether that space is used as a core facility, its importance for strategic collaborations, the needs of current faculty members and opportunities for future recruitment.
- Many US medical schools have adopted research funding metrics to guide space assignment.
- Current members of the faculty who have less than the threshold value in external research funding requiring bench space per square foot of laboratory assigned as “Research/Non-class Laboratory” or “Research Lab Bench” will be considered for laboratory space reassignment. Reassignment options include loss of all laboratory space, a reduction in space, and relocation to different space.
- Consideration will be given to the following potential mitigating factors prior to decisions regarding reassigning space:
 - amount and most recent end date of last externally funded award
 - three-year funding history
 - pending awards
 - remaining balance of start-up funding, if any, or initial offer commitment
 - internal funding
 - roles as co-investigator on grants
 - function of the space with regard to other investigators, for example, as a core laboratory
 - location and quality of the current space with regard to SOM priorities
 - shared laboratory-associated space
 - additional factors of concern to affected faculty member
- All changes to assigned research space are considered in the context of the comprehensive research laboratory space analysis, described below under Process.

Process for Research Space Allocation

1. Laboratory Research Space Committee Threshold Determination

- The Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training will chair a School of Medicine Laboratory Research Space Committee (LRSC), consisting of seven members of the faculty who have externally funded research.
- The members of the LRSC will be diverse with regard to department, rank, and sex.
- LRSC members will serve for five years with two members of the initial committee rotating off each year.
- A list of the current LRSC members is available on request from the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs.
- The LRSC will review the most recent metrics from the Association of American Medical Colleges prior to each space allocation effort to propose the threshold value. The Dean will review the recommendation and make a final decision regarding the threshold.
- Decisions are made by simple majority. At least five members, including the chair, must be present to

convene.

- Members are recused from discussions involving their own department.

2. Initial Review of Data

- The Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training will conduct a periodic comprehensive research laboratory space analysis with a goal to do so annually.
- At the beginning of each academic year, or at the request of the space committee, each department will review its research space allocations and update a shared database (currently FM Interact, which is maintained by the Office of Space Management) with the metrics listed in this policy. This database will serve as the primary quantitative data resource for research space allocation.
- Raw data regarding laboratory assignments (from FM Interact) and prior year wet-lab expenditures from external funding (currently from RAM Spot) will be merged to create a preliminary value for external research expenditures per square foot.
- The Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training will review the list for accuracy and add additional fields to include known mitigating factors described above.
- This preliminary analysis will be shared with the Dean when complete.

3. Review Process and Actions

- After conferring with the Dean of the School of Medicine, the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training will provide to each department chair the list of faculty members from that department who are assigned laboratory bench space, highlighting those who are funded below the threshold and the rooms involved. Any space assigned to the chair is considered in the same manner. The chair will have time to conduct a preliminary review of the data to insure its accuracy.
- The chair will be expected to meet with members of the faculty who are below the threshold, verify data accuracy, and to draft a plan for space reallocation.
- As part of the plan for each member of the faculty below the threshold, the chair may propose two options:
 - The faculty member is below the threshold, but reassigning some or all of the laboratory space in question is not recommended due to mitigating factors. These factors will be listed along with a timeline for achieving additional funding.
 - The faculty member is below the threshold and will have some or all of their research space reassigned. If the department has one or more faculty members who can justify an increase in space, or has an active recruitment in progress, the department chair may suggest a reassignment option.
- The plan for each faculty member below the threshold will be incorporated into an overall departmental space proposal, which will be submitted to the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training with a target date of 30 days from receiving the data. The chair can deliver the plan electronically or schedule a meeting for discussion.
- The LRSC will provide a peer review of the plans proposed by each chair (see below) and provide a recommendation whether to follow or modify each department's plan.

4. Faculty and Department Chair Notification

- Based on the LRSC determination, the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training will draft the appropriate notification for the Dean of the School of Medicine to review, sign, and send to the department chair and faculty member.
 - One letter will serve notice that the faculty member is below the threshold, but that there are no current plans to reassign some or all of the laboratory space in question. This letter will include

an offer to meet with the chair (or Dean, if the recipient is a department chair) and the Senior Associate Dean to discuss the matter if the faculty member so desires.

- The alternative letter will serve notice that the faculty member is below the threshold and that the chair (or Senior Associate Dean) will be scheduling a meeting to discuss space reassignment.

5. Appeal Process

- Any faculty member who receives notice of intent to reassign laboratory space will have 21 days from the date of the letter to appeal the decision in writing to the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training, articulating the justification for the appeal.
- A committee composed of the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Research Training, the chairs of two research-intensive departments other than that of the faculty member, and two active researchers from the faculty of other departments will review appeals and report their findings to the Dean.
- If the Dean affirms the space reassignment decision, the faculty member may further appeal to the Senior vice president for health sciences, per university policy.
- Reassignment will begin no fewer than 60 days from the date of appeal denial. It is anticipated that reassignment will be completed within six months of notification.
- Alternatively, if the appeal is upheld, the decision will be revisited when the next analysis is complete.

Related Documents

1. [VCU Research Space Allocation](#)
2. Office of Space Management website: <https://fmd.vcu.edu/departments/space-management/>

Revision History

Initial approval date 8/14/2024