Dear Neighbors,

As the University welcomes students to campus and as schools in Princeton and neighboring towns again open their doors, I offer my best wishes.

The coronavirus pandemic is still with us, and the delta variant presents new challenges. As we have done since the beginning of the pandemic, we have instituted a range of measures designed to decrease the risk of COVID-19 spreading. Our combined vaccination rate for students, faculty, and staff was at 95 percent as students began arriving in late August, and it will be even higher by the time this issue of Community Connections arrives in your mailbox.

With our rigorous testing program and other precautionary measures, we are confident that our campus is an unusually safe place in which to conduct our vital teaching and research mission. We will continue to monitor information from our campus and from medical and scientific sources and adjust procedures accordingly as we did last spring, when we kept infection rates remarkably low. We remain grateful for the assistance and cooperation of town, county, and state officials in keeping our campus and surrounding communities as safe as possible.

With our full complement of Princeton University students back on campus and circulating about town for the fall semester, we are proud to note that the University continues to host public vaccination clinics and are pleased that many residents of nearby towns have received their shots here. Our communities and our campus are in a stronger position now than we were a year ago to overcome the challenges of COVID-19. As we continue to work together to protect one another and resume more normal activities, I wish you all a healthy and productive fall.

Sincerely,

Christopher L. Eisgruber
President
Here’s the buzz on getting around on the Princeton campus

Now that the cicadas have burrowed back into the ground, the Princeton campus is walkable once again without the buzzing and crunching that Brood X created over the summer.

Visitors to campus this fall will find many changes underway in addition to the familiar sites of iconic buildings and places like Nassau Hall and Cannon Green.

As you pass through FitzRandolph Gate from Nassau Street and walk to the right of Nassau Hall, look for the restored Oval with Points sculpture by Henry Moore. Just like the tigers flanking the main door to Nassau Hall, Oval with Points remains a “must” photo stop for visitors. Take a selfie or a family portrait in front of this classic work of art with a good-as-new patina, restored by conservators over the summer.

Art@Bainbridge Reopening

The Princeton University Art Museum’s Art@Bainbridge gallery reopened to visitors Sept. 4. The fall exhibition is works by the artist Adama Delphine Fawundu, who uses her body and self-image to “tink past and present.”

In her practice, Fawundu embodies feminine West African deities, inserts herself into the archive of Black history, and celebrates the transmission of cultural knowledge by her female forebears.

The restored colonial-era Bainbridge House is at 158 Nassau Street. The building’s origins date to 1766, and it is one of the few remaining 18th century structures in downtown Princeton.

ADMISSION IS FREE.

Gallery hours:
Tuesday and Wednesday
11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Thursday, Friday and Saturday
11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Sunday
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

TigerTransit buses continue to circulate through campus, to the Princeton Plasma Physics Lab, and to the Princeton and Princeton Junction train stations. Week-end “shopper” buses continue to run out to the Route 1 corridor. Anyone may ride TigerTransit buses for free, but please wear a mask, a requirement for all riders.

If you travel to or from campus on NJTRANSIT buses, a shelter has been installed at the bus stop at Palmer Square. The corresponding stop on the south side of Nassau Street is being relocated one block to the east, near Firestone Library, and will also have a shelter.

Visitors may park and charge in most campus lots outside business hours and on weekends. Some lots have newly installed availing themselves to solar panels, part of the University’s ambitious efforts employing renewable energy.

Whether walking or biking, driving or scooting on campus, please pay attention to detour signs routing you through and around construction zones.

Princeton expands outreach in Mercer County, boosts community engagement with new hires

The Office of Community and Regional Affairs has expanded its staff, adding veteran non-profit administrator Duncan Harrison Jr. as assistant director for regional affairs. The office has also appointed Melissa Mercuro, director of human services for the Municipality of Princeton, as associate director for community relations. She succeeds Erin Metro, who retired. Harrison and Mercuro report to Kristin Appelget, director of Community Connections.

“Both are approachable, careful listeners, with a history of service and leadership,” Appelget said. “I am delighted that Duncan and Melissa have joined our team,” Appelget said. “Both are approachable, careful listeners with a history of service and leadership. I am certain that they will help deepen and expand University-community engagement, support opportunities for faculty, staff and students to be active participants in community life, and grow awareness of the opportunities and resources provided by the University to the region.”

