



Faculty Equity & COVID-19

The problem, the evidence, and recommendations



Scholars have been documenting the unique challenges faced by faculty of color, women, and other marginalized groups in terms of their hiring, retention, and advancement.¹ Many individuals in these groups were already walking a tightrope to be successful while managing family responsibilities, negotiating cultural differences, and having limited access to the privileges typically conferred to faculty members (e.g., status, security, presumed competence). The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities by removing the supports that had allowed marginalized faculty to stay atop the tightrope. Yet awareness of the precarity of marginalized faculty offers U-M the opportunity to reset in a way that better supports all faculty.

THE GLOBAL EVIDENCE OF PANDEMIC INEQUALITY ON FACULTY

There is increasing evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a differential impact on the productivity of faculty from different groups.

Many faculty report that they are **busier now than before the pandemic**, and women are more likely than men to say they are busier now than before (57% vs. 43%).²

Across faculty groups, there has been a **change in the distribution of work efforts**, with less time devoted to research and more time spent on teaching and service.^{2,3} However, **this change in distribution of efforts is not equal across groups.**

- The decrease in available time for research and writing is greater for women than men,² and greatest for women with young dependents.³ Data suggest that women are submitting fewer papers and pre-prints, are less likely to hold primary author position, and are less likely to submit single author papers.^{4,5,6} Disparities may increase in the next few years as the consequences of COVID-19 accumulate and affect scholarly endeavors.
- Women have less time for research and writing because of their greater caregiving responsibilities,² and when they have time for research and writing, they are more likely to be interrupted by dependents.⁷
- A study of non-academics indicated that men with children reported being more productive since the pandemic, and were more likely to have received a promotion, raise, recognition, or more leadership responsibility.⁸
- Among non-academics, White workers reported being more productive since the pandemic started, and were more likely to have taken on additional leadership than Black and Asian workers.⁸

Other work responsibilities may account for declines in time for research for faculty of color and women.

- Many scholars report that teaching online limits their time for research, with women more likely to say this than men.²
- Racial injustice (e.g., racial disparities in COVID-19 outcomes, anti-Asian prejudice, anti-Black violence) is creating disruptive distress for faculty of color.⁹
- Faculty of color and women are doing more emotional labor through supporting students and performing service.¹⁰

Barriers to research also differed for faculty in different disciplines.

- Among faculty in STEM, those in the bench sciences had the largest decrease in time for research due to lack of access to their labs.³
- Scholars in the humanities reported significant barriers to accessing materials for their research; this was also reported by social science scholars to a lesser degree.²

The **publication process may be slowing** for many scholars. Journal editors have noted an increase in declined reviewer invitations and an increase in requests for review extensions.⁶

A minority of faculty (24%) report having more time for research and writing.²

- Men (27%) and faculty in STEM (27%) were more likely to say they have more time to write than women (18%) and faculty in humanities (22%) and social science (18%).
- More time for research and writing was attributed to fewer meetings, lack of commute, not teaching, and fewer distractions at home.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON U-M FACULTY

In August, 2020, an informal survey about experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic was sent to members of four faculty networks administered by the U-M ADVANCE Program: the Network to Advance Women Scientists and Engineers, the Network to Advance Faculty of Color, the UM-LGBT Faculty Alliance, and the Single Faculty Network.* The results mirror the global data in many ways (see [“The Effect of COVID-19 on UM Faculty Life: Results from a Limited Survey conducted by the ADVANCE Program”](#) for more detail as well as strategies faculty employed to manage challenges).

- 77% of respondents reported lower work productivity. Challenges included being unable to access materials or space needed for scholarship, difficulty collaborating with colleagues, and inadequate home workspace and infrastructure.
- 37% reported increased workload due to online teaching.
- 33% reported challenges due to caregiving; parents found it especially difficult to manage work while assisting their children who were accessing school remotely through online instruction. As a reference point, the ADVANCE Program’s 2017 campus-wide climate survey indicated that 48% of tenure-track faculty have children they care for, and 13% are caring for another adult.
- 24% reported challenges in mentoring students online.
- 24% reported negative psychological effects of the pandemic.
- 15% reported an increase in demands on their time related to new COVID-related service, other administrative work, and the volume of emails.

