Wednesday, July 1, 2020

News Digest Special Edition: Penn State’s Preparations for Fall 2020

This email provides faculty with Penn State’s pandemic-related news and updates as the University prepares for the Fall 2020 semester. Watch for these news digests in your email twice each week, typically on Tuesdays and Fridays, with additional “special editions” like this one delivered periodically. Previous news digests are archived here.

NEW VIDEO MESSAGES

- To learn more about health and safety considerations and related monitoring plans that drive Penn State decision-making, view this informational video featuring Matt Ferrari, associate professor of biology, who is co-leading the University’s Public Health and Science Task Group. Ferrari describes two important areas of focus, including the monitoring of local community health care systems’ capacities and the University’s capacity to house and safely isolate students.

- The health and safety of Penn State faculty, staff, and students remain the University’s highest priorities. To learn more about the task group that is researching and testing available masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) for use in classroom, lab, and other campus spaces, view this informational video featuring Keefe Manning, professor of biomedical engineering and associate dean of the Schreyer Honors College. The group has already begun testing and will soon release initial mask- and PPE-wearing guidelines that will continue to be updated as additional information is gathered.

FACULTY FAQ: WORK ADJUSTMENTS

Q: I am a Penn State faculty member. Can I adjust my mode of instruction before or during the fall semester if I have a concern about teaching in person?

A: The University is developing plans to support the health and safety of all members of the Penn State community. These include enhanced disinfection protocols, universal required masking, and alterations to classroom and office environments that help to ensure social distancing practices.

Even with those measures, some employees who are part of vulnerable populations or who have family members who are part of a vulnerable population may have concerns about returning to the workplace. Faculty who are in this situation and who have concerns about teaching in person should work with their unit executive (dean/chancellor or a designee) to determine whether adjustments can be made to their teaching duties and/or other duties. Faculty are urged to consider a variety of available instructional modalities that may give them the flexibility to fulfill their teaching duties.
In addition, a faculty member who initially decides to teach one or more classes in person may request to alter the instructional modality at any point before or during the semester if they believe circumstances warrant it. Units are urged to remain flexible and think creatively about work adjustments while continuing to meet their educational goals.

Faculty members who believe they have a disability that necessitates a reasonable accommodation or leave should contact the Affirmative Action Office or Absence Management, as appropriate.

For the complete guidance on work adjustments, visit [https://sites.psu.edu/returntowork/faculty/](https://sites.psu.edu/returntowork/faculty/).

**LATEST NEWS**

- **To help create a safer learning, living, and working environment for all students, faculty and staff**, new classroom policies will be in effect this fall across Penn State’s campuses in alignment with public health recommendations and Gov. Tom Wolf’s requirements for higher education institutions. **Wearing face masks and social distancing will be required for all students and employees in classrooms, labs, offices, and campus buildings.** Students and employees also should practice social distancing, avoid large gatherings, and wear face masks while on campus, as well as within their local communities in line with local and state requirements. Specific policy guidance will be posted soon on the Office of Student Conduct website.

- **Course delivery details for Fall 2020** will continue to evolve in the coming weeks. The University soon will take a comprehensive look at instructors’ and departments’ course plans across colleges and campuses. By mid-July, Penn State plans to allow students to review their schedules and potentially change their courses based on their preferences for in-class, mixed-mode, or remote instruction.

- To enhance safety on all Penn State campuses, **buildings are being analyzed for touch-free environments and new classroom configurations**; and **new facility cleaning and disinfecting protocols** are being implemented.

- The COVID-19 Health Resources Task Group will provide options soon for University leadership to consider for implementing a rigorous testing and contact tracing program this fall.

**REMINDERS**

- All University employees who are currently working remotely should plan to do so until further notice unless otherwise instructed.
Penn State is augmenting outreach to all faculty via multiple platforms to share key information. To support this effort, faculty are encouraged to submit questions via this online form so leadership can respond to them in upcoming communications.

The University’s “Keep Teaching” and “Keep Learning” websites are being updated regularly with resources for faculty and students to prepare for the fall semester. Recent updates include:

- Return to Resident Instruction guidance
- Flexible Instructional Modes summary and details

Additional updates will be spotlighted in future news digests.

On June 26, Executive Vice President and Provost Nick Jones and Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs Kathy Bieschke shared a video message for University faculty regarding preparations for on-campus instruction in Fall 2020.

Faculty are encouraged to complete this confidential survey to provide feedback on the Town Hall held June 22 about Penn State’s plans for Fall 2020. A recording of the event is archived at livevents.psu.edu.

Penn State has updated guidance effective July 1, 2020, for University-related travel and meetings and events (revised on June 30, 2020).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To obtain comprehensive, updated information at any time, please review:

- The University’s comprehensive “Back to State” page and nearly 50 updated FAQs regarding plans to resume on-campus work and learning this fall
- The “University Measures” webpage, which summarizes steps Penn State is taking in response to COVID-19
- Penn State’s guidance for University-related travel and meetings and events
- The Office of Human Resources COVID-19 information site and “Return to Work” resource site
- The University’s health information page focused on personal safety practices for Penn Staters at all campuses
- A robust, updated list of contacts and resources for the University community
- The Penn State websites dedicated to teaching and learning in Fall 2020
- The Social Science Research Institute website featuring pandemic-related insights from University experts and other resources
- An online archive of previous news digests