In his new role, Harrison, a Trenton native, will identify and advance opportunities for the University to engage in community partnerships in Trenton and throughout Mercer County. Harrison brings more than a dozen years of experience in public administration, community development, finance, human resources, and non-profit management to Princeton.

Duncan Harrison Jr.

Harrison has a master’s in public administration from the City University of New York and a bachelor’s in sociology with a focus on criminal justice from Delaware State University. He served as councilman-at-large in the city of Trenton from 2014 to 2018.

Melissa Mercuro

Mercuro has broad experience in the public sector with a focus on community engagement, communication, and community outreach. She joined the University in August.

She began working at the Municipality of Princeton as interim director of human services in 2018 and was named director a year later. She managed all services and programs offered by the department, including public assistance, emergency homelessness assistance, pandemic relief, Welcoming Week, immigration outreach, the summer youth employment program, and holiday and back-to-school charitable drives.

She was a clinical intern at Corner House Behavioral Health in Princeton from 2018 to 2019, and before that she was human services and affordable housing administrative assistant for the municipality from 2016 to 2018.

A Princeton native who grew up in the Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood, she attended Princeton public schools. She is a licensed social worker and has master’s work in public administration, with a concentration in community-based leadership from Fordham University and a bachelor’s in social work from Rutgers University.

Employees donate backpacks with school supplies

For the fifth year the offices of Community and Regional Affairs and Finance and Treasury partnered with WB Mason to offer Princeton University employees the opportunity to purchase a backpack to donate to the annual Princeton Human Services’ School Supplies Drive. In addition to the backpacks, WB Mason donates supplies including binders, notebooks, pens, pencils and tissues.

This year, Princeton University employees donated 127 backpacks filled with supplies.

Pictured atop is Aki Kimbrel-Figueras-Martínez (Princeton Human Services), Emmanuel Jimenez (WB Mason), Jessica Malina (Princeton University), Princeton Mayor Mark Fieda, Kevin Gluck (WB Mason), Melissa Mercuro (Princeton University), Eric Serves (WB Mason), Gloria Lu (Princeton University), and Princeton Councilman Leticia Fragia. Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications.
New regional Princeton-led hub to accelerate tech innovation

Aiming to accelerate the transformation of scientific discoveries into technologies that improve everyday lives, a Princeton University-led consortium of regional universities will form a new innovation network with a $15.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The NSF Innovation Corps (I-Corps) Northeast Hub is one of five new hubs announced recently in a nationwide NSF-funded network of universities formed to accelerate the economic impact of federally funded research. It will deliver benefits in health care, energy and the environment, computing, artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced materials and other areas while building skills and opportunities among researchers from all backgrounds, including those historically underrepresented in entrepreneurship.

Princeton will be the principal institution in the hub, with the University of Delaware and Rutgers University as partner institutions. The hub will include five initial affiliates: New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and Rowan University in New Jersey; Lehigh University and Temple University in Pennsylvania; and Delaware State University, an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). The hub will expand by adding affiliates each year.

“Princeton is excited to lead this initiative to develop the talent and dynamism of our region’s researchers,” said President Christopher L. Eisgruber. “I am especially pleased that the hub will assist those who historically have faced barriers to opportunity and expand the societal impact of new discoveries and innovations.”

With funding from NSF over five years, the hub will provide entrepreneurial training, mentoring and resources to enable researchers to form startup companies that translate laboratory discoveries into products and services. The hub will employ the NSF I-Corps entrepreneurship training approach, which focuses on understanding the needs of potential customers, first-hand exploration of industrial processes and practices, and confronting the challenges of creating successful ventures based on scientific discoveries.

The I-Corps program is based on the “lean startup” methodology in which innovators rapidly iterate on their products and business plans based on customer feedback and market needs. The new hubs will extend the capability of the NSF I-Corps program, which started a decade ago, to grow the societal and economic benefits arising from federally funded research in science and engineering.

Located in the heart of the U.S. Northeast, the new hub will make use of its proximity to “deep-tech industries” that revolve around fundamental discoveries in areas such as health care and pharmaceuticals, energy, the environment, earth and water-friendly “green and blue” technologies, financial technologies, agriculture, communications and digital information.

