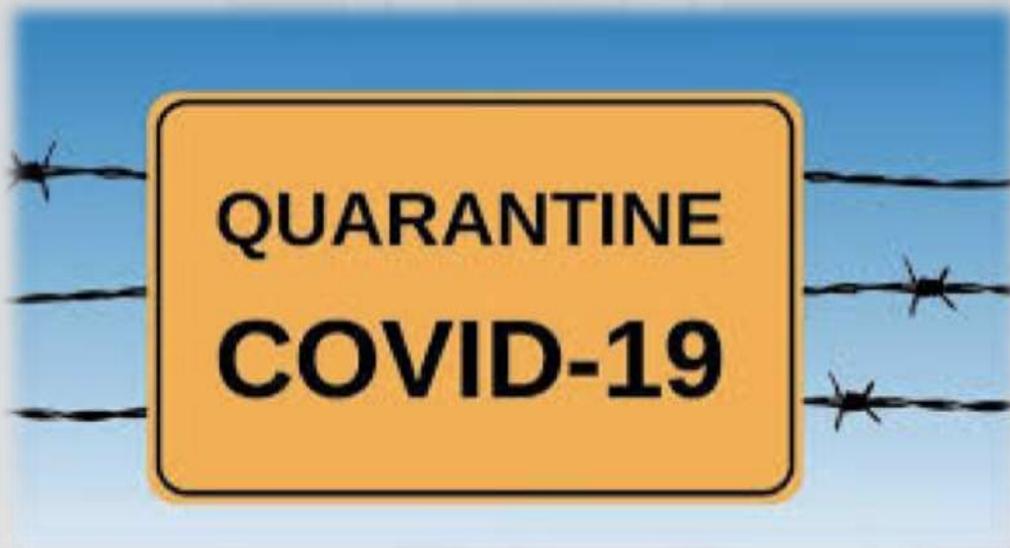# Lessons Learned from COVID-19 to Enhance Research Administration Services.

Office of the Vice President for Research
Dallen Calder
Dr. Andrew Weyrich (Mentor)

Background

QUARANTINE
COVID-19

The Coronavirus shutdowns at the University of Utah began in mid-March.

As a consequence members of Research Administration started working from home… With all it's distractions.

Background

Schall, M. A. (2019). The Relationship Between Remote Work and Job Satisfaction: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Autonomy, Work-Family Conflict, and Telecommuting Intensity.

- Perceived Autonomy
- Telecommute Intensity
- Demographics

Background

What is the feasibility of a hybrid work arrangement?

What are the possible benefits?

Does productivity increase, decrease, or remain the same when employees are working from home?

