

## Contingency Planning for Academic Unit Heads

*This document will be updated regularly as new information and guidance become available. Revisions will be highlighted in yellow.*

Faculty and instructors (referred to as “instructors” in this document) may encounter situations where they need to be absent from the classroom for an extended period and/or where multiple students in their classes need to be absent for reasons related to COVID. For example, an instructor may be in quarantine or isolation because they have tested positive for COVID or are an unvaccinated “close contact” of a COVID-positive individual, or they may need to provide caregiving at home to household members in quarantine or isolation. Instructors may also have multiple students who are in quarantine or isolation and must miss multiple class sessions.

Instructors and their academic units have always had processes and protocols in place for accommodating instructor and student absences. During the COVID pandemic, instructors and academic units have made tremendous efforts and have found creative solutions to meet the needs of students and instructors and to maintain optimal learning environments. As the COVID pandemic has persisted, units have sought ways to support both students and instructors in situations when absences may strain unit capacity. This document is intended to assist academic unit heads – department heads, school directors, division heads, and directors of academic affairs – in their efforts to manage these ongoing issues on a larger scale over the course of the rest of this semester and beyond as circumstances warrant.

### Contingency planning for student absences

#### *Managing multiple student absences: resources for instructors*

Senate policy [42-27, Class Attendance](#), emphasizes the importance of regular attendance but also grants instructors a great deal of latitude in providing reasonable opportunities for students to make up work for legitimate and unavoidable reasons including illness, family emergency, etc. The Faculty Senate has published additional [attendance guidance](#) for 2021-2022. Students are being encouraged to communicate with their instructors to describe their ability to complete work during their absence.

Instructors have developed and employed many creative strategies for managing student absences during the pandemic. Resources that have been developed to assist instructors in managing student absences, and specific strategies that might lend themselves to managing multiple student absences concurrently, are listed in [Appendix A](#) below.

#### *Managing multiple student absences: resources for academic unit heads*

Academic unit heads can support faculty and instructors in their units by engaging in contingency planning for multiple student absences. Some ideas include:

- Utilize student employees to manage some of the additional workload associated with supporting remote students in quarantine and isolation (Q&I). Although the hiring process can be time consuming, it may be possible to shorten the hiring process by utilizing students who are already employed by Penn State in a different capacity. Central funding has been made available for fall 2021 for units that wish to employ students for this purpose. To utilize this funding, academic unit heads can make a request to Abby Diehl, assistant vice provost for faculty affairs ([agc105@psu.edu](mailto:agc105@psu.edu)). Details about how the funding will be disbursed will be provided when approval is given. Below are possible sources of student employees who could provide remote support to students in Q&I:
  - Where feasible, instructors may be able to identify advanced students in the major to serve as Learning Assistants (LAs) for the remainder of the semester provided there is a way to usefully engage them if a need for Q&I support does not emerge.
  - Learning Centers, including Penn State Learning, already employ students who may be available to dedicate some additional hours on an interim basis to assist faculty in their own departments. Once funding is approved per above, academic unit heads can contact the director of their campus Learning Center for more information.
  - Other undergraduates in the unit who are already on wage payroll.
  - Formerly employed undergraduates who have moved on to another campus.
  - Learning Assistants newly hired on wage payroll, recognizing that background checks will need to be completed before work commences.
- Where possible, extend hours during which labs are staffed and supplied with needed materials and equipment for students to participate in make-up activities.
- Campus academic administrators could seek out upper-level students (often now at University Park) who formerly attended their campus to be virtual undergraduate TAs or tutors for credit. When students either TA or tutor for course credit, a background check is not needed. (Anyone who has access to student educational data must take the FERPA quiz. The link will be shared in this document when it is available.) Students can be 'late added' with a minimal fee.

