

Report on Research Compliance Volume 17, Number 8. July 23, 2020 Don't Leave Enforcement of Research Restart Rules to PIs, JASON Advises in COVID-19 Report

By Theresa Defino

In an extensive new report on how universities can safely restart research in light of the still-unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, JASON, an independent science advisory group, recommended that surgical mask use, daily symptom monitoring and physical spacing are essential.^[1] But the group, which most recently weighed in on strategies to combat foreign influences in U.S. research,^[2] has a warning about how to make sure the new “rules” and best-laid plans are followed—and it’s one that just might gladden the heart of research compliance officials. (It also could make a little extra work for them, however).

“Leaving the enforcement of new rules and procedures to principal investigators (who may not even be on campus) or relying on reporting by other researchers can be expected to result in wide-spread flouting of the rules and procedures” necessary to restart research, the authors wrote. The role should instead fall to lab directors, but they will need training and assistance from administrative officials.

JASON is a somewhat secretive group of “elite” scientists who typically remain anonymous. In December 2019, the National Science Foundation (NSF) released a JASON report it had commissioned to help the agency and awardees confront the escalating threat of Chinese and other foreign governments.

Founded by physicists during the Cold War and later renamed JASON after the leader of the mythical Argonauts, the group has operated with federal support, and its current “home” is with the D.C.-area contracting firm The MITRE Corporation.^[3] This new report, dated July 2, was posted on the website of the Council on Governmental Relations. RRC was unable to obtain comment on the report from the JASON group or MITRE.

Unlike the NSF report and most of its other projects, JASON assigned itself the task of assessing “risks and best practices for restarting university research programs.”

Members wanted to accomplish three goals: “understand the primary sources of risk and how they interact with the university environment; suggest modifications to existing continuity-of-operations plans; and identify the relevant information for collection from the personnel involved,” according to the 106-page report, *Managing the Risk From COVID-19 During a Return to On-Site University Research*. Their findings would also seem to be applicable to nonuniversity research settings.

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