Friday, December 11, 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.

PUBLICATION NOTE
This Digest will be published once a week on Tuesdays for the next two weeks. After December 22, the Digest will not be published until the week of January 11 unless a special edition is warranted.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: What resources are available to help me with my course preparations for the spring semester?

A: Be sure to check the new Spring 2021 Planning page on the Keep Teaching website for resources to assist you in your course preparations. On the page, you will find:

- a new Instructor Guide for Upcoming Semester Course Planning, including a checklist of tasks to complete prior to teaching and a list of “Instructor to Instructor” best online resources
- virtual office hours with technology experts and practice opportunities with teaching consultants
- recorded and live webinars on the topics most requested by instructors.

FEATURED VIDEO

- The latest episode in the “Ask the Experts” series features Dennis Scanlon speaking with Will Bleser to explore the recent COVID-19 vaccine candidates. Watch the interview here.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

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

- Calling all researchers! The University Faculty Senate wants to hear from you.

   Faculty, doctoral students, and other members of Penn State’s research community are encouraged to complete a brief survey that is being conducted by
the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (RSCA) Committee of Penn State's University Senate.

To complete the survey, please visit this link, or cut and paste the link into your browser: https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe-preview/SV_9oB0FOJCLjTHpxr

The survey is part of an effort by the Senate to assess the presence, extent, and correlates of COVID-19's effect on research activity at the University. The survey provides an opportunity for members of Penn State's research community to inform University policy regarding research during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey itself is being conducted anonymously, and its findings will be reported in aggregated form only to the Faculty Senate and university administration. The survey will take between 4 and 6 minutes to complete.

- In order to meet the ongoing needs created by remote and hybrid teaching and learning, Penn State IT has secured a limited number of webcams that will be included in the IT Loaner Programs. Students across the University who are unable to secure the appropriate technology to support their coursework are now eligible to request a loaner webcam. Requests can be made by using the Mobile Technology Request Form within the Penn State IT Help Portal. Loan requests are typically processed the day they are received, and equipment will be delivered via overnight shipping. The opportunity to request loans will continue throughout the remote/hybrid teaching and learning period.

- The binding of a SARS-CoV-2 virus surface protein spike to the human cell surface protein ACE2 is the first step to infection that may lead to COVID-19 disease. Penn State researchers computationally assessed how changes to the virus spike makeup can affect binding with ACE2 and compared results to those of the original SARS-CoV virus.

- Penn State is urging students, faculty, and staff to reconsider or avoid international travel. If an employee decides to travel internationally for personal reasons during the remote period after November 20 and/or during the holiday break, Penn State’s expectation is that they will return to the U.S. by the beginning of the spring semester.

- Physicians at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center provide information about the COVID-19 vaccines that have been developed and may soon be distributed.

- Dr. Jennifer Kraschnewski, professor of medicine, public health sciences and pediatrics at Penn State College of Medicine, has received $2.69 million through the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to establish projects aimed at addressing COVID-19 health disparities among nursing home residents and racial and ethnic minorities.
WEBINARS

- **University-wide Faculty Coffee Break**  
  Friday, December 18, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

  The toughest semester ever is coming to an end. Let’s get together for a much-deserved break! The Penn State Faculty Advisory Group invites all Penn State Faculty to relax, debrief and most importantly, connect! Grab a cup of coffee or a mug of hot cocoa and feel free to share your pandemic teaching experiences at this low-key discussion. After we get together as a group, we will have the opportunity to divide into smaller groups to meet, discuss and exchange ideas with faculty from across the university, focusing on things that worked this semester, no matter how big or small (around topics like building community, tools discovered, student engagement, assessment, new ideas for spring, things I would do differently). We would love for you to join us…and bring along a colleague! Zoom Link: [https://psu.zoom.us/j/98221490005](https://psu.zoom.us/j/98221490005)

- Penn State IT Learning Development is offering two Top Hat training sessions for instructors on Building Engagement Opportunities into Your Course. [Register now for one of these sessions](https://psu.zoom.us/j/98221490005):
  - Thursday, December 17, 10:15 a.m.-noon
  - Tuesday, January 12, 10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- Penn State has [extended its hours for walk-up coronavirus testing](https://psu.zoom.us/j/98221490005) at the University Park campus from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays through January 18.

- With Penn State’s courses transitioning to remote delivery and students living on campuses departing their residences by Nov. 20, the University is reminding its community of available resources and guidance — including testing — for the remainder of the fall semester and calendar year. These include testing, remote learning and teaching resources, health and wellness services, and campus facilities and services.

- There are a variety of academic, technology, housing, and other resources available to help students prepare for the shift to remote learning, as well as virtual wellness, exercise, and mental health resources that will be available for all students during the remote learning period and beyond.

- A [resource has been developed for instructors who are teaching asynchronously](https://psu.zoom.us/j/98221490005), 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.

- **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.
- 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