

## **Recommended Actions for Achieving Merit & Promotion Equity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

UC Davis STEAD Committee  
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### **Introduction**

In response to the recommendations for mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on UC faculty made by the University Committee on Faculty Welfare (UCFW) and the University Committee on Affirmative Action, Diversity, and Equity (UCAADE) (these documents are found [here](#)), the STEAD committee recommends the adoption of a series of intentional practices that are designed specifically to achieve equity in the merit and promotion processes at UC Davis. Our focus on the merit and promotion process is intentional and consistent with the work of the STEAD committee, but we emphasize that these recommended actions must be combined with others that are designed to address the immediate and long-term impacts the pandemic has had on other aspects of faculty members' lives and work, on the members of other university communities (e.g., students), and on other university activities and processes.

We emphasize that while our recommendations focus on redressing the impact of the COVID pandemic, we recognize that the pandemic coincided with a national reckoning related to racial inequality and injustice. This has been an historic period of examination, activism, and grounded work aimed at addressing systemic racism and advancing toward social justice. We highlight that both the impact of the events that precipitated the current crisis of racial justice, and the work required to interpret those events and lead institutional responses aimed at increasing racial equity have been unequally distributed among the faculty. Fortunately, UC Davis already has an established mechanism in the faculty merit and promotion process – the Contributions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement – that can be used to support the documentation, evaluation, and reward of activities responding to the current crisis of racial justice. We encourage the continued institutionalization of Statements of Contributions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the faculty evaluation process. And we specifically recommend these statements be used systematically to recognize and reward work done by faculty colleagues to address the current crisis in race relations and to promote racial justice.

Our recommendations related to the COVID-19 pandemic are informed by two distinct but related bodies of research: (1) the very recent studies of the pandemic's impact on faculty members' academic work; and (2) the extensive body of research that has identified multiple dimensions of inequality in the academy, the causes of those disparities, and the practices that, prior to the pandemic, had helped to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion among postsecondary faculty in the US.

### The pandemic impact in context

Over the past months a steady stream of studies has documented the disparately negative impacts the pandemic has had on women,<sup>1-7</sup> faculty of color,<sup>8-10</sup> caregivers,<sup>1,11-13</sup> and early-career scholars and doctoral students.<sup>14</sup> The impacts also differ by field and type of research<sup>1</sup> because of the varying demands for in-person interaction, access to specialized facilities and resources, and the need for travel to specific locations.

While the recent studies emphasize the pandemic's impact, they add to an already large and multidisciplinary body of research into the extent, causes and consequences of disparities by race-ethnicity and gender in the academy.<sup>15,16</sup> The broader body of research tracks the long

history of disparities among postsecondary faculty, the progress toward equity that has been made over recent decades, and the insights and institutional changes that generated the progress.<sup>16</sup> It thereby highlights both the gains that are threatened by the pandemic's impact, and the actionable interventions that may mitigate that impact and ensure continued progress toward greater equity, diversity and inclusion.

### **Recommended actions**

The following recommended actions are aimed at avoiding the loss of talented and hardworking faculty members and creating equitable systems for supporting the career development of all faculty. We recommend actions at 3 institutional levels:

- department-level actions that must be led by department chairs and senior faculty;
- actions that are specific to the administrators and faculty involved in college- and campus-level faculty review processes, including Associate Deans and the faculty members of Faculty Personnel Committees (FPCs) and the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP);
- actions institutional leaders must take to support and institutionalize equity-focused efforts across campus.

We highlight that our recommendations purposefully do not focus on individual faculty members. *We emphasize the importance of not placing undue responsibility for achieving equity on those who have already been disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic.*

#### Department-level actions:

- Chairs should engage all department members, including faculty, graduate students and staff, in activities that will develop an understanding of the insights generated by the empirical study of bias, its multiple forms and causes (e.g., cognitive and procedural), and how those biases generate inequities in the evaluation of faculty in the merit and promotion process. (There are many supportive resources available, including books that summarize the research,<sup>17-19</sup> and the multiple articles, videos and websites collected [here](#) by the UC Davis Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.)
- Chairs should reach out to all faculty members to assess individual challenges, create individualized adjustments and strategies for meeting those challenges, and collect the information needed to achieve equitable support.
- Chairs should recommend pandemic impact statements from all faculty who will be reviewed over the coming years and develop clear guidelines for these statements.
  - A pandemic impact statement explains the research, teaching, and service that candidates were able or unable to do, infrastructural or financial constraints, and unplanned obligations they were required to meet (including child and elder care) during the pandemic.

**Note:** Faculty *should not* be required to disclose personal information about the specific cause(s) of the impacts to their scholarly activity (e.g., health or caregiving disruptions). In addition to being an invasion of privacy, such a requirement could undermine the goal of increasing equity. It may significantly increase the burden of providing a statement by increasing both the time needed to compose the statement and the stress of revisiting and describing

personal experiences. Requiring personal information may also potentially spark or reinforce existing implicit biases that negatively impact the evaluation of scholars from populations who are underrepresented in the academy.

