Supporting Faculty During & After COVID-19
Don't let go of equity.

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INCLUSIVE & DIVERSE STEM FACULTY

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Introduction

COVID-19 has upended health, education, and work systems. People are balancing new work, familial and personal care routines, coping with feelings of uncertainty and grief, and wondering how they are going to make it all work. College and university faculty are no different. Faculty, like educators everywhere, are expressing concerns about their ability to provide instructional, academic, and emotional support to students, adapt to online teaching environments, maintain research, grant and publication activity while managing personal, child, and sometimes extended familial care. Recent budget and hiring freezes and furlough announcements have only heightened faculty concerns about the stability of their appointments and their current and future workloads.

Thankfully, institutions are responding to faculty concerns. And although there are several overarching concerns, COVID-19 presents distinct challenges to differently situated faculty members, calling attention to and potentially widening individual and institutional equity gaps. Thus, as campuses set about problem-solving they must keep equity[1] front and center. Below, we draw on various news sources[2] to describe how institutions are responding to COVID-19 in relation to faculty support and evaluation. We also take the liberty to suggest responses that have not been widely discussed, but that we view as worthwhile considerations.

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[1] Equity is an orientation that compels decision-makers to consider how differently situated groups might require different levels & kinds of support & resources to ensure success. For a robust discussion of equity-minded leadership & decision making, we suggest reviewing the Center for Urban Education's equity-minded literature.

[2] Material for this document comes from a variety of news outlets that cater to college and university stakeholders (e.g., Inside Higher Education, The Chronicle of Higher Education, #academic twitter) as well as university websites.

Supporting Faculty and their Careers During and After COVID-19: Don't let go of equity.

2

Concerning Extension Policies

Over the past month, faculty concerns about COVID-19 have surged on social media. In response, many institutions announced "tenure clock extensions." Tenure extensions are important, but they are insufficient. They do not relieve pressure for faculty productivity and like any other policy, without strong equity safeguards, they can be applied unevenly and inequitably. Moreover, **tenure extensions do nothing for the majority of faculty who hold contingent appointments** and who also tend to be women and racially minoritized persons. Furthermore, tenure extensions do not support graduate students/future faculty who are facing a difficult job market.

Guidance for Implementing Extension Policies

❖ Tenure extension policies adopted in response to COVID-19 vary. Some require that faculty "opt-in." Others automatically apply a one-year extension to pre-tenured faculty probationary timelines. Institutions should specify if they are adopting an "opt-in" or an "opt-out" policy.

❖ Specific timelines for opting-in or opting-out must be outlined and made consistent across all sources (e.g., memos, websites) and levels of the institution (e.g., program areas, departments, colleges, institution). These timelines should address faculty who are at different points of the probationary period.

❖ Research on "stop-the-clock" policies offers important insights as to how extension policies can most equitably be applied. This research suggests that **automatic (e.g., opt-out) policies are optimal** because all faculty receive additional time and the burden of "opting-out" falls on those likely to be in privileged positions and buffered from some of the effects of COVID-19 (e.g., cis-hetero men whose spouses manage household affairs).

❖ Faculty evaluation policies must be applied at multiple levels, and with tenure and promotion cases, external reviewers may also be involved. Here again, existing research on "stop-the-clock-policies" is helpful. This research suggests that evaluation committees as well as external letter writers should be **instructed to account only countable time**. Said otherwise, institutions should state **the specific number of years** (e.g., 6 years) for which a candidate should be evaluated rather than referring to the timeframe that they have held their appointment.

Acknowledging and Affirming a Slow-Down

Extension policies may relieve immediate concerns about productivity, especially because all laboratory-, face-to-face, or other human-subjects involved research has been suspended. Moreover, some journals are also "suspending" or "slowing" the peer-review and publication process—humane decisions, but decisions that will have implications for authors and publication timelines. **T**hus, in addition to extensions, leaders and faculty must collectively work together to develop policy that acknowledges and does not penalize dips in faculty productivity. This is especially important because if previous research holds, dips in productivity are likely to differ across gender, race, ability, caregiver status, and class, among other identity markers.

❖ Committees, and when applicable, external reviewers, should be explicitly instructed to **apply a different standard when assessing faculty research and publication activity for academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021**, and perhaps even 2021-2022. For example, if an institution typically expects pre-tenured faculty to publish two papers per year, it should outline that its typical expectation for two papers per year does not apply for the years 2020, 2021, etc.

❖ Committees may be further instructed to assign greater value to conference papers and/or submissions underway than they would otherwise assign.

❖ Committees and external reviewers should also be instructed to honor papers accepted at conferences that were cancelled as evidence of scholarly productivity and contribution.

❖ Committees must **resist comparing and contrasting candidates' relative productivity.** Health concerns, care responsibilities, and financial challenges may affect faculty capacity to work. Rewarding high rates of productivity and holding other scholars to the same standard may disadvantage those experiencing the most challenges. Once more, it is possible to draw on research stemming from "stop-the-clock" policies, which suggests cis-hetero men tend to produce more work during "stop-the-clock" periods because they rarely assume the amount of child care/familial labor women assume. When evaluation committees allow cis-hetero men's inflated productivity to become the norm, everyone else suffers.

Centering Faculty Learning in the Evaluation of Teaching

Although online education has been around for nearly three decades, many faculty members are still new to online instruction. Consequently, social media is filled with anxious faculty trying to figure out what it means to teach online. Thus, leaders must adjust evaluative policies and practices to acknowledge that a speedy transition to online education may negatively impact course evaluations. This is **especially important for non-tenure eligible faculty** for whom "stop-the-clock" policies are irrelevant and who are frequently hired or fired on the basis of teaching evaluations.