There are clear warning signs here – about faculty not being able to address their own well-being, reduced productivity despite an increased workload, and childcare needs (that added to critical previous childcare needs).

* Note: Demographic information was not collected to preserve anonymity.



Image credit: <https://finshots.in/archive/walking-the-tightrope/>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING FACULTY

To address the disparities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we offer suggestions in several areas. These recommendations are based on suggestions offered by other scholars (see suggested reading section), empirical research, and the faculty we surveyed. Be aware that because the effect of the pandemic has been felt unequally by faculty in different groups, **identity-neutral responses may inadvertently exacerbate inequality**. Maintaining a commitment to diversity (i.e., greater representation), equity (i.e., adequate resources and policies to provide equal opportunities), and inclusion (i.e., an environment permitting full acceptance, belonging, and participation) is critical to avoid significant loss of faculty from marginalized groups.

RESEARCH

- Acknowledge to faculty that a “COVID slow-down” is expected and acceptable.
- Provide supports for conducting and managing research: e.g., editorial assistance for papers and proposals; project management software to keep remote teams connected and manage workflow; funds to support faculty on existing research or as they pivot to new methods and topics.
- Increase flexibility: e.g., allow new faculty to spend start-up funds, provide start-up timeline extensions, reschedule sabbaticals.
- Make sure spending restrictions consider equity (e.g., (un)availability of other resources).
- Provide opt-out tenure clock extensions for tenure track faculty but be aware that these do not help research track faculty. With awareness that tenure clock extensions may exacerbate inequality (by increasing the lifetime earnings of those tenured in fewer years), consider making promotion salary increases retroactive to when the faculty member would have usually gone up for tenure (as UMass-Amherst administration has committed to doing).¹¹

SERVICE

- During the pandemic, reduce service and meetings to only essential activities.
- Postpone some activities (e.g., internal reviews, events) and consider streamlining others (e.g., annual review) to reduce demands on time and resources. Post-pandemic, evaluate whether some committees could be disbanded; consider that some meetings may remain online (e.g., faculty meetings).
- Temporarily reduce or waive formal service for faculty with significant caregiving demands; this can also make space for informal service that women and faculty of color may be engaged in. Pair this with reducing formal service generally so as not to shift the burden onto faculty without these demands.
- Create mechanisms for making invisible service work (e.g., supporting students during the pandemic) more visible. Recognize that women and faculty of color are more likely to engage in this work generally, and especially during the pandemic.

TEACHING

- During the pandemic, allow instructors to teach in their desired mode (in person, hybrid, online) without needing to justify their preference. Post-pandemic, consider whether some courses might have online components as teaching online may create more opportunities for some faculty (e.g., caregivers, faculty with disabilities).
- Create more formalized mechanisms to cover courses for faculty who need to be absent for more than one or two classes due to unexpected issues (e.g., illness, family emergencies) or chronic health problems.
- For untenured faculty with significant caregiving demands who are teaching during the pandemic, provide them with a course release in a future semester prior to tenure review. These releases can be staggered to reduce pressure on departments to staff courses.
- Give faculty with significant caregiving demands priority in selecting courses to teach. Do not expect them to shoulder larger service courses, or alternatively, assign extra help.
- Flexibly address teaching needs: e.g., team teaching, hiring additional lecturers, hiring advanced graduate students to teach.
- Go beyond how-to videos. Provide one-on-one assistance with online teaching: e.g., with creating videos, setting up Canvas, improving the accessibility of course materials. Provide headphones, microphones, and other helpful equipment.

WORK-LIFE

- Recognize that the pandemic is likely more personally relevant to faculty of color than white faculty because faculty of color belong to the groups most likely to have serious health problems or die from COVID-19, and are more likely to have family members unemployed due to economic downturns tied to the pandemic. Therefore, more members of their personal networks may have been affected by COVID-19 and they may be facing additional invisible burdens as a result. They may also be facing more significant economic strain.
- Consider whether there are mechanisms to support faculty parents, especially those with young children. Could funds typically used to support conference and research travel be provided as emergency funds for caregiving assistance? Could U-M assist faculty in forming learning pods that do not recreate inequality (e.g., do not create silos of racially or economically similar families)?
- Work with local schools to support safe in-person learning options for children.
- Recognize that faculty without caregiving responsibilities may also be facing significant strain that affects productivity.
- Provide funds to allow faculty to create usable home offices (e.g., ergonomic chairs and desks, stable Wi-Fi).
- Be aware that cuts to salary and benefits may especially harm faculty of color, women, and contingent faculty because they already face disparities in these areas.

