

Friday, August 20, 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. 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 2021 Resources](#)" webpage.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY:

Q: How can I support students who may miss class for an extended period of time due to being in quarantine or isolation?

A: The University has shared [testing expectations](#) for students who have not been fully vaccinated and/or did not share their vaccination status. Students who test positive and need to enter isolation, as well as students who need to quarantine as a result of a possible exposure to COVID-19, will be encouraged to reach out to their course faculty. While students will be expected to contact their instructors and make every effort to work with the instructor to complete the work and stay on track, faculty are encouraged to work with students to the extent possible, given the challenging circumstances. Supporting students in quarantine or isolation and identifying ways for them to make up missed work is particularly important for first-year students, for whom the isolation or quarantine period can be discouraging and stressful. The first six weeks of the semester are critical in terms of engaging and making connections with students, which in turn helps them persist in college. Additionally, faculty should receive a message from Student Support Services whenever a student must be absent from class to quarantine or isolate. Student Affairs and academic advisors will be providing support to these students and may be in touch with faculty to assist with the coordination necessary to encourage continued academic progress for these students. As a reminder, according to [Senate policy](#), "Instructors also should provide, within reason, the opportunity to make up work for students who miss classes for other legitimate but unavoidable reasons. Legitimate, unavoidable reasons are those such as illness, injury, military service, family emergency, or religious observance. Again, it should be recognized that not all work can be 'made-up' and that absences can affect student performance in a class."

The Faculty Senate has published [attendance guidance](#), along with [suggested teaching strategies in residential courses for temporary instructor and student absences](#).

Q: Can I get reinfected if I've already had COVID-19?

A: In [this FAQ](#), Matthew Ferrari, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics, explains that you can be reinfected if you have already had COVID-19.

Q: Why should I wear a mask if I'm vaccinated against COVID-19?

A: Moriah Szpara, associate professor of biology and biochemistry and molecular biology, explains that because vaccinated people can acquire breakthrough infections, they are capable of transmitting the virus to others, and masking is beneficial in blocking the spread of COVID-19. Read the full FAQ [here](#).

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State students, faculty, and staff who are not vaccinated for COVID-19 and those who have not shared with the University that they are fully vaccinated will be [required to test weekly for COVID-19](#) throughout the fall semester, or until they share with the University that they have been fully vaccinated.
- Of the 4,664 students who were moving into University Park residence halls during the first three days of move-in week, [1,050 were required to take a COVID-19 test](#) because they had not yet provided Penn State with proof of vaccination. Of those 1,050 COVID-19 tests, there were five confirmed positives for a positivity rate of less than half a percent.
- A total of 419 faculty requests for work adjustments were received during both review periods (up to July 15 and August 5-12) and 364 required action by the review committee. For these 364 requests, 249, or 68%, were approved; 105, or 29%, were denied; and 10, or 3%, are pending a decision.
- All tenure-line faculty who were in their probationary period during calendar year 2020 are eligible to confirm acceptance of the extension of the probationary period due to COVID-19 until April 1 of the penultimate year in the probationary period. If you confirm acceptance of the extension by August 31, 2021, your tenure clock will be immediately adjusted and any formal review you have scheduled for the 2021-2022 academic year (e.g., 2nd or 4th year review) will take place in 2022-2023. If you are going up for your sixth-year review, this deadline does not apply as the confirmation of the extension for those in their penultimate year must be received by April 1 of that year. Faculty who wish to confirm acceptance of the extension may do so by completing this [form](#). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at vpfa@psu.edu.
- Penn State's Office of Physical Plant has implemented an [operational strategy to focus on cleaning and ventilation](#) that will promote health and safety while allowing the University to return to pre-COVID-19 classroom capacities for the fall semester.

- University Health Services is administering [free COVID-19 vaccinations for all students](#) in the Student Health Center at University Park, beginning with the first day of classes on August 23.
- The union representing about 2,600 technical service employees has [agreed to follow University requirements for mask-wearing](#), regardless of vaccination status. The agreement goes into effect immediately.
- At a special meeting on Aug. 13, the [Faculty Senate passed two positional resolutions](#). The first requests the implementation of a COVID-19 vaccine mandate and raises concerns related to masking and testing requirements, course delivery methods and the involvement of faculty in the decision-making process. The second is a vote of no confidence in the University's current plans for the fall semester.
- 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.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- President Barron shared an [open letter to the Penn State community](#) about Penn State's COVID response.
- In a survey sent to 87,783 Penn State students, 88% of University Park respondents, 73% of Commonwealth Campus respondents, and 84% of World Campus respondents reported being **partially or fully** vaccinated. More details are available [here](#).
- As part of its COVID-19 mitigation plans, [Penn State previously announced](#) that starting Aug. 16, COVID-19 tests will be required for all students moving into on-campus residential housing who have not shared with the University that they have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or provided a positive COVID-19 test result from the last 90 days prior to arrival. Full details are provided [here](#).
- Recognized student organizations may [return to holding in-person activities](#), including meetings, tabling, and other events for the fall semester, and are no longer required to submit the pre-approval form for events.
- After many months of working and studying from home, Penn Staters are gearing up for this fall's return to campus. To help the transition go smoothly, information technology teams across the University have collaborated on a checklist; see the [article](#) for full details.
- Penn State students who were enrolled at any point during summer session 2021 and who are [experiencing financial need as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

are now able to [apply for an emergency financial aid grant](#) from the University's Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) III allocation.

- Effective immediately, Penn State will require all students, faculty, staff, and visitors – including those who are vaccinated and unvaccinated – to [wear masks indoors at all campuses](#). Click [here](#) for a list of FAQs related to the University's fall plans.
- Instructors are reminded to utilize the [Canvas setup guidelines](#) as they prepare classes for fall. These guidelines ensure that, in the event of instructor or student illness, information is conveyed consistently across courses.
- Penn State is continuing to [encourage students and employees to share their coronavirus vaccination status](#) to help inform the University's decision-making and its COVID-19 management plan. Employees can provide their vaccination status using [SalesForce Health Cloud](#), a secure online platform.
- [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 ["University Status" page](#) and [updated FAQs](#) regarding on-campus work and learning
- Penn State's ["Keep Teaching"](#) and ["Keep Learning"](#) websites, including many [instruction-related FAQs](#)
- Penn State's [COVID-19 dashboard](#)
- Previous issues of this [Digest](#)
- The [Office of Human Resources COVID-19 information site](#) and ["Return to Work on Campus"](#) resource site
- 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