

**Friday, January 8, 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.

### **QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY**

**Q: *Can any University employee now receive a COVID-19 vaccine?***

**A:** Not at this time. The University is working in collaboration with Penn State Health to begin vaccinations for a select group of our Penn State health care personnel in Centre County that are in the priority tiers established by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Those employees will be notified by their leadership channels about the processes to obtain a vaccine.

[More information about vaccines is available from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.](#)

**Q: *Is Penn State making the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for employees or students?***

**A:** At this time, the vaccine is not yet available to the general public and a decision about whether to require the vaccine has not been made. More information will be forthcoming through the PA Department of Health (which is overseeing the vaccine distribution) and the University as we weigh the pandemic's continuing impact on our communities.

**Q: *Do I need a negative COVID-19 test before entering my lab, my creative studio, or other on-campus research facility?***

**A:** There are no additional COVID-19 testing requirements for conducting on-campus research. [Students must have a negative COVID-19 test result before returning to campus](#) as part of their return for the spring 2021 semester. However, there are no additional test requirements for entering research facilities.

All students are required to complete pre-arrival testing before returning to campus for any activity, including lab or studio work. It is appropriate for a lab or studio leader to be clear about the expectation that the student [complete the required testing](#) and ask whether the student has completed the testing; however, a lab or studio leader should

not ask for a test result. If a student tests positive, then supervisors will be notified as part of Penn State's contact tracing process.

**Q: *Can I ask students for proof of a negative COVID-19 test before they enter my lab or studio?***

**A:** You should not ask someone for test results. You can communicate to students that your expectation is that they have [completed their required testing](#) and that they are following isolation requirements if they tested positive.

No one should come to a lab/studio/work/class if they have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19 until the isolation period is completed and symptoms resolve fully. If someone tests negative, they can return to a lab/studio/work/class while continuing to abide by all safety procedures and protocols including masking, distancing, and hygiene practices.

**Q: *Will instructors at University Park and the campuses be able to use their classrooms during the remote instruction period at the beginning of the spring semester?***

**A:** At University Park, general purpose classrooms will be closed during the remote period, except for those instructors who have made prior arrangements, from January 18 to February 12. General Purpose Classrooms in Thomas, Willard, Boucke, Osmond, and Hammond Buildings will be reopened for student study use during this time. Instructors needing to use classrooms in other buildings, or to reserve a GPC in the five open buildings, should work with their academic scheduler. At the Commonwealth Campuses, general purpose classrooms will remain open to instructors but instructors should check with local campus officials regarding availability of specific facilities. If an instructor is alone in the classroom, then they do not need to wear a mask. Masks must be worn in the presence of others, and shared equipment such as microphones, keyboards, and other items should be wiped down in accordance with Environmental Health and Safety "[Guidelines for Cleaning Computer Products](#)."

**Q: *Will classrooms at Commonwealth Campuses be available for students for remote learning and studying?***

**A:** Classrooms will be available at Commonwealth Campuses during the remote period but hours and availability will differ from campus to campus. Campuses will be communicating directly to their students and faculty about classroom availability. Students can also use the Penn State Go mobile app to find available classrooms or visit a campus' website for more information.

## **LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY**

- Penn State, in collaboration with Penn State Health, [began administering COVID-19 vaccinations](#) on January 5 for a select group of health care personnel

who are working on campus in Centre County and are identified as part of the “critical workforce” in Pennsylvania’s Phase 1A of the Department of Health’s vaccine distribution plan.

- 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](#).
- 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](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.
- 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.

- 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.
- In the latest edition of The Medical Minute, physicians at Penn State Health discuss [how vaccines work in the body](#).

## WEBINARS

- **Keep Teaching Short Webinar Series (30 minutes)**
  - *Structure, Flow, and Pacing of the Semester*. Wednesday, January 13, 2021: [12:00 – 12:30 p.m.](#) and [2:00 – 2:30 p.m.](#) Check the Keep Teaching Webinars page for links.
  - 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.
- **Top Hat Sessions Being Added**
  - Due to the overwhelming interest in Top Hat, Penn State IT Learning Development training sessions are currently fully booked and waitlisted. As a result, two additional webinars will be offered Tuesday, January 12 and Friday, January 15 with no registration required. The webinar information and links will be available soon on the [Keep Teaching Webinars](#) page.

## KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- Penn State has decided to [delay the start of in-person classes](#) and transition to a fully remote learning environment for the beginning of the spring 2021 semester at all campus locations.
- This article outlines the [steps all students must take](#) before returning to their campus communities before February 15.
- After the fully remote period (January 19 through February 12), [courses will resume their scheduled mode of instruction](#). Course delivery modes include Covid In-Person, Covid Mixed-Mode, Covid Remote, and Covid Web.
- 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.
- [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