Background

Objectives:
- Understand the positive and negative aspects of employees working from home.
- Evaluate the level of productivity of employees working from home compared to pre-Covid-19 levels of productivity.
- Explore possible implementation of future hybrid work arrangements and obstacles to implementation.
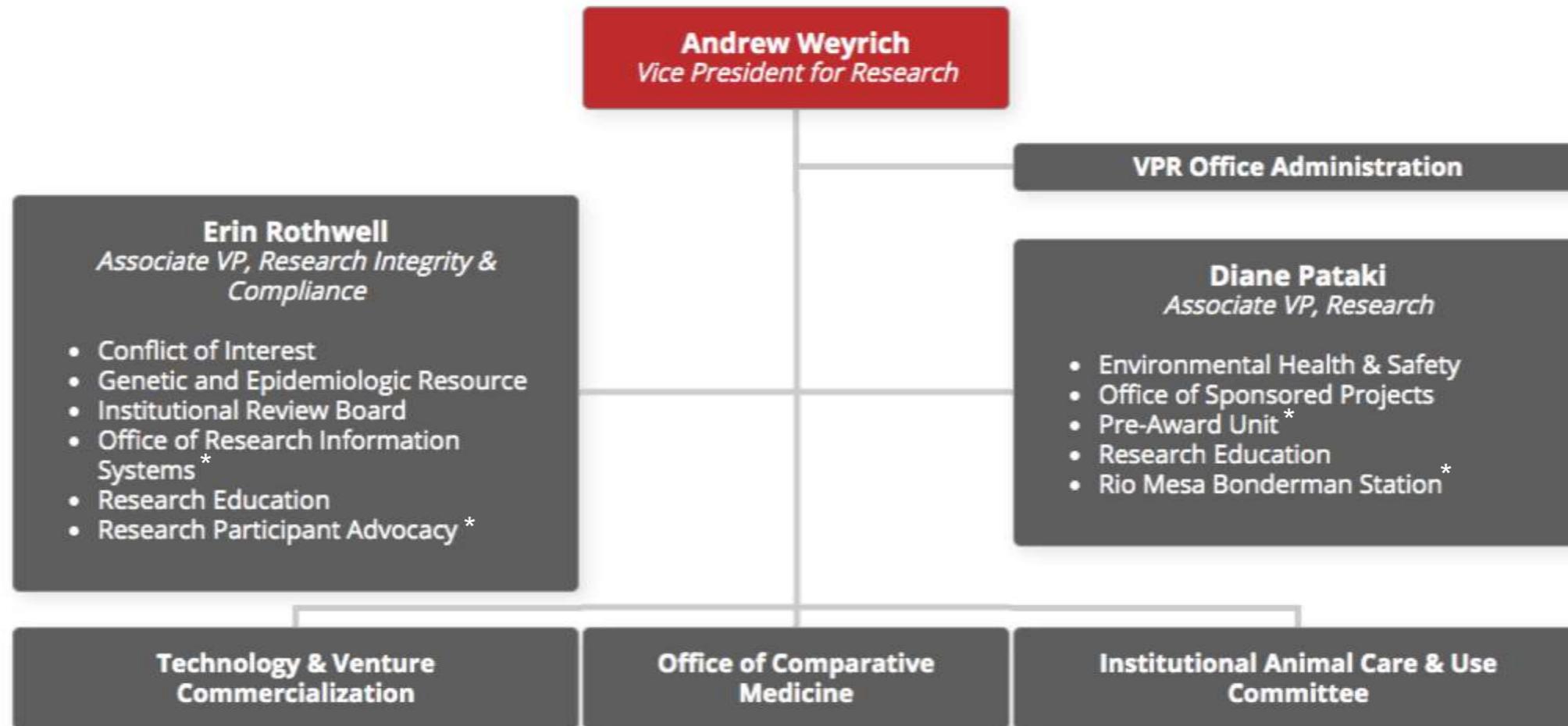
Hypothesis: In working from home, levels of unit productivity will remain stable and increased employee satisfaction will result in high plausibility of future hybrid work arrangements.

Methodology

- Information was gathered using an eight question survey and one-on-one interviews with VPR unit directors.

- Survey questions focused on employee preferences and opinions

  - How comfortable are you self-directing and monitoring your telecommuting work?
  - How efficiently do you work from home by comparison with being at work for those activities?

- Interviews were focused on analyzing current unit productivity compared to productivity before the shutdown.

  - Productivity metrics were collected from select units.

Methodology

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Andrew Weyrich
Vice President for Research

VPR Office Administration

Erin Rothwell
Associate VP, Research Integrity & Compliance

- Conflict of Interest
- Genetic and Epidemiologic Resource
- Institutional Review Board
- Office of Research Information Systems *
- Research Education
- Research Participant Advocacy *

Diane Pataki
Associate VP, Research

- Environmental Health & Safety
- Office of Sponsored Projects
- Pre-Award Unit *
- Research Education
- Rio Mesa Bonderman Station *

