

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tenure System Faculty, Fixed-Term Faculty, and Continuing and Fixed-Term Academic Staff

FROM: Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Guidelines on Creating a COVID-19 Impact Statement for Annual Review, Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure/Continuing System Faculty and Academic Staff – Fall 2020

Dear Tenure System Faculty, Fixed-Term Faculty, and Continuing and Fixed-Term Academic Staff:

Attached you will find a memorandum and guidelines on Creating a COVID-19 Impact Statement for Annual Review, Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure, Fall 2020. This document was created in response to broad interest from the academic community to acknowledge the ways in which the COVID context is impacting academic functions that are unique to individuals. Academic pursuits are themselves unique to individuals and we have in place a variety of mechanisms through which disruptions or acceleration in work can be integrated into existing unit, college, and university reviews. That said, the university we live in today differs significantly from the one that existed in April when Interim Provost Teresa Sullivan sent the accompanying memorandum under which the reappointment, promotion, and tenure process currently operates. Therefore, the new memo that is attached provides a way to document these emerging differences in the processes for annual review and for continuing status reviews and promotions for academic staff and fixed-term faculty.

As for any academic guidance provided by this provost, wide input was requested, and in some cases requested multiple times. And, as a consequence, we received widely variant responses. The present document includes that general thinking, respects and values the local deliberations that are part of college and unit discussions, and recognizes that these guidelines are guideposts and not dictums. Perhaps most importantly, the document appreciates that individual accommodation may differ when viewed through a lens of equity. The ambition was to etch out a generalizable mechanism of



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Memo to Tenure, Fixed-Term, and Continuing System Faculty and Academic Staff:
Guidelines on Creating a COVID-19 Impact Statement

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attributions of the COVID impact and enable an academically thoughtful manner of engagement on an individual level while preserving the integrity of the system.

Some comment about the prompts included in the enclosed guidelines document and their personal nature is warranted:

- (a) The notion that “everyone is impacted and therefore any documentation is moot” does not appreciate the fact that everyone is not impacted the same. Equity would argue that we, as an institution, need to understand the differences and be able to respond in meaningful ways.
- (b) The “fact” of the prompts has been critiqued by some. However, the individuals who are most disproportionately affected have indicated in their feedback that the list “lessens the exhaustion” of having to sort out the prose to describe the specific impacts.
- (c) And finally, the “personal nature” of the prompts has been critiqued, but recognize that we have existing asks of faculty and academic staff, including information for parental leave or extensions of the tenure clock.
- (d) The prompts in the present document are neither binding nor required, but are a recognition of the array of ways in which academic work is altered. No one should feel the necessity to reveal more about themselves than is needed. If there are any concerns in this regard, documents can be sent via email to Academic Human Resources in the Office of the Provost at ahr@msu.edu.

I thank all of you for thinking broadly about the ways in which we measure ourselves and each other in this time of COVID.

Attachments

Cc: N. Suzanne Lang, Ph.D., Interim Associate Provost and Vice President for Academic Human Resources

Annual Review, Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure/Continuing System Faculty and Academic Staff Guidelines on Creating a COVID-19 Impact Statement Fall 2020

Units (departments/schools) and colleges across Michigan State University (MSU) use established criteria for excellence in teaching, research, advising, and service/outreach/engagement to assess annual review, as well as reappointment, promotion and tenure/continuing appointments (RPT/C). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, shuttering and impacting institutions and individuals including those at MSU. The purpose of this document is to acknowledge that faculty and academic staff (FAS) at MSU have encountered varied challenges. You have worked to maintain your academic goals across multiple areas of work. We do not yet know how long the COVID-19 pandemic will impact human health, however, we do acknowledge that the trajectory for success for individual FAS may be affected by these challenges for several years to come.

This document provides guidelines for MSU FAS on writing a COVID-19 impact statement that may be submitted to unit administrators as part of the activity report for annual review, and to internal and external reviewers upon tenure and promotion/continuing appointment assessments. Inclusion of the statement for annual review and/or RPT/C is optional. However, FAS are encouraged to document their progress and challenges on an ongoing basis. By including examples of what you have done and aimed to do during this time will ensure institutional memory by conveying the impact of the pandemic on your work.