- Develop a clear statement that the expectations of research productivity during the pandemic period *should not be the same as those applied during normal times*. The baseline expectation is that productivity is lessened during (and immediately following) the pandemic. Share this statement with both the candidate and the reviewers of the dossier at all levels of evaluation (e.g., as part of the departmental letter). The contents of the impact statement can then be used to contextualize what the faculty member was able to accomplish.
- Use the [series of questions](#) compiled by Malisch et al.<sup>20</sup> and/or the [synthesized list of questions](#) developed by the UMass ADVANCE program to develop the COVID-19 impact statement guidelines that are tailored to the scholarly activities and pandemic experiences of the departmental faculty, staff, graduate students, etc.
- Develop and institutionalize (1) clear criteria, metrics, benchmarks, etc. to be applied consistently in merit and promotion decisions, i.e., under normal circumstances, and (2) clear criteria for how extenuating circumstances will be considered in evaluation processes, i.e., during negatively impactful individual-level events (such as illnesses), localized events (such as fire seasons, earthquakes, droughts, etc.) that may have disparate impacts across groups of researchers or areas of scholarship, as well as national or international events (such as pandemics).
  - Develop qualitative and holistic evaluation approaches that explicitly limit reliance on quantitative metrics such as number of publications, citations, impact factors, research expenditures, and teaching scores which were shown to be biased pre-pandemic and which may lead to more bias as a result of the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on faculty research productivity.
- Clearly communicate the evaluation criteria endorsed by the department to all faculty and include descriptions of those metrics in all evaluation letters, e.g., departmental review letters and letters to external reviewers for promotion cases.
- Develop clear directions for how to assess cases impacted by the pandemic to include in all letters to external reviewers for promotion cases.
- Chairs, faculty and departmental administrators develop a transparent system for tracking and ensuring equity in the distribution of service assignments and workload.
- Chairs and faculty review all departmental committee assignments to identify non-essential service, allow faculty to defer or drop non-essential committee work already assigned, and identify ways to streamline departmental service requirements more permanently.

#### Actions for administrators and members of FPCs and CAP:

- Engage in targeted training, reading and other activities to develop an understanding of the insights generated by the empirical study of bias, its multiple forms and causes (e.g., cognitive and procedural), and how those biases generate inequities in the evaluation of faculty in the merit and promotion process.

- Review recent research and reports of the disparate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women faculty and faculty of color.
- Proactively discuss how the evaluation process can be modified to address the effects of recent events, especially the disparate effects it has had on specific groups of faculty.
  - Actively engage in discussions with campus, college, and department leaders about the development of guidelines for pandemic impact statements.
  - Accept the stated impacts of the pandemic on a candidate's research, teaching, and service without requiring or expecting the inclusion of personal information.
  - Recognize and value shifts in effort from research to teaching and service to meet the needs of others on campus during the pandemic and social justice challenges.
  - Develop qualitative and holistic evaluation approaches that explicitly limit reliance on quantitative metrics such as number of publications, citations, impact factors, research expenditures, and teaching scores which were shown to be biased pre-pandemic and which may become more biased as a result of the disparate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on faculty research productivity.

Actions for university leaders:

- Communicate the commitment to equity and to supporting the scholarly activity and career advancement of all faculty clearly, consistently, and repeatedly.
- Engage in targeted training, reading and other activities to develop an understanding of the insights generated by the empirical study of bias, its multiple forms and causes (e.g., cognitive and procedural), and how those biases generate inequities in the evaluation of faculty in the merit and promotion process.
- Create and maintain clear, easily accessible and consistent communication flows about policies, actions, and resources, and about recommended changes to normative practices.
 

**Note:** These communication flows must be bidirectional so that campus leaders can both disseminate information about policy, and gather information about the challenges faculty are experiencing and suggested approaches to alleviating their impacts.
- Work with the Academic Senate, college leadership, and department chairs to ensure consistent implementation of flexibility and support policies.
- Create a committee or coordinated network of ombudspeople who are empowered to assist affected faculty and advocate on their behalf (individually and collectively), to facilitate the communication flows, and to consult on the development and implementation of new policies and practices (e.g., on writing pandemic impact statements).
  - The committee/network must be charged with the goal of increasing equity in faculty access to pandemic-related support across campus by identifying and helping to address the unevenness that may arise across departments and colleges.

- Expand the availability of stop-clock and merit deferral options for faculty in conjunction with (1) a full examination of the negative short- and long-term impacts these programs have on faculty equity in pay and career progress (e.g., research documenting the counter-intention impacts of gender-neutral stop-clock policies<sup>21</sup>), (2) the development of strategic actions to address those inequities, e.g., retro-active application of advancement-level pay for faculty who are promoted after a deferral.

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