Friday, November 13, 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: Will Penn State implement alternative grading for fall 2020?

A: Penn State is reimplementing its opt-in alternative grading system for the fall 2020 semester to support and provide flexibility to undergraduate students who may be facing significant challenges academically due to circumstances beyond their control related to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Students are urged to use alternative grading very cautiously and to be attentive to the long-term implications of choosing an alternate grade. More information is available in the full FAQ and in the story in this Digest under “Latest News”.

Q: What is the status of in-person meetings, events, and gatherings?

A: Penn State’s Meetings and Events guidance has been revised to reflect an order issued by Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary of Health Rachel Levine that amends previous COVID-19 orders to allow for adjusted capacity to gathering limits. Meetings and events with more than ten attendees still require unit executive approval. Further information is available here and the full document is available at https://www.vpfa.psu.edu/back-to-state-fall-2020-resources/.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard has been updated today with the results of on-demand and random testing.

- Penn State is reimplementing its opt-in alternative grading system for the fall 2020 semester. For the fall 2020 semester, undergraduate students will be able to choose to keep the grade earned in each of their courses, or to have one or more grades replaced with one of three alternative grades that have no impact on GPA calculation.

- A resource has been developed for instructors who are teaching asynchronously, such as World Campus or COVID-Web courses, to incorporate Wellness Days
into these modes for Spring 2021. The resource provides practical ideas for addressing wellness with students.

- **Students who are studying outside of the U.S. may encounter problems obtaining instructional materials** such as textbooks, lab kits, and technology necessary to be successful in their courses. A cross-university team has developed a set of solutions for instructors to help ensure students have access to these materials in a timely manner.

- The recorded November 10 webinar with President Eric Barron is now available to view online at [https://liveevents.psu.edu/nov-10-2020-webinar](https://liveevents.psu.edu/nov-10-2020-webinar). Joining Barron for the webinar were Damon Sims, vice president for Student Affairs, and Kelly Wolgast, director of the COVID-19 Operations Control Center.

- Penn State Schreyer Scholar Melody Munitz, a junior double majoring in musical theater and psychology, has [made the most out of challenges the global pandemic has posed](https://liveevents.psu.edu/nov-10-2020-webinar). In addition to providing a voice for Penn State’s latest video ad, she has managed to produce numerous works in a short amount of time, including a radio play.

- **After nine months of social distancing, masking and quarantining, many are experiencing pandemic fatigue.** Whether it manifests as anxiety, exhaustion or defiance, it’s important to recognize and address it for the sake of our physical and emotional health.

- During the Board of Trustees Committee meeting on Outreach, Development and Community Relations on Nov. 12, Tracey Huston, vice president for Penn State Outreach, shared [updates and accomplishments by Outreach units and showcased how each was able to pivot in innovative ways](https://liveevents.psu.edu/nov-10-2020-webinar) to continue to provide meaningful programming and experiences for students and communities.

- Measures instituted in April to help curb the spread of COVID-19 across the U.S. may hold a clue for improving air quality, according to researchers who [examined the pandemic’s effects on two key pollutants and human mobility](https://liveevents.psu.edu/nov-10-2020-webinar).

- **Self-reports of smell and taste changes** provide earlier markers of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 than current governmental indicators, according to an international team of researchers including two from Penn State, John Hayes, a professor of food science and Alyssa Bakke, a staff sensory scientist, both in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

**WEBINARS**

- 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, November 16, 12:00-1:00 p.m., Trends and Updates from Penn State Career Services

• Upcoming webinars for instructors at all Penn State campuses include:
  o Monday, November 16, 12:15-1:15 p.m., Assisting Students as They Pivot to Remote Learning
  o Tuesday, November 17, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Ask the Experts: Virtual Office Hours

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

• Dr. Glenn Buchberger, an internist and pediatrician at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, provides advice about how to gather safely during the holiday season in this article.

• After weeks of rehearsals in parking garages, open-sided tents, lecture rooms, Schwab Auditorium and the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, Penn State choirs will share the results of their work in 30-minute, socially distanced and masked performances from the School of Music Recital Hall and Pasquerilla Spiritual Center. All concerts can be viewed at the School of Music Livestream link: https://musicmedia.psu.edu. Five choirs featuring more than 200 students from all colleges at University Park will be featured as follows:

  Sunday, November 15
  o 2:00-2:30 p.m., Oriana Singers (upper voices), directed by Dr. Kathryn Hylton
  o 2:40-3:10 p.m., University Choir (mixed voices), directed by Dr. Bryan Nichols

• 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.

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