Friday, September 18, 2020

News for Faculty and Instructors: Penn State and COVID-19

This twice-weekly email is designed to provide faculty and instructors with Penn State’s pandemic-related news and updates during the Fall 2020 semester. Watch for these emails on Tuesdays and Fridays, with additional “special editions” delivered periodically. Previous faculty news digests are archived here. For current Fall 2020 faculty guidance, resources, FAQ documents, and more visit the “Back to State Info for Faculty” webpage.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Q: Faculty who were employed by Penn State as of Spring 2020 were given a one-year extension to their provisional tenure period. Will this extension apply to faculty hired since Spring 2020?

A: In March 2020, Penn State extended the provisional tenure period for all faculty in their pre-tenure probationary period as defined in University policy AC23. In recognition of the impact the pandemic has had on faculty members in the probationary period, the extension is now being offered to all tenure-line faculty in their probationary period during the calendar year 2020. This means that any faculty member in probationary status during calendar year 2020 can request a one-year extension by completing the online Confirmation of Extension of the Probationary Period Due to COVID-19 form.

When confirmation of the tenure clock extension is received, the faculty member’s probationary period will be adjusted, and the dates of all formal reviews will move forward one year. This extension is not a stay but a response to the negative impacts that COVID-19 may have on a faculty member’s research, teaching, and service.

A faculty member must confirm acceptance of the extension no later than April 1 of the penultimate year of the probationary period by completing the aforementioned form. Confirmation of the extension may be submitted at any time up until April 1 of the penultimate year of the probationary period. Once confirmed, the extension may be relinquished once.

Details are available here and an FAQ about the extension is available here.

Q: As a faculty member, if I have potential symptoms of COVID-19, what should I be telling my students while I am awaiting testing? What should I tell my students if I am diagnosed?

A: Faculty and staff have the same rights to privacy of their health information as everyone else (see AD22 and AD53). Employees, including faculty, do not have an obligation to share their protected health information or testing status with students.
If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have tested positive or have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, you should leave work if you are at work, notify your academic administrator (department head/school director/CAO/DAA), contact Occupational Medicine at 814-863-8492, and contact your personal healthcare provider. Do not hold classes or meet with students in-person if you have symptoms or have been told to quarantine or isolate. You may hold your class remotely as you are able. If you are ill and not able to have class, work with your academic administrator to plan an alternative. You do not need to share the reason why you are ill with your academic administrator. Some colleges/campuses have class cancellation policies that will need to be followed.

You do not need to share with your class that you are absent due to a COVID diagnosis or symptoms or that you are in quarantine or isolation. As explained in an FAQ in this Digest on Friday, September 11, if you test positive for COVID-19, then contact tracers will work with you to identify your close contacts. Generally speaking, in traditional classroom settings with proper masking and physical distancing, instructors and students will not be considered close contacts of each other.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard has been updated to reflect preliminary testing results for September 11 to 17. Among students tested at the University Park campus whose test results have been received, Penn State received 306 positive results from its on-demand testing and 14 positive results from its random testing program.

- Penn State has implemented a contact tracing process in coordination with the Pennsylvania Department of Health as part of a layered tracing and testing approach for students and employees at all campuses. This article describes the contact tracing process in detail.

- New COVID-19 reporting forms allow students, staff and faculty to easily submit information about students who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who identify themselves as close contacts of students who have tested positive.

- Penn State leaders will host a virtual Town Hall event at 3 p.m. on September 23 to answer University faculty and staff questions about the return to campus and Penn State’s ongoing response to the coronavirus.

- Penn State is taking a three-pronged approach to 2020 flu vaccine clinics throughout the commonwealth. Vaccines are free for all Penn State employees, and employees can choose from one of three options. Vaccine clinics for students at University Park will be held beginning September 21.

- University leaders wrote a letter to the University community affirming that health and safety is of the utmost priority as fall sports resume.
• The Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors voted unanimously to resume the football season starting the weekend of October 23-24, and adopted significant medical protocols including daily antigen testing, enhanced cardiac screening and an enhanced data-driven approach when making decisions about practice/competition.

• The Public Health Ambassador Program, a newly created peer health initiative, continues to provide students at the University Park campus with guidance on healthy behaviors and social norms related to COVID-19.

• During yesterday’s meeting of the Board of Trustees Committee on Outreach, Development and Community Relations, representatives from Penn State and the State College community reported on their collective efforts to limit the impacts of COVID-19 with the increase in local activity at the beginning of the fall semester.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

• Several new FAQs pertaining to promotion and tenure were added to the 2020-2021 Promotion and Tenure FAQ document to provide guidance about processes in the midst of the pandemic. Please see FAQs #68, 70, and 71 for updated information about peer teaching reviews, an updated charge to the committee, and virtual meetings.

• Please check Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard for the latest on-demand testing and random screening results.

• Faculty can still submit questions related to Penn State’s plans for a return to classrooms in the fall. Questions may be submitted here.

• Professional development and training opportunities are available to faculty in preparation for the Fall 2020 semester. Upcoming webinars for instructors at all Penn State campuses include:
  o Tuesday, September 22, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Time Management Strategies for the Busy Engaging Instructor
  o Wednesday, September 23, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Time Management Strategies for the Busy Engaging Instructor
FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

- The University’s comprehensive resources on its “Back to State” page and updated FAQs regarding on-campus work and learning this fall
- Penn State’s “Keep Teaching” and “Keep Learning” websites, including many Fall 2020 instruction-related FAQs and new webinars
- Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard
- The online archive of video messages from Penn State leaders and experts
- The Office of Human Resources COVID-19 information site and “Return to Work on Campus” resource site
- The “University Measures” webpage, which summarizes steps Penn State is taking in response to COVID-19
- The University’s health information page focused on personal safety practices for individuals at all campuses
- A robust, updated list of contacts and resources for the University community
- The Social Science Research Institute website featuring pandemic-related insights from University experts and other resources