

Tuesday, December 15, 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 After December 22, the Digest will not be published until the week of January 11 unless a special edition is warranted.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: Will final exams still take place in the event of a change in normal campus operations due to weather?

A: With finals being administered remotely this week, and since instructors and students have had time to plan for this, exams will continue as scheduled. However, instructors are urged to be flexible in handling individual situations, such as students who may be unable to access campus wi-fi to complete their final exams or who experience power outages due to weather. In these situations, students must be given the opportunity to complete an alternative assessment or a make-up exam. In the event that normal operations are disrupted due to snow, individuals are urged to avoid coming to campus, if possible, and those who must visit campus should remain alert and avoid sections of campus that may be covered in snow or ice. Instructors should not travel to campus to administer a remote exam during a change in normal campus operations due to weather, nor should students travel to campus to take an exam.

For more information, please see

<https://news.psu.edu/story/642327/2020/12/15/administration/penn-state-provides-guidance-ahead-forecasted-snowstorm>.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State's [COVID-19 dashboard](#) has been updated today with results of on-demand and random testing.
- In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, [Penn State has updated its quarantine guidelines](#) for community members who are exposed to COVID-19 and for those returning from travel outside of the commonwealth.

- The University-wide team charged with developing programs for spring 2021 wellness days has announced [more details about wellness day programs](#), including program themes for each of the three wellness days and different formats for participating in programs.
- Penn State will hold its [fall 2020 commencement ceremony](#) via livestream at 2 p.m. on Saturday, December 19.
- The Institute of State and Regional Affairs at Penn State Harrisburg, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Population Network, has [released new data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) on Pennsylvania.

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>

- 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:](#)
 - Thursday, December 17, 10:15 a.m.-noon
 - Tuesday, January 12, 10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- **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

- 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.
- 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. The CDC, the Pennsylvania governor, and others also strongly discourage domestic travel and urge avoiding large gatherings at this time.
- 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](#), 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