“The hub will build on the robust industrial and government relationships of its academic institutions to develop a network of cross-sector partnerships that will leverage the investment of federal research dollars in the region’s universities,” said President Eisgruber. “Federal support for innovation provides a dynamic infusion of resources to energize economic growth, grow employment opportunities, and inspire new generations of entrepreneurial researchers to find solutions to societal challenges,” said U.S. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman, who represents New Jersey’s 12th district, which includes Princeton University. “New Jersey’s institutes of higher learning have always been on the cutting edge. The National Science Foundation I-Corps Northeast Hub will invigorate the capacity for federally funded research to improve people’s everyday lives.”

Catherine Zandonella

For more information, visit icorpsnortheasthub.org.

Princeton welcomes diverse cohorts of new students

It’s not unusual to walk down Nassau Street across from the Princeton campus and overhear several languages being spoken. The diversity of Princeton University students, faculty and staff is a contributing factor.

First-year students in the Class of 2025 who arrived for the fall semester come from all 50 states — plus Washington, D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands — and 58 other countries. The 1,345 members of the first-year class include more than 200 students who deferred enrollment from the Classes of 2023 and 2024. Eighteen percent are first-generation college students, 22% are lower-income students eligible for federal Pell grants and 62% qualify for financial aid.

Forty-eight percent of the incoming students are U.S. citizens or permanent residents who self-identify as people of color, including bimodal and multiracial students. Thirteen percent of the class are international citizens. Some countries represented in the Class of 2025 include Albania, China, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, the Netherlands and Rwanda.

Additionally, during orientation the University welcomed 713 graduate students from 54 countries for the 2023-24 academic year.

The Graduate School again admitted and yielded its most diverse cohort of students, with 24% of incoming domestic students (including terminal master’s and Ph.D. students) from underrepresented groups. Incoming underrepresented domestic Ph.D. students will comprise 23% of the domestic Ph.D. population — a historic high.

Princeton University is the lead institution in the new Innovation Corps (I-Corps) Northeast Hub funded by the National Science Foundation to foster startups based on university research. Picture: Graduate student Marisa Lavagno sets up chemical reactions that are powered by blue light and enable the rapid synthesis of new pharmaceutical drugs. Photo by C. Todd Rosehart, Department of Chemistry.

New director of athletics announced

John Mack, a member of the Princeton Class of 2000, is the University’s new Ford Family Director of Athletics. Mack worked as an athletics administrator at Princeton as well as with the Big Ten Conference and at Northwestern University. He most recently was a lawer practicing in Michigan. He succeeds Molly Marcoux Samaan, Class of 1991, who became commissioner of the Ladies Professional Golf Association. The full announcement on Mack’s appointment is available at goprincetontigers.com.

Catherine Zandonella

For more information, visit icorpsnortheasthub.org.

Princeton University’s newest cohort of graduate students visit Alexander Hall to join the Graduate School’s orientation activities, which included an outdoor lunch and information fair, held Aug. 25. Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications.
Solar arrays expand on campus and beyond for sustainability

New University solar projects represent a big leap forward in sustainability. Princeton is expanding its renewable energy generation on campus by installing eight new solar projects. The expansion supports the University’s ambitious goal to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2046. The solar arrays will be connected to the Princeton microgrid and will more than triple the University’s current solar photovoltaic (PV) generating capacity from about 5.5% to 19% of current electric energy use.

The new solar PV arrays will be built above three large parking decks, one surface parking lot, three fields and the roof of the High-Performance Computing Research Center (HPCRC) on the Forrestal campus in Plainsboro. The field mounted solar arrays will be installed in 2023 that were 20% efficient. New panels can approach 25% efficiency, compared with those installed in 2012 that were 20% efficient. The new solar arrays are being built under a power purchase agreement with EDF Renewables. The company will design, build, own, operate, and maintain the arrays for 15 years. After that, the University will have the option to purchase the facilities. The expectation is that these solar facilities will continue to function for another 10 to 15 years after that.

As Princeton expands the use of geo-exchange technology on campus, the electric heat pumps in the new TIGER (Thermally Integrated Geo-Exchange Resource) facility will be partially or fully powered from renewable resources. Investing in heat pumps and geo-exchange projects, with enough capacity to serve the entire campus, will enable Princeton University to phase out nonrenewable energy sources, including natural gas used today to produce steam and power.

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Into podcasts? Give a listen to these Princeton productions