MENTORING

- Encourage Launch Committees and other mentors to explicitly discuss modified expectations and strategies related to work during the pandemic.
- Consider other mentoring structures to support assistant professors who are facing a unique set of circumstances and more uncertainty than usual (e.g., peer mentoring, group mentoring).
- Some faculty may be best mentored by scholars outside of U-M (because of their scholarly area or identity); provide funds to compensate outside mentors for providing this service.

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Delay new, non-essential programs and initiatives and use staff and financial resources to support existing faculty efforts.
- Create norms to reduce the amount of email, especially outside of business hours.
- Empower ombuds to help faculty affected by COVID-19 find support. This can provide a route for faculty to raise concerns confidentially and may ease pressures on unit administrators.
- Communicate COVID-19 decisions promptly.

MONITORING COVID-RELATED INEQUALITY

- Develop metrics to assess equity at the department, school/college, and university levels to determine whether the pandemic is having unequal impacts on faculty. These metrics might include scholarly productivity, time to promotion, tenure and promotion outcomes, salary, teaching and service loads, number of student advisees, climate and job satisfaction, hiring, and retention. Note that most of the research on the impact of COVID-19 on faculty has focused on gender differences. Nevertheless, there are likely significant effects that differ by a number of other identities including race, international status, disability, rank, and age.
- Ensure that those most affected by COVID-19 have a seat at the table when new policies and procedures are developed and when COVID-19 equity metrics are discussed.
- Provide anonymous or confidential mechanisms by which faculty can provide feedback to administrators about their needs and concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVALUATING FACULTY

GENERAL EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Decrease faculty uncertainty by communicating clear metrics and specific benchmarks; these may be determined at the departmental level.
- Articulate the value of teaching and service in an academic world where research is often seen as paramount. This work has always been essential to the functioning of the university and is especially critical now. The pandemic (and racial injustice) has resulted in an increased need for faculty to engage in outward facing public engagement, support and mentor students, and engage in committee and leadership efforts on campus and nationally. Therefore, communicate to faculty that this work is valued; align evaluation standards and criteria to match where faculty have placed their efforts to address the critical needs of this moment; adjust reward structures to mirror this commitment. Where the balance has been skewed in evaluative processes, reset norms and expectations.
- To mitigate evaluation bias, inform evaluators of the differential impact of COVID-19 on faculty from marginalized groups.
- Explicitly inform external reviewers to account for the “COVID slow down” by assessing the quality (rather than quantity) of the candidate’s work during the pandemic and years following.
- Consider the inclusion of COVID-impact statements as part of the annual review process. The ADVANCE Program at UMASS-Amherst has compiled recommendations for [best practices in documenting pandemic impacts](#). However, note that these may require faculty to disclose personal and/or family circumstances that may lead to evaluation bias. Alternatively, assume most faculty have been negatively affected.
- Modify expectations around national and international visibility in tenure and promotion decisions as some faculty, unable to travel to conferences, may have less opportunity to gain visibility.
- Malisch et al. (2020) provide [questions for evaluation committees to consider](#).

EVALUATING RESEARCH

- Prioritize quality over quantity in scholarly output. Do not let the 25% of faculty able to be more productive during the global pandemic set the standard for the 75% who are not able to do so. Adjust productivity expectations to be achievable by the 75%; provide equivalent evaluations to those who meet those (already high) expectations with those who exceed them.
 - Examine ways in which faculty have adapted their research program to account for limitations caused by the pandemic (e.g., new research areas; learning new skills; building new collaborations).
 - Be attentive to the different ways in which COVID has impacted faculty in different fields. For example, those conducting archival research, fieldwork, or ethnographic work might be restricted for 12-24 months while those in dry labs might be able to conduct most or all work remotely.
 - Allow faculty to count accepted, but cancelled-due-to-COVID, conference presentations and talks in their annual review.
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EVALUATING TEACHING

