Friday, March 5, 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.

FEATURED VIDEO

- In this video, Moriah Szpara, associate professor of biology and biochemistry and molecular biology, explains why those who have been vaccinated should continue to wear a mask.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

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

A: Orders issued by Governor Wolf on March 1, 2021 amend previous COVID orders and do not apply to classrooms. Indoor or outdoor meetings of 10 or fewer participants are permitted with no prior permission required, with masks required and taking into account the governor’s orders regarding maximum occupancy. Requests for meetings or events with more than 10 participants must be submitted for approval to the unit executive. Read the full FAQ here.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State’s COVID-19 Dashboard shows ongoing results for all COVID-19 tests administered on campus since December 19, 2020, for faculty, staff, and students.

- Penn State urges University Park students to take advantage of the walk-up COVID-19 testing on campus if they are concerned that they may have been exposed to the coronavirus.

- Refresh and Recharge: Virtual Coffee and Conversation for Instructors, Friday, March 12, 3:00-4:00 p.m. Thirsty for more? The Penn State Faculty Advisory Group invites all Penn State faculty to reconvene mid-semester to reconnect. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and share your successes and challenges this semester at this low-key discussion. Instructors will have the opportunity to divide into smaller groups to exchange ideas with faculty across the University. We would love for you to join us – and bring along a colleague!
• Ling Rothrock, professor of industrial and manufacturing engineering, is helping to inform the decision-making process for places of worship when determining when and how to reopen their buildings to in-person worship.

• The University Staff Advisory Council (USAC) has announced its sponsorship of speakers for the remaining wellness days.

WEBINARS

• Mentoring March – A Workshop Series for Faculty Mentoring Graduate Students. Effective mentoring is an invaluable component of graduate students’ success, and is even more important and challenging during the pandemic, which has introduced even more complexity into developing and maintaining strong mentoring relationships.
  o Aligning Expectations, Thursday, March 11, 12:30–1:30 p.m.
  o Addressing Equity and Inclusion, Thursday, March 25, 12:30–1:30 p.m.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

• With the conclusion of the required universal COVID-19 testing period, Penn State resumed testing of its on-campus students and employees on Monday, March 1 as part of the University’s spring 2021 student testing strategy.

• According to a new model created by researchers at Penn State, when healthcare workers become ill during a disease outbreak, overall case counts and mortality rates may significantly increase.

• Penn State is planning a phased return over the summer semester to a full on-campus learning environment for fall 2021. The University’s priorities continue to be the health and well-being of its students, faculty, staff and local communities, and the plans for expanded in-person classes have the flexibility built in to quickly respond to changing pandemic conditions, if necessary.

• Penn State is adjusting its spring 2021 COVID-19 testing strategy to increase the use of walk-up testing among students and implement additional rapid testing at the various testing locations on the University Park campus.

• Gathering feedback from your students early in the semester helps gauge their learning and can provide you with valuable data for making course adjustments. Download a PSU learning survey specific to your COVID instructional mode and place it in your Canvas course to collect feedback. Instructions are provided: how to import student feedback surveys from Canvas Commons into your course. Once in your course, you can customize the content to meet your needs. Read
about additional options for gathering feedback on the Keep Teaching site or view the Fall 2020 webinar on this topic.

- Penn State Health provided COVID-19 vaccines to more than 1,400 members of the public who meet current Phase 1A eligibility on its first day operating four new, dedicated vaccine sites across central Pennsylvania on Monday, February 22.

- Walk-up COVID-19 testing hours at the University Park campus will be extended in the coming weeks.
  
  o Week of Feb. 15 and onward: Walk-up testing at the Hintz Family Alumni Center will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
  o Beginning Feb.15, employees and students will have separate entrances and separate queues.

  This walk-up testing is available to employees who are in the Return to Work database at University Park. Employees in that database also continue to have the option to do the opt-in mail kit testing.

- 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