Dear Neighbors,

As this most challenging year draws to a close, I hope that you and all those dear to you are healthy and well, staying safe amid the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 cases continue to spread here in New Jersey and around the nation. At the same time, we know far more today than we did last spring about what actions we can take individually and collectively to keep our community as secure as possible.

As we invite our undergraduates and graduate students to campus for the spring semester, we are stressing that the safety of our campus and our neighboring communities will depend on sustaining a community culture of care that incorporates and respects public health guidance. The commitment and cooperation of everyone is essential. Wearing masks, keeping a safe distance from one another, washing our hands — we must take these and other precautions every day.

We have also learned from public health officials and from the experiences of other campuses that frequent testing is a key to limiting the spread of COVID-19. We approach the spring 2021 term with a thorough testing regimen in place, aided by a new testing lab we’ve built on campus.

When other colleges and universities have adopted these measures, they have successfully mitigated infection rates in their campus communities. We are confident that our planning, policies and testing capacity will enable us to do so as well. We will continue to monitor such developments, including public health guidance and state regulations, and adapt as necessary. Our efforts benefit from strong partnerships with local government and health officials, and we are grateful for their counsel and support.

I recognize that many families have dealt with COVID illnesses and deaths, and I extend my sympathy and condolences to all. We look forward to a time in the coming months when vaccines will allow for the easing of some of the limitations imposed on our community by the pandemic. In the meantime, we must all remain vigilant as we press forward with the mission of this University.

Looking forward with hope, I wish you, your family and friends a safe and healthy holiday season and a brighter future. As this most challenging year draws to a close, I hope that you and all those dear to you are healthy and well.

Christopher L. Eisgruber, President, Princeton University

Undergraduates return for spring semester 2021 under strict social contract and robust testing

Princeton has invited all enrolled undergraduate students to return to campus for the spring semester and will continue to support remote learning for anyone who chooses it. The invitation to undergraduates is in addition to the University accommodations in place for graduate students, many of whom returned to campus for the fall semester.

"During the fall term, we cultivated strong public health norms and practices on the Princeton campus; monitored and learned from experiences with the virus at Princeton and elsewhere; and established an on-campus testing laboratory," President Christopher L. Eisgruber said in a message to the University community Nov. 24.

"In light of that work, we have concluded that, if we test the campus population regularly, and if everyone on campus rigorously adheres to public health guidance about masking, social distancing and other practices, we can welcome a far greater number of students back to Princeton," he said.

Eisgruber noted that protecting the wellbeing of individuals and the collective community will require the commitment and cooperation of everyone who elects to come to campus.

A choice to return to campus is a choice to accept limitations and take on new responsibilities, he said, citing several examples, including:

- Masking and social distancing requirements will apply throughout campus.
- Undergraduates residing on campus or in the Princeton area will be required to participate in the University’s coronavirus testing program and to comply strictly with all instructions related to contact tracing, quarantine and isolation.
- Parties and most other social gatherings will be prohibited.
- Undergraduate students will be prohibited from hosting visitors and will be restricted from traveling.
- All returning undergraduates, including those from New Jersey, will be required to quarantine upon arrival to campus.

The president acknowledged that all or part of campus may need to be “locked down” because of high infection rates at the University or in the surrounding community.

"We expect that restrictions will have to be especially tight as we begin the term in February, when we anticipate that infection rates in the country and in New Jersey will remain high and when the weather will limit outdoor interactions," Eisgruber said. "We hope, but cannot guarantee, that there will be opportunities to increase interaction, and to phase in more activities, as the term progresses."

Information about the spring term, including information for families and visitors, is available on a new website at spring2021.princeton.edu.
New pedestrian and bike lanes open on campus

New “advisory lanes” have been installed to create space for bicyclists and pedestrians to ride and walk along College Road and Lawrence Drive on the Princeton University campus.

Painted stripes mark sections on the edges of each street, narrowing the roadway for vehicles. Signs are posted advising motorists of the new lane configurations and of the need to yield to cyclists, pedestrians and oncoming vehicles.

The lanes on College Road extend from Alexander Road to the Graduate College, and to the west campus gate on Springdale Road. The lanes on Lawrence Drive extend from the Lawrence Apartments to Alexander Road.

The advisory lanes are a pilot project as the University seeks ways to encourage biking and walking on campus, a priority goal of the campus mobility plan and a component of the broader University sustainability initiative to reduce campus fossil fuel consumption.

What exactly should a driver do?