Moreover, because women faculty generally dominate the ranks of non-tenure-track faculty, with women of Color often entering the professoriate through non-tenure-track ranks, it is imperative that institutions devise equity-minded COVID-19 era evaluation guidelines for teaching. This is not the time to evaluate online learning or teaching efficacy. Unfortunately, some institutions have added questions to teaching evaluations to assess "what worked" in online classes. Such questions are not likely to yield reliable data, given the extraordinary circumstances under which everyone, including students, are working, and they may exacerbate the raced and gendered nature of evaluations. Thus, rather than evaluating teaching on the basis of student surveys, faculty should be given opportunities to document how and what they learned while teaching through COVID-19.

❖ In upcoming evaluations, faculty might be asked to complete written reflections about 1) the move to online teaching, 2) the training they sought to make the move to online platforms, 3) the resources they used *or* needed to acquire to move their classes online, and 4) the support they need to be effective online educators in the future.

❖ Faculty could also be encouraged to provide a "before" and "after" syllabus to demonstrate how they adjusted their courses in response to COVID-19.

Accounting for the Emotional (Invisible) Labor

Social media is filled with stories from faculty members agonizing over their students' well-being and resources to complete school. In one Facebook group, a professor mourned for a student who had just lost a family member. In another group, professors described their efforts to support grieving and stressed students. **An initial (non-scientific) scan of these stories seems to be gendered: women seem to receive these messages more frequently and they also share, or ask, how they can best support students experiencing such pain and vulnerability.** These gendered patterns align with the research concerning emotional labor within academia. Thus, as institutional leaders contemplate how to evaluate and appreciate the work of faculty during this time, they should consider the amounts and kinds of emotional support that faculty are providing to students during this crisis.

❖ Faculty members should be invited to detail the emotional labor that they poured into students during this time. For example, faculty might be asked to report if they held "virtual coffee hours" or "check-in meetings" as a way to connect and support students.

❖ Faculty may be encouraged to share video messages, letters, or materials in which they communicated course changes, resources, and other general measures of support to their students.

❖ Faculty should also be encouraged to document mentorship and support that they offered to junior colleagues in and outside of the university regarding job searching, maintaining scholarly productivity, and transitioning to on-line teaching and learning.

❖ Faculty should be encouraged to document any workshops or trainings that they participated in to develop their emotional intelligence and skills to support students.

Evaluating Prospective Faculty Hires

Finally, when institutions resume hiring, search committees should be mindful of how COVID-19 is disrupting the workflow of today's graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. Institutions are responding in a range of ways to graduate students: some have committed to continually fund students and/or provide emergency support for students. However, the bulk of colleges and universities are not likely to have access to such expansive resources nor to a wealthy alumna base capable of replenishing resources. Moreover, like faculty members, graduate students have diverse lives and are differently situated. Wealthy students will likely be able to cope with funding gaps and will likely be in the position to "make up" for lost time through high-impact experiences (e.g., internships, networks). Thus, in evaluating future job candidates, leaders and committees must work to minimize the disparate effects of COVID-19 on candidates.

❖ Search and hiring committees should ask future candidates to include a statement regarding if and how COVID-19 impacted their research, publishing, or teaching opportunities.

❖ Institutions might establish or expand postdoctoral programs that allow promising candidates the opportunity to re-invigorate their research agendas before starting their faculty appointments.

❖ Departments should establish or invest additional resources in mentoring programs to support new scholars that may have a more difficult transition given disruptions in their academic programs and research and the potential for continued disruption.

Looking Forward:
Providing Equity-Oriented Supports

This crisis is not over. Institutions will continue to manage complex challenges related to COVID-19 in the coming months. Looking ahead, decision makers must anticipate the kinds of support that faculty may need as they continue to manage the personal and professional implications of COVID-19. Like evaluative processes, support systems require attention to equity. We offer the following suggestions.

- ❖ Offer more support for individuals who have multiple large introductory courses that meet more frequently.

  - ➢ It may be useful to connect faculty with instructional designers, preferably with some familiarity with subject matter and intended audience (e.g., undergraduate, graduate) to help redesign courses for an online environment.

  - ➢ Offer summer workshops for instructors and teaching assistants, offering best practice in managing and facilitating educational engagement for large groups, synchronously and asynchronously.

  - ➢ Provide technology point persons to help faculty proactively and quickly address technology challenges.

- ❖ Ensure that faculty with fixed term, part time, or single course contracts have adequate financial resources and support to continue to offer classes online

  - ➢ Offer to provide hot spots for non-tenure-track faculty.

  - ➢ Ensure non-tenure track faculty have access to laptops and library resources, especially in the summer when they may be prepping for fall courses but when non-tenure track faculty lose access to libraries.

- ❖ Offer faculty members opportunity to negotiate class meeting times and modes.

  - ➢ Flexibility in course times and delivery mode (e.g., not requiring 100% synchronous) may make it easier to manage home and professional responsibilities. In fact, faculty members *and* students often prefer and benefit from a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences.

- ❖ Address the occurrence and disparate impact and risks that online education may pose to faculty with marginalized and minoritized identities.

  - ➢ Institutions must consider additional security and safety measures that can be put in place for all courses, provide emotional support for those who have experienced this harm, and seek and reprimand those who engage in these acts of identity-based violence.

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