Technology & Venture Commercialization

Office of Comparative Medicine

Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee

* Unit not included

"Reporting VPR units are responsible for; compliance and safety, research education and training, technology patent and commercialization, grant proposal development and submission, and more."
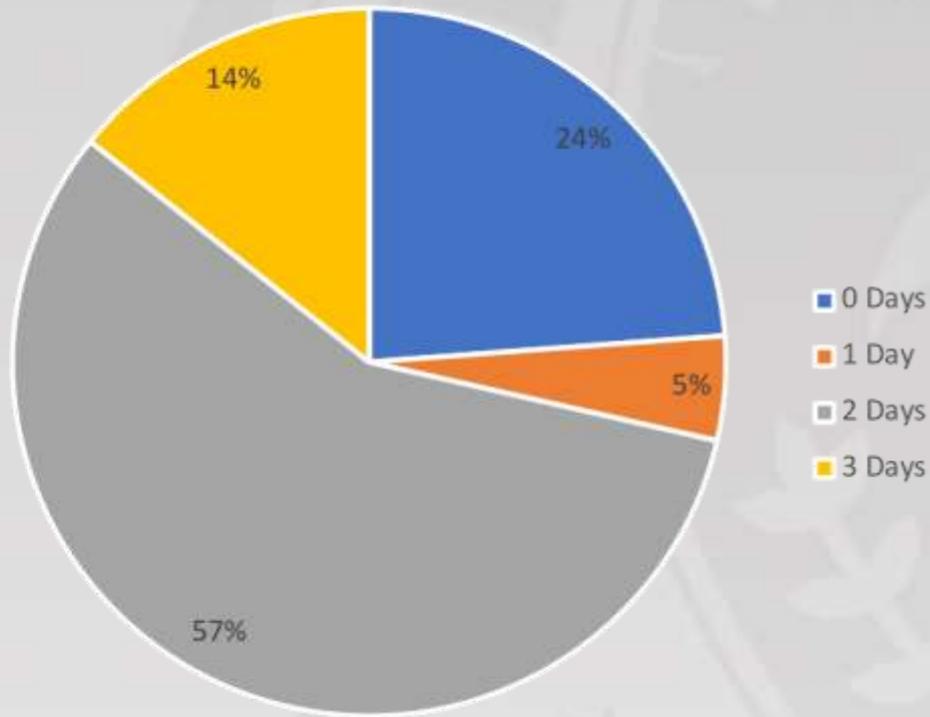
Results

Pros vs. Cons

Results

Pros	Cons
Schedule Flexibility (7)	Lack of Face to Face Contact (6)
No Commute (7)	Hard to find good work/life balance. (6)
General Convenience (5)	Children and Family distractions (5)
Being able to take care of children (2)	Inability to maintain same quality of work (lab inspections, etc.) (4)

"Please don't make me go back. I am so much more productive and happy with what I'm getting done because people are more thoughtful with my time. "

Important Considerations

- Extended work schedules – Mornings, evenings and weekends.
    - Home life distractions are causing employees to complete work outside normal work hours.

- Level of accommodation needs to be defined by VPR leaders to determine future schedule flexibility.