FAS Annual Review

FAS are encouraged to create a record of the impacts now, while they are fresh, as part of the regular activity report for the evaluation period. COVID-19 impacts to consider include, but are not limited to:

- disruptions and reduced productivity
- adjustments/contributions made due to the pandemic in support of the university's pivot to online teaching, learning, and advising (undergraduate and graduate level)
- lack of infrastructure at home to support virtual work (e.g., technology access/lack of access, overloaded bandwidth, lack of quiet space, etc.)
- SIRS scores that increased/decreased as a result of teaching issues associated with the pandemic
- budgetary constraints which resulted in loss of research assistant funding; limits on incoming graduate students; loss of summer funding
- disruptions and reduced productivity engendered by intensified caregiving (childcare, eldercare, etc.) responsibilities may influence time to promotion, especially for women.

- differential impact of COVID on minoritized FAS, due to long-standing systemic health and social inequities, while providing increased emotional support for minoritized students
- disproportionate health and financial impacts on immigrant communities
- travel issues for faculty and graduate students
- sabbatical interruptions, postponements, or adjustments
- cancellations of conferences, invited talks, performances
- cancellation of fellowships, artist/scholar-in-residence appointments
- lack of access to laboratories, field sites, studios, human subjects, libraries, archives, and study populations
- additional work required to meet university guidelines for safely reopening laboratories, research, field work projects, and studio work
- closed facilities, performance venues, festivals, summer institutes, residences, and ensembles for artists and performers, documentary filmmakers, poets and digital humanities scholars
- reduced productivity or opportunities for training or practice because of safety guidelines within the work environment through sanitation, mask wearing, social distancing, and limiting numbers of people in work settings at one time (shift/schedules)
- reduced scholarly products (manuscripts, books, juried exhibits, performances) and the reasons that caused the reduction (e.g., peer review unavailable or slowed, publishers unable to work, travel restrictions)
- suspension of or curtailed traditional and ad hoc service assignments
- greatly increased service responsibilities for some faculty, especially for those doing community outreach and engagement, that reduced time for research and/or teaching
- complicated external service responsibilities such as journal editorships, chairing of academic conference sessions, professional organization service, and other integrated scholarly service affected by the need to make adjustments in response to the pandemic
- interrupted and/or altered engagement with community-based institutions
- personnel circumstances and family responsibilities that required attention and time such as caregiving (children, family members, elders), home schooling, personal health issues, and/or death in the family which resulted in differential impacts
- financial stress caused by the elevated costs of childcare, eldercare and/or healthcare increased anxiety and other mental health issues that impede productivity and performance
- disruptions and stresses experienced mainly by FAS in MSU's multiple medical schools and clinics (e.g., HDFS, Psych, Ed, etc.) who are practicing in new ways, facing increased risks within their practices for themselves and their families, or having some clinical services halted or shifted to virtual oversight of students/residents who are providing care in person and through telehealth¹

¹ As an example, physicians who are responsible for rounds at Sparrow Hospital are required to quarantine prior to and after stay rounds to socially distance from their families.

Additionally, FAS may discuss how they faced disruptive conditions in alternate and creative ways. Examples include but are not limited to:

- altering research priorities to answer emergent questions related to the pandemic
- donating resources to respond to the pandemic
- supporting students in changes to the mode of learning and/or advising
- engaging in invisible service by supporting colleagues and students that were new to the University
- increased support of minoritized students by minoritized FAS
- invisible service to support the mission, e.g., helping others navigate problems, which in turn reduced one's own ability to do work
- actions to support collaborators from agencies, communities, schools, businesses, or non-profit organizations experiencing difficulties because of the pandemic
- reconfiguring courses with community engagement and service components
- increased service in academic governance, and university reopening subcommittees or review processes

Many faculty have found this to be an important time for reflection on their work, rethinking scholarly goals, investing in professional development, or connecting their work more to social issues. Coincident, a racial justice crisis during the spring and summer of 2020 has greatly increased the urgency for greater attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion within all facets of U.S. society. The extra work put on FAS of color directly due to the intersection of COVID and social upheaval represented by the protests across the nation needs to be acknowledged.

