Friday, October 16, 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.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: If a student or employee with COVID-19 symptoms is selected for surveillance testing, do they still need to complete the surveillance testing process?

A: Symptomatic individuals selected for surveillance testing should indicate their symptoms via the questionnaire on the COVID-19 surveillance registration website. Students and employees who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 will be excluded from random asymptomatic surveillance testing.

Due to the fact that surveillance test samples are analyzed in pools, or groups, for efficiency, and in the interest of personal and community health, symptomatic students should instead stay home and schedule an appointment with University Health Services or their campus health center for individual evaluation and testing. Employees with COVID-19 symptoms should stay home, call their primary care provider, and contact Penn State Occupational Medicine at 814-863-8492 or psuoccmmed@psu.edu.

As part of Penn State’s multi-layered COVID-19 testing program, the University is conducting randomized daily testing of at least 1% of the campus population to identify asymptomatic carriers of the virus. Those excluded from testing due to COVID-19 symptoms may be added back into the testing pool and selected again at a later date.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard is updated every Tuesday and Friday with results of both on-demand and random surveillance testing.

- The recorded October 15 Q&A session with President Barron is now available to view online.

- The University will hold a remote symposium to help instructors prepare for the planned pivot to remote instruction on November 20. The Transition to Remote Symposium will be held via Zoom on Friday, November 6 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. More than 25 experts, including faculty champions from 6 campuses, as well as experts from TLT, the Schreyer Institute, World Campus, Penn State
Harrisburg Center for Teaching Excellence, academic advising and student success centers, Environmental Health and Safety, and multiple college-level offices will serve as co-facilitators/panelists during the event. Attendees are encouraged to bring their questions, challenges, and successful tips.

- The health and safety of the entire community remains a joint town/gown priority as University officials, municipal leaders, local public health authorities, law enforcement and more prepare for the start of the Nittany Lion football season, which will take place without fans in attendance.

- Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House’s coronavirus response coordinator, visited the University Park campus on Wednesday, October 14 to discuss Penn State’s ongoing response to the coronavirus pandemic with University leaders.

- The Penn State Faculty Senate passed a resolution asking the University to consider sharing additional COVID-related information with the Senate and consider several suggestions for the University’s testing and virus mitigation strategies.

- In order to encourage communication to students in preparation for the November 20th transition to remote teaching and learning, a series of templates has been created for instructors who are currently teaching In-Person or Mixed courses. This will assist in communicating key information to students to help them to prepare to be successful in their studies as they make this transition. We recommend all instructors review these templates and begin communicating this information as soon as possible.

- Researchers in Penn State’s College of Information Sciences and Technology say that insightful lessons provided and tools adopted during the pandemic should be considered in future teaching – including the continued use of mixed class-delivery modes and supplemental recordings.

- During the pandemic, use of technology and electronic communication are more important than ever. During National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, Penn State’s Office of Information Security urges the University community to protect their devices, data, and Penn State Accounts against cyberattacks such as ransomware. Faculty and researchers who work with intellectual property are encouraged to be particularly vigilant.

- Penn State IT is working to assist instructors and students with preparations for the remote teaching period that will take place following the Thanksgiving break. Information on technology resources and the Technology Loaner Programs is available on Penn State’s Keep Teaching and Keep Learning websites. For students, there is a limited supply of loaner laptops and mobile hotspots. For instructors who need assistance with digital annotation, there is a limited supply
of loaner iPads. Instructors and students can access the Mobile Technology Request Form with their Access ID and password.

- To help understand the science and to formulate a plan for students to return to campus for the fall 2020 semester, the School of Music formed a COVID Committee, comprising administration, faculty and staff, to develop health and safety practices steered by scientific, peer-reviewed research.

- Penn State’s Department of Architectural Engineering brought together a unique blend of faculty expertise to find innovative solutions to challenges posed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic – including the transformation of an engineering design studio space into a mixed-mode, socially distanced classroom.

**KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY**

- Different types of virus testing are being conducted at the University this fall, and each one is billed and paid for differently. Required, random surveillance testing is free to both students and employees. Penn State is also providing free asymptomatic walk-up testing at University Park for both students and employees working on campus. Finally, students who seek care at University Health Services or their on-campus health center will be billed via their insurance for any evaluation or testing that is provided.

- President Barron wrote a letter to the University community emphasizing the need for fans to cheer on the Nittany Lions safely during the upcoming football season.

- Penn State College of Medicine researchers say that a large, international study of COVID-19 patients confirmed that cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and other diseases can increase a patient’s risk of dying from the virus.

- With mounting scientific evidence that anosmia, or loss of smell, is one of the most specific symptoms of COVID-19 infection, sensory scientists in Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences have launched a webpage to encourage people to perform a daily smell test.

- Gathering feedback from students at an early point in the semester helps gauge students’ learning and provides instructors with valuable data for making course adjustments. Students appreciate being asked for feedback, especially when instructors respond with changes to improve learning. Surveying students is one method for gathering feedback. PSU learning surveys specific to the four COVID instructional modes have been created for you to download into your Canvas course to collect student feedback on the learning modes. Click here for instructions on how to download them into your course. For information about
other options for collecting midsemester feedback, see the Schreyer Institute’s Midsemester Feedback page.

- Share a story about your successes in the Fall 2020 semester, in-person, mixed, or remote! We’re looking for stories from instructors, students, and staff. Your experiences can help motivate and inspire others and generate new ideas that benefit the Penn State community. You may also recognize someone who you think is doing great work. You can find the form here, which we encourage you to distribute within your department.

- 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.

- The “Keep Engaging” Fall Webinar Series will be delivered via Zoom, from noon to 1 p.m. every Monday through November 16. Upcoming webinars include:
  - Monday, October 19, 12:00-1:00 p.m., Barriers & Bridges to Success for Our Financially Insecure Students

- Professional development and training opportunities are available to faculty. Upcoming webinars for instructors at all Penn State campuses include:
  - Thursday, October 22, 12:00-1:00 p.m., Instructor Wellness – Practicing Self-Care
  - Thursday, October 22, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Finding What You Need: Engaging Students Using Online Resources

**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