- Utilize holistic teaching assessments rather than student evaluations to determine teaching effectiveness. This could include improvement in teaching over time, responsiveness to feedback regarding areas of improvement, evaluation by trained peers, creative and innovative teaching techniques (including adaptation to online formats), sound pedagogical approaches, development of new courses, and decolonization of the syllabus (i.e., less focus on only white, Western scholars and forms of knowledge).
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Suggested Additional Reading for Policy and Practice Recommendations Regarding COVID-19

- American Sociological Association (2020). [*Statement Regarding Faculty Review and Reappointment Processes During the COVID-19 Crisis*](#).
- Cardel, M. I., Dean, N., & Montoya-Williams, D. (2020). *Preventing a Secondary Epidemic of Lost Early Career Scientists: Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women with Children*. Annals of the American Thoracic Society, (ja). <https://www.atsjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1513/AnnalsATS.202006-589IP>
- Gibson, E. M. et al. (2020, June 25). *How Support of Early Career Researchers Can Reset Science in the Post-COVID-19 World*. Cell, 181, 1445-1449. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2020.05.045>
- Gonzales, L.D., & Griffin, K.A. (2020). [*Supporting Faculty During & After COVID-19: Don't Let Go of Equity*](#). Washington, DC: Aspire Alliance.
- Malisch, J. et al. (2020). *In the Wake of COVID-19, Academia Needs New Solutions to Ensure Gender Equity*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117(27), 15378-15381. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2010636117>
 - This article contains supporting information online at <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/suppl/2020/06/17/2010636117.DCSupplemental/pnas.2010636117.sapp.pdf>
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- Scheiber, N. (2020, September 29). *Pandemic Imperils Promotions for Women in Academia*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/business/economy/pandemic-women-tenure.html?smid=em-share>
 - See also Northwestern University - Organization of Women Faculty's [*Call for Immediate Action to Protect Gender Equity in the Face of COVID-19*](#).
- University of Massachusetts – Amherst ADVANCE Program (2020). [*Documenting Pandemic Impacts: Best Practices*](#).
- University of Michigan COVID-19 Researcher Disparities Committee (forthcoming). *Disparities in Research Progress and Productivity Induced or Exacerbated by COVID-19: Challenges and Recommendations for Immediate/Short-Term Relief (Phase 1 Report)*. University of Michigan Office of Research and the Provost's Office.

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- ² Wachorn, D., & Heckendorf, E. (2020, June 17). *We Asked 3000+ Academic How They're Coping With COVID-19: This is What We Found*. De Gruyter. <https://blog.degruyter.com/we-asked-3000-academics-how-theyre-coping-with-covid-19-this-is-what-we-found/>
 - See also the "Author pulse survey coronavirus crisis" at <https://blog.degruyter.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/De-Gruyter-Author-pulse-survey-results.pdf>
- ³ Myers, K., Tham, W. Y., Yin, Y., Cohodes, N., Thursby, J. G., Thursby, M., ... & Wang, D. (2020). *Unequal Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Scientists*. *Nature Human Behavior*, 4, 880-883. doi: [10.1038/s41562-020-0921-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0921-y)
- ⁴ Oleschuk, M. (2020). *Gender Equity Considerations for Tenure and Promotion during COVID-19*. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 57(3), 502-515. doi: [10.1111/cars.12295](https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12295)
- ⁵ Flaherty, C. (2020, April 21). *Early Journal Submission Data Suggest COVID-19 is Tanking Women's Research Productivity*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity>
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- ⁸ Rogers, B. (2020, August 26). *Not in the Same Boat: Career Progression in the Pandemic*. QualtricsBlog. <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/inequitable-effects-of-pandemic-on-careers/>
- ⁹ Weissman, S. (2020, May 9). *Universities are Freezing Tenure Clocks. What Will that Mean for Faculty of Color?* *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, a CMA publication. <https://diverseeducation.com/article/175846/>
- ¹⁰ Gonzales, L.D., & Griffin, K.A. (2020). *Supporting Faculty During & After COVID-19: Don't Let Go of Equity*. Washington, DC: Aspire Alliance.
- ¹¹ Mickey, E. L., Clark, D., & Misra, J. (2020, September 4). *Measures to Support Faculty During COVID-19*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/09/04/advice-academic-administrators-how-best-support-faculty-during-pandemic-opinion>

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