### *Special considerations*

Some types of courses, such as labs and studio courses, may be challenging in terms of providing make-up opportunities for students. Some options for instructors and academic unit heads to manage student absences from these types of classes include:

- Record the lab (using video or still-image photography) and provide students with the recordings/images and the data so that they can do calculations.
- Identify ways to preserve some of the learning objectives of the lab, such as analysis and research, that don't involve the tactile experience of the lab.
- Give students who are unable to complete a course due to a prolonged absence first registration priority for the following semester.
- Consider deferring a student's grade—this is possible if the student is not graduating and the student's attendance can feasibly be accommodated in one or more labs/studio class sessions during the following semester.
- Additional virtual lab ideas and resources for several STEM disciplines are available via the following:

- [Online resources for science laboratories \(POD\)](#)
- Disciplinary societies may maintain ideas and resources for virtual labs that have been curated during the pandemic (e.g., American Chemical Society [resources](#))
- Northern Illinois University [virtual lab resource](#)

## Contingency planning for instructor absences

### *Managing instructor absences: resources for instructors*

We know that instructors want to create optimal learning experiences for students and assume that, if they are faced with absences, they will make the best decisions they can to promote student learning and success. Penn State’s definitions of instructional modes permit up to 24% of an in-person class to be offered remotely, a flexibility that faculty/instructors may utilize to manage their own absences due to illness, during travel, or for pedagogical reasons. For example, an instructor may have a household member who is quarantining or isolating that requires them to be home with that person.

Specific strategies that faculty can utilize to manage their own absences are provided in [Appendix B](#).

### *Managing extended or multiple instructor absences: resources for academic unit heads*

Academic unit heads can support faculty and instructors in their units by engaging in contingency planning for extended or multiple instructor absences. Some ideas include:

- Invite professionals in the area to serve as temporary guest teachers; professionals could also, with advance planning, be hired to teach courses.
- Hire someone to serve in a ‘roamer’ function to fill different instructional roles across the unit as instructor absences warrant.
- Consider hiring (paid supp) or consulting with instructional designers or librarians to teach, facilitate discussions, or run technology, or to assist faculty in crafting lesson plans, using existing learning objects, and engaging with students on topics of their expertise. Instructional designers and librarians have at least a master's degree, and many have degrees in fields other than education and library science as well.
  - Requests to exceed caps on supplementary pay can be made to, and will be approved by, the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs as needed. If a potential instructor is close to the cap, then the unit may make a proactive request to exceed the cap.
- Senior graduate students who have experience teaching and have the time in their schedule to do so could potentially serve as “substitute” instructors. See [Appendix C](#) for full details.
- If an instructor’s absence will result in more than 24% of the class being delivered remotely, they may consult with the academic unit head. The unit head, in turn, should determine whether other options for delivering the course in person are available. If there are no other in-person options available, the unit head may make a request to the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs to raise the percentage of remote delivery. This does not constitute a change of course mode.

## Committee members

Abby Diehl, Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs (Chair)

Jeff Adams, Associate Vice President and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education

Sarah Ades, Associate Dean, The Graduate School and Associate Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Rick Brazier, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Research, Office of the Senior Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses, and Professor of Math and Geology

Michele Duffey, Assistant Teaching Professor of Kinesiology and Chair, Faculty Senate Committee on Intra-University Relations

Judy Ozment, Associate Professor of Chemistry, Penn State Abington

Stevie Rocco, Assistant Teaching Professor and Director of Learning Design, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences

Denise Solomon, Liberal Arts Professor and Head, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences

## Appendix A Instructor Strategies for Managing Multiple Student Absences

*Resources available to faculty/instructors for managing student absences:*

- [Contingency Planning for Undergraduate and Graduate Instruction](#)
- [“Suggested teaching strategies in residential courses for temporary instructor or student absence”](#)
- [Supporting Students in Quarantine and Isolation](#) (developed by the College of Health and Human Development)
- [Student Quarantine and Isolation Guidance for Faculty and Instructors](#)

Instructors may wonder how the class should proceed if someone in the class is in quarantine or isolation. Instructors who are concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 should contact [Occupational Medicine](#) for guidance; this [flow chart](#) describes how instructors should proceed if a student in their class tests positive for COVID-19.

*Specific strategies that instructors have utilized to manage student absences:*

- Making a Zoom option available to students but noting that this option is available only to students in quarantine or isolation.
- Preparing a recorded lecture or online assignments in advance.
- Compiling previously recorded class videos from a remote version of the course that can be shared with students who missed the in-person classes.
- Photographing key images during a class to show processes, activities, and outcomes (e.g., in a lab experiment, creating artwork, building something, etc.).
- Preparing class notes or finding a student who is attending class who will volunteer to share the good quality notes they took in class with the absent students.
- Creating peer groups or study groups in the class; when a student in the group is absent, they will have a community upon which they can rely.
- Thinking about how to meet the course’s learning objectives in a novel, independent way, so a student who is absent can come back without issue.
- Considering obtaining a Q&I tutor/TA to work remotely with absent students.
- Work is proceeding with alternatives for faculty needing to offer make-up exams and will be forthcoming.

