Tuesday, January 12, 2021

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 Spring 2021 semester. Watch for these emails on Tuesdays and Fridays, with additional “special editions” delivered periodically. Previous faculty news digests are archived here. For current faculty guidance, resources, FAQ documents, and more visit the “Back to State Info for Faculty” webpage.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: After the remote period concludes, how will my class proceed if there is a change in normal operations due to weather?

A: In the event of a change in normal campus operations due to weather, instructors teaching in any mode of instruction may opt to deliver instruction asynchronously. When a change in normal campus operations due to weather or other local emergency circumstances occurs, students, faculty, and instructors may not have the same access to University facilities and resources and may have other commitments such as childcare.

- COVID In-Person (CP) courses may not be moved to a synchronous online meeting per Faculty Senate policy. In the event of a change in normal campus operations, the instructor can choose to offer content asynchronously or may cancel class altogether.

- Because there are differences in how Hybrid/COVID Mixed-Mode (CM) courses are structured, instructors need to specify in their syllabi how class content will be delivered.

- COVID Remote (CR) courses may continue to meet remote synchronously at the usual time, or the instructor may choose to offer content asynchronously or cancel class altogether.

- Web and COVID Remote Asynchronous (CW) courses will continue with no changes.

More information is available in this document.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health has an informational website about the COVID-19 vaccine, which includes a COVID-19 Interim Vaccination Plan. The
plan provides information about the distribution of vaccines when available and describes the phases for vaccine administration.

- Two Penn State students are part of a larger group of undergraduates who are learning about the research process, scientific data, and COVID-19 and its effects as research assistants on the Data 4 Action Research Project. The project aims to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 in Centre County by assessing biological, psychological and social functioning of community members and Penn State students.

- Varun Gupta, associate professor of supply chain management and analytics at Penn State Behrend, discussed how distribution of COVID-19 vaccines will be managed, how the scale of the initiative will complicate the effort, and how confident we can be that the process will work.

- The Penn State Berkey Creamery has been growing its virtual outreach to the University community during the coronavirus pandemic.

**WEBINARS**

- **Keep Teaching Short Webinar Series (30 minutes)**
  - Wednesday, January 13, 2021: 12:00 – 12:30 p.m. and 2:00 – 2:30 p.m.: *Structure, Flow, and Pacing of the Semester*
    - In this session, we will discuss considerations for how a course is organized across the space of a semester, what each week looks like, and the organization of each individual class.
  - Thursday, January 14, 2021, 12:00 – 12:30 p.m. and 2:00 – 2:30 p.m.: *Teaching here and there: Engaging students in a mixed mode classroom using Top Hat*
    - Engaging students in mixed mode classrooms can be a challenge with students both in person and joining remotely via Zoom. Top Hat allows you to engage students synchronously, regardless of how they’re joining your class. We will demonstrate Top Hat features and strategies for engaging students and increasing participation, and discuss how you can leverage data from Top Hat to evaluate student progress.

- **Top Hat Training Session**
  - Penn State IT Learning Development is offering a Top Hat training session on **Friday, January 15** with no registration required.

**KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY**
As faculty prepare for the Spring semester, a suggested timeline for communication to students has been developed to reflect the remote learning period and shift to in-person instruction. This includes templates to streamline communications and ensure consistency with key information, as well as technical information to support faculty in using Canvas as a communications platform. All faculty are welcome to adapt this information to suit their specific needs. See CommTemplates-Spring-2021.docx.

Academic Integrity in the time of COVID: Focus from the Start. Remote and online teaching changes the environmental controls you have in your courses. Students are also experiencing pressures in new or exacerbated ways. One unfortunate consequence of these changes is enhanced potential for academic dishonesty. Encourage academic integrity in your course by addressing the topic explicitly at the start of the semester. Beyond including formal policies in your syllabus, support academic integrity throughout the semester by leveraging a variety of tools and available resources, including videos and resources designed by students for students. Watch this 30-minute webinar to help spark ideas on how you can foster academic integrity throughout the semester.

Contingency Planning for Labs-at-Home: With the announcement that Penn State will begin the Spring 2021 term remotely, Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) would like to remind all faculty who are considering having students complete hands-on laboratory experiments/projects at home that they must submit protocols to Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) for a risk review and approval. Many students’ homes are not set up with adequate ventilation, lack environmentally safe disposal procedures, and have insufficient experience to handle if something were to go wrong, along with other concerns about chemical safety and other safety considerations. More information and a form for submitting your proposed labs-at-home are available at: https://ehs.psu.edu/sites/ehs/files/labs_at_home_approval_request.docx and https://ehs.psu.edu/laboratory-safety/forms.

This FAQ addresses testing requirements for students who must return to their campus communities prior to February 15 or who have remained in their campus communities over winter break.

With the spring semester beginning with remote learning, Penn State Transportation Services shared an update on parking regulations and transit service through February.

Through the Big Ten course sharing initiative, which launched in fall 2020 and will continue in spring 2021, Penn State students can take one online course each semester at another participating Big Ten institution at no additional cost.

Faculty can still submit questions related to Penn State’s COVID response. 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
- Penn State’s “Keep Teaching” and “Keep Learning” websites, including many Spring 2021 instruction-related FAQs.
- Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard
- Previous issues of this Digest.
- 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