Friday, October 15, 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.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: Are faculty ‘work adjustments’ available for spring semester 2022?

A: Guidance has been updated and released to inform faculty and instructors of on-campus work expectations and the work adjustments process for spring 2022. A document describing the work adjustment process and criteria is available here. Faculty with an approved work adjustment for fall 2021 may apply for an extension of their work adjustment to spring 2022 here. The form for faculty who do not currently have a work adjustment, but who want to request one for spring 2022, is available here. The deadline to apply for a spring semester work adjustment is October 29.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- In compliance with President Biden’s executive order requiring COVID-19 vaccination for all federal employees, contractors, and others, Penn State has determined that all University Park faculty and staff must submit proof that they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by December 8.

- A research project conducted jointly by the Penn State College of Medicine and Penn State University Libraries will assess COVID-19 beliefs, including vaccine hesitancy, throughout the Penn State community.

- A Penn State-led research team will measure the rapid changes in greenhouse gas emissions that resulted from lower traffic levels and efforts to curb transmission of the virus.

- According to Penn State College of Medicine researchers, more than half of the 236 million people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 worldwide since December 2019 will experience post-COVID symptoms up to 6 months after recovering.

- Penn State will award $50 million in emergency relief to help students enrolled during the fall 2021 semester to cover any component of their cost of attendance or other emergency expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Penn State’s COVID-19 Dashboard will be updated twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the fall semester.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

More than five weeks into the fall semester, the COVID-19 vaccination rates among students, faculty, and staff at University Park are continuing to rise as the positivity rate of University COVID-19 testing declines. As of October 7, the overall vaccination rate among all students at University Park is more than 87%, and the seven-day positivity rate of all testing conducted by Penn State at University Park is 0.4%. Penn State is urging students who have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19 to begin the process now so that they can be fully vaccinated before leaving campus for the Thanksgiving break.

A “contingency planning” document has been developed that assists academic unit heads (department heads, director of academic affairs, school directors, division heads) in planning for the possibility of a faculty member’s extended absence from a class, or multiple student absences in a single class, that may strain instructional capacity. Faculty members may also find this document useful to review.

COVID-19 testing at White Building is available from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays through Fridays for students living on or near the University Park campus, and faculty and staff who are working on campus.

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