Tuesday, December 22, 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
After today, the Digest will not be published until the week of January 11 unless a special edition is warranted.

FEATURED VIDEOS
- Assistant Professor of Biology Nita Bharti, an expert with Penn State's Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics, addresses some of the concerns people have voiced about the safety of the new Covid vaccines.

- In this end-of-year video, President Eric Barron and his wife Molly Barron thank the Penn State community for their commitment, hard work, and perseverance this year.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Q: *The first wellness day of the spring semester falls during the remote period. Will it still take place as scheduled?*

A: Yes. Information about virtual programming that will occur on that day (Tuesday, February 9) is forthcoming.

Q: *Will research labs and facilities remain open during the remote learning period?*

A: On-campus research-related activities will continue to operate according to their established safety procedures.

Q: *Will in-person student research be permitted through the remote-only instruction period at the start of the spring semester?*

A: Undergraduate and graduate students are permitted to continue working in labs if they are in town. Students may not request to remain in an on-campus residence hall solely for the purpose of working in a lab. Undergraduate students, graduate students, external visitors, and visiting scholars must receive prior approval from the relevant academic dean for them to continue on-campus research. Those who are already

approved to work on campus do not need to be re-approved. All students and visitors must adhere to the standard operating procedures of the lab and be part of the person-count for square footage, scheduling, and any other relevant considerations. Faculty cannot and should not require undergraduate or graduate students to come to campus, and undergraduate and graduate students who conduct on-campus research must be included in the research reductions and approaches to de-densification.

Q: *What steps should faculty take now to prepare for the remote start to the semester?*

A: In preparation for spring, faculty and instructors should use the extensive resources available on the spring 2021 planning section of the Keep Teaching website to prepare their remote teaching plans for their courses. Leading up to January, faculty and instructors should continue to refine their course plans and syllabi for remote teaching and make adjustments as appropriate to transition any in-person activities and requirements to later in the semester. Additional guidance on clinical courses will be forthcoming.

Q: *Will all instructors be required to transition back to in-person teaching following the remote period?*

A: Instructors will return to their originally scheduled spring 2021 course mode after the remote period concludes. Those who are part of a vulnerable population or who have other challenges with providing in-person instruction at any point during the semester should work with supervisors to determine how adjustments can be made. Additional information and guidance is available and regularly updated at the University's Keep Teaching website. Instructors should also directly review "Instructional Issues for Return to Resident Instruction," and Return to Work resources for faculty.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO 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.

- As Penn State prepares for the end-of-year break, the University has updated the availability of walk-up and mail-in virus testing, campus health and counseling services, its COVID hotline and student support services.

- View the photo gallery from the livestream broadcast of Fall 2020 Commencement, held on December 19.

- 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.

- Students and instructors worked through the challenges and limitations of a mixed-mode learning environment. This article shares stories of Penn Staters going above and beyond to continue educating students during a global pandemic.

WEBINARS

- Penn State IT Learning Development is offering a Top Hat training session for instructors on Building Engagement Opportunities into Your Course. Register now for one of these sessions:
    - Tuesday, January 12, 10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- 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.

- 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.

- **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