- If the road is clear, drive on the side of the road you would normally travel. You could also drive straight down the middle.
- If a cyclist or pedestrian is in the safety lane to your left, you can continue traveling as you were.
- If a cyclist or pedestrian is in the safety lane to your right, you should move to the center lane to pass.
- If motorists approach each other heading in opposite directions, each should move to the right side of the road so as not to collide.

On-campus COVID Testing Lab

The COVID-19 testing laboratory, housed in Princeton’s Department of Molecular Biology, is part of the University’s comprehensive testing program. The in-house clinical laboratory will facilitate increased testing capabilities with faster results for students, faculty, staff and researchers who are approved to be on campus. (Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications)

New lanes on College Road extend from Alexander Road to the Graduate College. (Photos by Dan Day and Laurel Masten Cantor, Office of Communications)

The Art Museum is bringing its collections to town through a new project called Art for the Streets. High-quality reproductions of extraordinary artworks from the Museum’s diverse, globe-spanning collections now adorn the glass windows and doorways of empty storefronts in Palmer Square and, most recently, the Princeton Shopping Center. This initiative—which will extend further across downtown in the coming weeks—seeks to help sustain the liveliness of Princeton at a time when many forces are challenging the survival of small businesses. Museum director James Steward notes, “With so many empty storefronts, it seems critical to do what we can to safely enliven our town’s streetscapes and do our part to support local businesses, residents, and visitors at such a difficult time.” Residents out for a cup of coffee, some shopping or a masked stroll now encounter reproductions of diverse works from across the Museum’s collections, including a beaded African tunic, an Edo-period Japanese print, a sculpture of a Maya god and a painting by Edouard Manet, among others. Each reproduction is accompanied by a QR code linking it to additional information, so that the viewing experience can become an educational one, too.
When Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center experienced a surge in coronavirus patients last spring, it tapped Princeton University researchers for urgent solutions to help protect its healthcare workers. Since then, University labs have delivered more than 3,000 reusable face shields to staff in the emergency department and other areas of the hospital in Plainsboro, as well as 1,500 specialized covers for the powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) used by medical workers in high-risk environments. University labs recently received a request for another 1,000 PAPR covers.

Princeton faculty members Daniel Cohen and Daniel Notterman assembled research groups from across academic departments to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting from their usual research as they fielded calls from doctors and hospitals for assistance. The PPE work was one of the early initiatives by the University to support efforts to combat the disease, in addition to ongoing COVID research regionally and internationally. Many of the research efforts began soon after the outbreak and continue today.

Early on the morning of April 23, Cohen’s graduate student Matt Heinrich received an urgent text from administrators at Princeton Medical Center. The hospital needed stretchable, reusable, full-face-and-neck covers for the patient care units, and it needed them fast. Heinrich had just sent over a prototype he had made, and hospital administrators responded by asking for an immediate delivery.

The face shields’ design was not difficult, Cohen said. The challenge was finding available materials when everyone was scrambling for plastics used to make the face shields. The team was able to use alternate plastics similar to binder covers. They set up a system in which the purchasing departments at Princeton Medical Center and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital obtained the material, and then team captains collected the parts and delivered them to volunteer assemblers, including a core group of volunteers from the Princeton Neuroscience Institute. Volunteers assembled the shields, then the captains picked up the finished devices and returned them for delivery.

“We have delivered three to four thousand so far,” Cohen said.

In labs across campus, faculty, graduate students and research staff have been working to address urgent medical needs in the community — from producing the innovative face shields and other personal protective equipment (PPE) to developing several ventilator designs that are cheaper and more easily assembled than standard equipment.

The face-shield project was much more complex. Medical workers in high-risk areas wear self-contained breathing systems called powered air purifying respirators. PAPRs are similar to full-face scuba masks and are much safer and better to use than standard face shields. To work, PAPRs must integrate seamlessly with an eye, nose and chin cover that has to be protective, flexible and elastically sealed from the neck up to the ears.

Kari Mastro, Ph.D., R.N., the director of practice, innovation and research at Princeton Medical Center and a key contact for the Princeton University team, had worked years before as an intensive care nurse with Notterman, a physician who is now a senior researcher and lecturer with rank of professor in molecular biology as well as the chair of Princeton’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects.

Mastro said that obtaining enough PAPR covers was particularly challenging because they are relatively complex and meant for single use only. Used mainly in surgery and high-risk procedures, the equipment has been in high demand during the pandemic and very difficult to obtain.

