Friday, September 25, 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: What is the student Public Health Ambassador program? What do Public Health Ambassadors do?

A: The Public Health Ambassador Program is a newly created peer health initiative administered by Health Promotion and Wellness. Goals of the program are to provide the campus and local community with visible student public health educators to answer questions related to COVID-19 reopening and operation and to use educational peer-to-peer engagements to help influence healthy behaviors, including physical distancing, wearing face coverings, practicing hand and cough hygiene, and using hand sanitizer. This program is just one of many initiatives that support Penn State’s multifaceted Back to State plan and provide COVID-19-related resources to students, employees and community members. To date, student ambassadors have had many positive exchanges with students, employees, and community members.

To date, approximately 160 students have been hired to serve as public health ambassadors. Each student is assigned to a team with other student ambassadors, and each team is assigned to one of 10 zones on and off campus. The students walk around their zone during the shift and interact with individuals who may not be following the requirements. Ambassadors will be located at popular campus locations such as the HUB-Robeson Center, Allen Street Gates, outside the Forum Building, and in front of Thomas Building, from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 5 p.m. on the weekends.

The program has a SharePoint site that includes a program overview, educational materials, and other COVID-19 resources.

Q: How should I treat student absences during COVID?

A: There are two general principles to keep in mind. First, while it is always true that we do not want people who are ill to come to class, it is particularly true in the midst of a pandemic. Second, flexibility is essential given that some students are in isolation and quarantine. Below is a summary of the relevant policies and guidance related to how to manage student absences during COVID.
Instructors are encouraged to handle student absences with flexibility during this pandemic period. Additionally, **it is critical to our health and safety efforts that instructors advise students who are feeling ill not to attend class.** FAQs on the [keepteaching website](https://keepteaching.psu.edu/) and the [virusinfo website](https://virusinfo.psu.edu/) provide additional information about how instructors might provide make-up work to students who are unable to participate in class for a short period of time or to engage them remotely with collaborative or communication tools if the period of time is extensive.

Penn State guidelines pertaining to class attendance are available from two sources. First, the [Academic Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual](https://policies.psu.edu/) states that **"in the case of illness, students are not required to secure the signature of medical personnel."** University Health Services does not provide medical notes to students. Second, the University Faculty Senate’s [Policies and Rules for Undergraduate Students](https://psu.edu/facultysenate/) states, **"Instructors also should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss classes for other legitimate but unavoidable reasons. Legitimate, unavoidable reasons are those such as illness, injury, military service, family emergency, or religious observance."** In addition, the Faculty Senate’s [syllabus guidelines](https://psu.edu/facultysenate/syllabus-guidelines/) discuss student attendance and explain that syllabi should "emphasize that students should NOT come to class physically when they are feeling ill".

If a student is taking a CP or CM course and has tested positive for COVID, the instructor will receive an email. Please note that it is possible that a student will notify you of a positive test result before you receive this email. This is explained in depth in an FAQ in the [September 4 faculty Digest](https://psu.edu/facultysenate/). Instructors teaching CR or CW courses will not receive an email if a student in their class tests positive, but should still work with these students to make up any missed work if the student is too ill to attend class remotely.

Students may report to you that they are feeling ill or feel that they may have been exposed. Students who feel ill should be advised to not attend class in person and to get tested through Penn State’s walk-up testing process. Students who feel that they may have been exposed should be advised to complete the Student COVID-19 Self-Referral Form on the [COVID-19 Support page](https://psu.edu/covid/) for students and can also be tested through walk-up testing.

### LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State released its [preliminary coronavirus testing results](https://psu.edu/covid/) for the period of September 18 to 24 on its [COVID-19 Dashboard](https://psu.edu/covid/) today.

- Violations of the University’s expectations or local or state laws related to COVID-19 will typically [result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct](https://psu.edu/studentconduct/). Any
large gathering off campus in violation of local ordinances will be considered a serious violation and will likely result in suspension.

- University leaders convened a virtual Town Hall event on September 23 for faculty and staff to discuss Penn State’s ongoing response to the coronavirus pandemic and its plans for the remainder of the academic year. The town hall will be archived and available for viewing soon at https://LiveEvents.psu.edu.

- As part of the University’s multi-pronged testing program, random and risk-stratified samples of students are selected and tested daily for COVID-19 during the semester.

- The IM Building on the University Park campus has been reopened as of today. All visitors will be required to wear masks, practice social distancing, and follow enhanced health, safety and scheduling procedures.

**KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY**

- Penn State has updated its public COVID-19 dashboard with the University’s on-demand testing and random testing results from tests administered during the period of September 18 to 20, as well as new University testing results from the prior week.

- Wastewater sampling for coronavirus on campus and in the surrounding community could alert University decision makers to a potential outbreak several days before individuals exhibit symptoms of an infection. Data from this sampling are shared with Penn State’s COVID-19 Operations Control Center and regularly with University leadership.

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

- Penn State Human Resources, in partnership with Health Advocate, has announced a three-pronged approach for the 2020 flu vaccine clinics throughout the Commonwealth. Employees can choose one of three options to get a flu shot.

- Faculty can still submit questions related to Penn State’s return to classrooms this fall. Questions may be submitted here.

- Professional development and training opportunities are available to faculty. Upcoming webinars for instructors at all Penn State campuses include:
Thursday, October 1, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., **Faculty Forum: Designing Online Discussions to Promote Engagement**

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