Guidance for Faculty Reviewers of Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure/Continuing System Reviews

In Spring 2020, MSU Academic Governance approved a blanket one-year extension for tenure and continuing system faculty and academic specialists. The time from appointment or the last personnel action (i.e., reappointment) **minus** the extension year will be used for evaluation. While a single year pandemic extension is an important resource, FAS may be hesitant to utilize it. Research suggests that “stop-the-clock” policies can widen the gender wage gap and impact lifetime earnings. Further, such extensions do not help teaching FAS without research expectations. FAS whose time is disproportionately being spent on increased caretaking demands with schools closed, or FAS who are already tenured or in the continuing system will not be helped by such extensions. Thus, equitable processes must be ensured. To inform both internal and

Physicians are at greater risks of exposure. Thus, this requirement can disrupt other professional responsibilities in significant ways. This is also true for those FAS involved in providing legal advice and outreach activities.

external reviewers, FAS will be strongly encouraged to create a COVID impact statement to be included in their reappointment, promotion and tenure/continuing system dossiers or woven into their reflective essay. Documenting all of these circumstances will allow for a more equitable assessment of how COVID has impacted individual FAS programs. Creation of COVID impact statements can also be useful to providing context for reappointment, promotion, and tenure/continuing system decisions. While it is encouraged, the inclusion of a COVID impact statement is optional.

It is important that the effects of the pandemic on FAS work be acknowledged with respect to impacts across research outputs (quantity and quality); the transition of teaching, advising, and mentoring into multiple modalities (which include online and virtual settings), and limitations on university service and on public impact through outreach and engagement. It is also essential to acknowledge unequal impact on members of our university community, including early career FAS, women, minoritized FAS, caregivers, those vulnerable due to health conditions, and many others. It is important to note the lens of which historically minoritized groups approach these topics. They may not wish to include personal details concerning their health and may be reluctant share their experiences. Thus, there is a need for a more holistic appraisal of academic work for tenure track/non-tenure track/continuing system FAS. For FAS going up for RPT/C, units should consider developing recommendations for new ways of assessing productivity that are holistic, if the unit has not already done so.

Internal and External Review for Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure/Continuing System Reviews

All reviewers should be instructed to take the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration when evaluating work performed. For example, reviewers should consider how criteria need to accommodate changes resulting from the pandemic.²

They should recognize the contributions FAS have made in various ways, and at the same time account for each person's specific working conditions. Overall, FAS maintained continuity and excellence in both undergraduate and graduate education that contributed to the mission of the University. Many FAS used time during the summer of 2020 to engage in additional training to improve the teaching and learning environment in their online classes. Increased caregiving responsibilities or lack of access to research facilities as a result of the pandemic should not negatively affect assessments of FAS. Reviewers at all levels need to know how to take impact statements into account, which also requires education and written statements of instruction to internal reviewers (e.g. unit peers, chairs/school directors, college RPT committees) and external reviewer solicitations. The Office of the Provost will partner with advisory groups across the university to develop how to take impact statements

² For example, if department/disciplinary criteria indicate the need to give a performance in Carnegie Hall, but Carnegie Hall was closed, then the faculty member should not be held to that standard in that review period.

into account; educational opportunities will be included in AAN Thrive workshops for FAS and administrators.

References

[Supporting Faculty During and After Covid-19: Don't let go of equity](#) – Aspire

[Documenting COVID-19 Impacts: Best Practices](#) – University of Massachusetts Amherst ADVANCE Program

[Faculty Equity & COVID-19](#) – University of Michigan ADVANCE Program

[Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity](#) – *PNAS*

[Is It Time to Stop Stopping the Clock?](#) – *Chronicle of Higher Education*

[Tenure and promotion after the pandemic](#) – *Science*