- Additional accommodations are needed for home office setups.
    - Desktop computers & extra monitors.
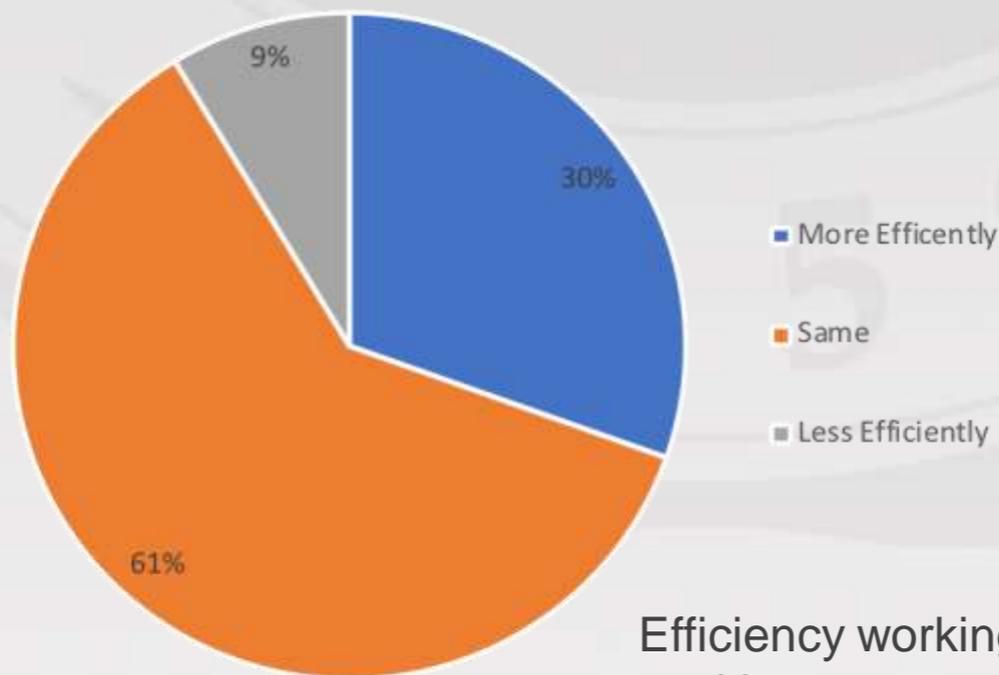
Results

Average # of days needed on campus to complete relevant tasks
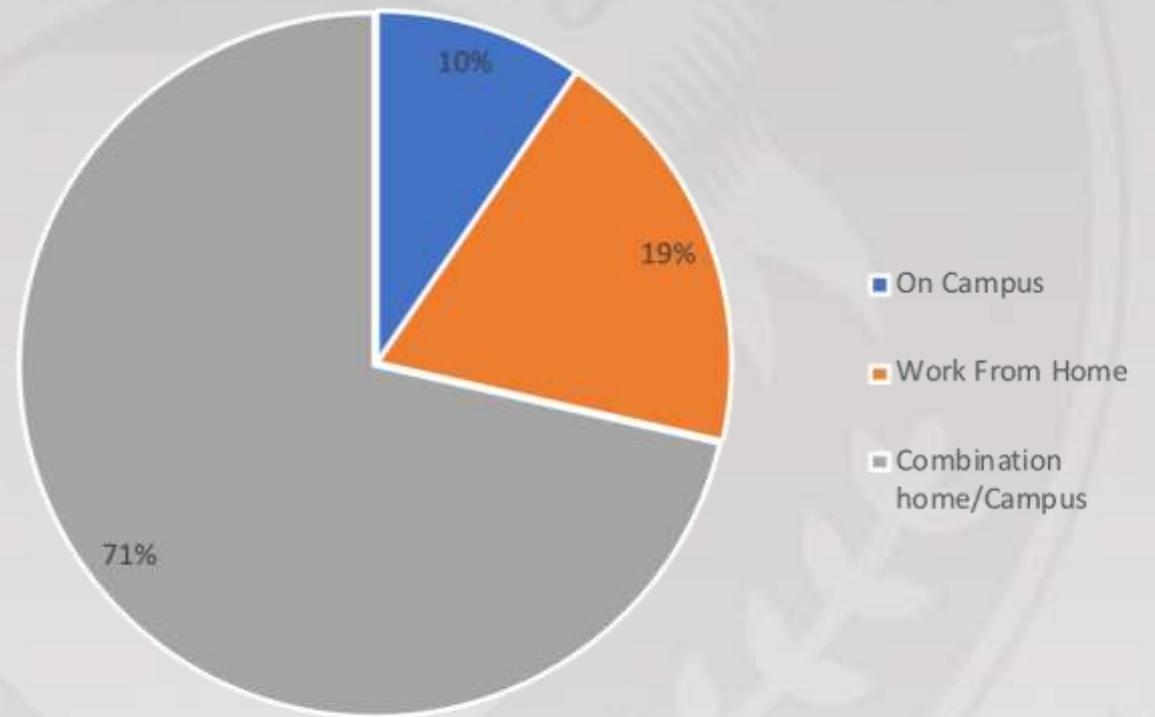
Preferred Work Arrangement

Efficiency working from home compared to working on campus

Results: Ability to Work From Home

Majority or All

Institutional Review Board

Genetic and Epidemiologic Resource

Research Operations

Office of Sponsored Projects

Research Integrity

Technology and Venture Commercialization

Conflict of Interest

Research Education

Partial

Environmental Health and Safety

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Unit work-from-home ability determined from unit director interviews. Based on unit function, unit size and output type.