*Understanding and Supporting Individual Complications*

Some students and instructors will have individual difficulties trying to engage while in Q&I at home. Instructors can offer solutions related to:

- Online access or computer equipment issues
  - Students who must be absent from the classroom due to being in Q&I, and who are experiencing equipment and/or internet access issues, can request a loaner laptop and/or hotspot, which will be shipped to them. Students will be informed of this opportunity in a communication sent to them by Student Support Services.
- Home life creates unavoidable demands on a person’s time (caregiving, etc.)
  - Seek to provide asynchronous options to maximize time flexibility

## Appendix B Instructor Strategies for Managing Their Own Absences

*Resources available to instructors to help them manage their own absence(s) from class:*

- [Contingency Planning for Undergraduate and Graduate Instruction](#)
- [“Suggested teaching strategies in residential courses for temporary instructor or student absence”](#)

*Specific strategies that faculty can utilize to manage their absence:*

- As in non-COVID times, the expectation is that instructors communicate with academic unit heads (department heads/school directors/DAAs) when an absence and/or extended absence is necessary, and that they also communicate the absence to students, including any temporary changes to the mode of the course.
- Consider having a short-term substitute available; this could be a faculty colleague or a professional in the area who could serve as a guest teacher. Guest speakers who are not employees can receive honoraria if permitted by the unit.
- Instructors who are in quarantine or isolation can teach remotely during this time if they are able to do so. If an instructor believes their absence will bring the course to greater than 24% remote delivery, they should consult with their unit head (see “Managing extended or multiple faculty absences: resources for academic unit heads” above.).
- Depending on the length of the absence, a faculty member can explore a leave of absence by contacting [Absence Management](#). In addition, faculty may always make a request to the [Affirmative Action Office, via the University’s ADA coordinator](#), for a reasonable accommodation. Graduate students serving as instructors or TAs in a similar situation should discuss options including a leave of absence with their graduate program and/or assistantship supervisor as applicable.
- Ask post-doctoral fellows to fill in on a temporary basis.

Senior graduate students who have experience teaching and have the time in their schedule to do so could potentially serve as “substitute” instructors. Consideration should be given to the demands on the student’s time to ensure that they are not overburdened or that their degree progress is not significantly impacted. Graduate students being asked to step in for another instructor should be compensated for doing so. There are several potential mechanisms depending on the situation. The Office of Graduate Fellowships and Award Administration (OGFAA available via email at [gsfellowships@psu.edu](mailto:gsfellowships@psu.edu)) will answer any questions and provide advice.

**Graduate student on Graduate Assistantship with additional teaching for the remainder of the semester:**

- A graduate student who is already supported by a graduate assistantship could have the stipend grade increased to compensate them for the additional effort so long as the additional teaching activities will continue on a regular and ongoing basis throughout the semester. Furthermore, beyond just an increase to stipend grade, if the additional teaching will bring a student’s assistantship activities to >20h/week on a regular and ongoing basis, then the appointment should be increased to ¾ time. However, such a change must be made within the credit minima and maxima for such appointments as outlined in section 6 of policy [GSAD 901](#) and be approved with a [Variable Rate Assistantship Request Form](#) (OGFAA will provide expedited review).

**All other graduate students taking on additional teaching:**

- Graduate students who are 1) **not** supported by a graduate assistantship (though they may be supported by a graduate fellowship), or 2) who are supported by a graduate assistantship appointment but for whom additional teaching will not be regular and ongoing should be appointed using a wage/payroll position. In this case, graduate students should be appointed to a wage/payroll position at a pay rate no less than the equivalent of the hourly rate for a grade 12, ½ time GA stipend. Depending on the level of the course and the field, the stipend grade assignment could be higher to be commensurate with the most appropriate GA rate for the program/course. (See [Table of Stipends for Graduate Assistants](#).) Hours for students in these positions should not exceed 20 hours/week. If the student holds multiple wage/payroll appointments, hours across all wage/payroll appointments may not exceed 20 hours for international students, and 30 hours/week for domestic students.

In either case, students must be compensated beginning in the same month they begin their additional activities or as soon as possible thereafter. Program staff should work with HRSS Data & Onboarding ([Brandi Taylor](#)) to input appointment updates into Workday.