Tuesday, September 8, 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: I am an employee. What should I do if I am feeling ill or feel that I may have been exposed to COVID-19?

A: If you are having COVID-19 symptoms, you should 1) leave work immediately if you are at work and self-isolate; 2) notify your supervisor; and 3) contact Penn State Occupational Medicine at 814-863-8492 or psuoccmed@psu.edu. Occupational Medicine will determine whether you need to be tested and whether the test should be ordered through your family physician or through Occupational Medicine. It is important to contact Occupational Medicine because its staff will contact your supervisor and the University’s Absence Management on your behalf to inform them about when you will be out of the office and when you may be able to return. If you are working remotely, Occupational Medicine will still be able to advise you on testing. You also may wish to consult this chart if you have questions about how to proceed if you feel ill or believe that you may have been exposed to the virus.

Q: Will Penn State implement alternative grading for fall 2020?

A: For fall 2020, faculty have been preparing their courses for many months, around half of all courses are already being delivered remotely, and students, faculty, and staff have all been aware of the need to prepare for a potential pivot to more fully remote instruction if required for health and safety considerations. Therefore, it's very unlikely that alternative grading will be implemented under the current circumstances or in the event that we must pivot to greater use of remote instruction prior to the planned November 20th switch.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State released its coronavirus testing results for the week of Aug. 28 to Sept. 3 on its COVID-19 dashboard on September 4. Among students tested at the University Park campus, Penn State received 115 positive results from its on-demand screening and 59 positive results in its random screening.
• As part of the University’s testing and contact tracing plan, Penn State has launched the Testing and Surveillance Center (TASC), to be used for random asymptomatic surveillance testing at the University Park campus.

• Numerous groups and individuals within Penn State IT have been supporting the University’s COVID efforts since the spring. IT’s efforts support teaching, learning, contact tracing, and more.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

• A new guidance document includes information about what instructors should do if a student in their class has been placed in quarantine or isolation and how to handle student absences.

• As movement restrictions due to COVID-19 have increased domestic abuse concerns, a collection of Penn State advocacy and support offices has created the Victim & Survivor Support and Advocacy web resource.

• 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 Wednesday, September 9, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Engaging Students in a Multi-Audience Classroom for Active Learning

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