None

Comparative Medicine

Results: IRB Productivity Data

IRB Work@Home Efficiency

The IRB measures efficiency by how long it takes for the IRB to complete review tasks. This chart shows the difference in median IRB review times between the first two quarters of 2020.

Q1 represents time the IRB staff were working on campus.

Q2 represents time the IRB staff were working from home.

The general trend shows that efficiency has increased during the work from home period, even with an increase in the number of applications submitted for review.

Median time from IRB submission to IRB approval.

Median time for IRB staff to complete initial pre-review.

New Studies

Pre Covid-19 → n=393 — 2020 Q1 — 40 days — 2020 Q1 — 19 days
Post Covid-19 → n=517 — 2020 Q2 — 29 days — 2020 Q2 — 17 days

Amendments

Pre Covid-19 → n=711 — 2020 Q1 — 16 days — 2020 Q1 — 8 days
Post Covid-19 → n=1,091 — 2020 Q2 — 14 days — 2020 Q2 — 8 days

Continuing Reviews

Pre Covid-19 → n=654 — 2020 Q1 — 28 days — 2020 Q1 — 10 days
Post Covid-19 → n=743 — 2020 Q2 — 22 days — 2020 Q2 — 9 days

Report Forms

Pre Covid-19 → n=287 — 2020 Q1 — 9 days — 2020 Q1 — 9 days
Post Covid-19 → n=478 — 2020 Q2 — 10 days — 2020 Q2 — 10 days

There should be major consideration for the VPR office to permit that the IRB work from home.

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Adequate

Institutional Review Board

Units are collecting productivity data, but they are not being measured.
Measurements are vital in allowing employees to continue working from home.

Insufficient

Office of Sponsored Projects

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Conflict of Interest

Technology and Venture Commercialization

Research Education

Genetic and Epidemiologic Resource*

Environmental Health and Safety*

Not Applicable

Office of Comparative Medicine

Research Operations

Genetic and Epidemiologic Resource*

Environmental Health and Safety*

*Differing Unit Responsibilities

Implications

Production Based

- Majority of work can be accomplished electronically.

  - Institutional Review Board

- Specific, measurable output.

- Telecommuting is highly feasible.

- Minimal campus presence necessary

Support Based

- Activities based on providing aid to researchers.

- Physical campus presence is necessary.

- Focus on campus relationships.

- Responsibilities cannot be carried out remotely.

  - Comparative Medicine

Implications

- Even within units there are differences between who is able and who is not able to work from home. (ex. RGE: coordinator vs clerk).

- Reduced employee presence on campus will require less office space. 6 units directors expressed their willingness to implement some type of shared workspace format. Half of these units are dealing with significant space problems.

- Schedule adjustments and guidelines may help increase work/life separation in a hybrid work arrangement.

Conclusions

- 83% of units reporting telecommute feasibility and 70% combination home/campus work arrangement preference. This indicates a type of future hybrid work arrangement is plausible.

- The decision to work from home should be based on the nature of work being carried out by each unit and employee.

- Productivity data are being collected but not properly assessed to determine individual unit work-from-home ability.

Next Steps

- Analyze the financial impact associated with downsizing office space and overall usage.

- Systems to delineate productivity measurements in each VPR unit need to be developed to establish methods of continual productivity assessment.

- Quantify employee satisfaction on a more precise level using questionnaires such as The Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index.

Thank you!

Dr. Andrew Weyrich

VPR Unit Directors