Each PAPR cover has a clear plastic visor and a fully bonded, stretchable membrane that seals all around the wearer’s face. Cohen’s team took about a week to replicate the design with fully reusable and available parts, including materials already in their lab.

The team sent their prototype to the hospital, which prompted the early-morning text asking Heinrich for as many as he could produce. Working with re-purposed craft cutting machines, Heinrich and Cohen created the components of the PAPR covers that they shipped to teams of volunteer assemblers. Eventually, Cohen said, they sent the design to their suppliers. The supplier pre-cut the pieces and returned them for assembly at Princeton, where over 1,500 have now been assembled. The PAPR cover design not only met the hospital’s needs but it proved more durable than the standard cover, Mastro said.

The Princeton team shared their design so the PAPR covers could be replicated for the entire Penn Medicine system, which operates in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Cohen’s group is now filling a request for 1,000 more PAPR covers from Princeton Medical Center to meet the recent increase in COVID cases.

Princeton University Ph.D. student Matt Heinrich and his adviser Daniel Cohen led the effort to design and assemble the face shields and PAPR covers for local hospitals. Their team contributed more than 3,000 face shields and 1,500 PAPR covers in the spring and summer. As COVID-19 cases have spiked again this autumn, Princeton Medical Center requested another 1,000 PAPR covers. (Photo by Aaron Nathans, Office of Engineering Communications)

Daniel Notterman, a physician and a senior research scholar and lecturer with the rank of professor in molecular biology. (Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications)

Daniel Cohen, assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering. (Photo by Frank Wojcikowski)
Municipality, University reaffirm shared priorities in extending voluntary contribution agreement

Reflecting the strong and mutually beneficial relationship between the Municipality of Princeton and Princeton University, the town and the University have agreed to a two-year extension of the voluntary contribution agreement that outlines funding the University provides to support municipal operations. The extension runs through 2022.

The Municipal Council approved the agreement at its Dec. 14 meeting. Under the extended agreement, Princeton University will provide a total of $8.482 million to the municipality in the next two years. Since the current agreement began in 2014, the University has contributed more than $21.81 million to support municipal operations.

Princeton University President Christopher Eisgruber said, “Throughout the COVID pandemic the town and the University have worked together creatively and collaboratively to meet many challenges. The extension of the voluntary contribution agreement and the financial support that it provides for municipal operations is a further reflection of the University’s ongoing support for the community.”

Council Member Eve Niedergang, one of the town’s representatives in discussions with the University, said, “This agreement is the result of our year-long discussions with Princeton University to affirm the university’s commitment to the wellbeing of the municipality and its taxpayers. This short-term agreement, which continues the 4% annual increase, is one key step in continuing to build a relationship with the University focused on our mutual shared interests in maintaining the town’s fiscal health, diversity of population, and thriving downtown.”

Council Member Michelle Pirone Lambros, who also represented the municipality in discussions, said: “The agreement with the University represents nearly $8.5 million of voluntary contributions from the University over the next two years, including very significant support for our firefighters. The commitment to the fire department is just one of the many ways we are partnering with the University. For example, the Princeton Small Business Resiliency Fund would not have been possible without the University’s contribution of $350,000 to support our small businesses during the pandemic.”

The extended agreement includes unrestricted contributions by the University of $3,619,200 in 2021 and $3,764,000 in 2022.

The University has also agreed to contributions to specific needs totaling $1.1 million. These include:

- The University will provide additional funding to support the municipality’s fire department. In 2020 the Municipality of Princeton hired six career staff to support the existing volunteer fire department. The University has agreed to increase its annual contribution immediately by providing $550,000 to the town before the end of 2020, and $150,000 in both 2021 and 2022 to support fire department expenses.

- The University will contribute $250,000 to support construction of a new storage facility for the Municipal Public Works department, a commitment that had been made in the existing agreement.

In addition to these voluntary contributions, the University is the largest taxpayer in the Municipality of Princeton. In 2019 the University paid $11.8 million in property and sewer taxes to the Municipality of Princeton. At least $6 million of the University’s annual tax payments to Princeton are exempt from New Jersey law.

Representing Princeton University in the discussions that resulted in this agreement were Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs Brent Colburn and Director of Community and Regional Affairs Kristin Appelget. In addition to Niedergang and Pirone Lambros, the Municipality of Princeton was represented by Business Administrator Marc Dashield.

Visit CONSTRUCTION.PRINCETON.EDU to find out more about our construction projects and the temporary impacts affecting campus.