Friday, May 7, 2021

News for Faculty and Instructors: Penn State and COVID-19

This 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 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.

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’s COVID-19 Operations Control Center (COCC) has developed a comprehensive COVID-19 mitigation strategy for the transitional month of May and the summer 2021 semester for all campuses that includes vaccine consideration, masking, testing, contact tracing, and quarantine and isolation.

- Penn State scientists have moved rapidly to apply their expertise toward the development of complementary COVID-19 vaccine candidates.

- A team of researchers in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed models that project a sharp decline in COVID-19 cases by July 2021.

- Gov. Tom Wolf visited the University Park campus on May 5 to join President Barron, head football coach James Franklin, and student-athlete Theo Johnson in urging Penn Staters and Pennsylvanians to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

- Acting Pennsylvania Physician General Dr. Denise Johnson visited the Regional Vaccination Clinic at the Bryce Jordan Center on May 3 to address vaccine hesitancy and encourage college students to get vaccinated before the semester ends.

- As instructors return to campus this fall with ideas for updating their courses based on the lessons they’ve learned over the past year, a new resource has been developed to introduce research-based indicators of quality. The Course Design Quality Check provides a short list of ideas for assessing quality, and is accompanied by a 2-hour workshop for instructors who wish to discuss ideas in their own disciplinary context.

- The COVID-19 pandemic, which caused an almost immediate shift to remote learning in March 2021, dramatically changed the way CAS100 was taught.
The 2021 survey\(^1\) from TLT regarding challenges students face during the pandemic found that 17% of students found differing layouts in Canvas challenging. To reduce this challenge during the upcoming semester, please remember to use the research-based guidelines for setting up Canvas to be effective for your students! (\(^1\) Serpi, A., Robert, J. (2021). The remote teaching experience: 1 year later, How are instructors holding up? Retrieved April 13, 2021, from https://doi.org/10.26207/fdjkr25)

COVID-19 vaccines may cause temporary swelling of the lymph nodes in the armpit in the same arm that was injected. This is normal and expected says Shelley Tuzzato, chief technologist for outpatient imaging at Penn State Health Lime Spring Outpatient Center.

The Regional Vaccination Clinic at the Bryce Jordan Center has resumed operations as scheduled on Thursday, May 6, offering both the two-dose Moderna vaccine and the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. May 6 through 10 will be the final week that the clinic offers the first dose of the two-dose Moderna vaccine. Starting May 13, the clinic will only offer the second dose of Moderna and the single dose J&J vaccine.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- As Penn State continues to prepare for the resumption of full on-campus activities and a return to in-person modes of instruction for fall 2021, separate guidance for both faculty and staff has been crafted to keep employees informed and to help the transition back to campus remain on track.

- Penn State has announced updated guidance and procedures for hosting events and large gatherings both on and off campus.

- Students are reminded of move-out procedures and COVID-19 safety measures as they prepare to move out of campus residence halls.

- Penn State strongly encourages all students to upload their COVID-19 vaccine records through myUHS.

- For the spring 2021 semester, optional alternative grading is available for undergraduate students, and there is an exception process available for graduate students who wish to request optional alternative grades.

- Penn State is strongly encouraging all students, faculty, and staff to sign up to get a vaccine as soon as they are able to receive one. Phase 2, which extends vaccine eligibility to all Pennsylvanians age 16 or older, began on April 13.

- Spring 2021 Holiday/Special Events Testing Schedule
o Friday, May 7: no random testing (all campuses); one walk-up testing site open (Pegula Ice Arena).
  o Saturday, May 8: no random testing (all campuses); no walk-up testing.

- 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. Walk-up COVID-19 testing hours at the University Park campus will continue as follows:
  o Walk-up testing at the Hintz Family Alumni Center will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
  o Testing availability will change on the dates listed above. More information is available here.

- 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