

**Asking the Right Questions:
A primer for merit, tenure and promotion evaluation committees
in times of COVID-19**

The impacts of COVID-19 in research productivity will be felt for many years and will need to be factored into promotion and tenure decisions over an extended time span that reflects academic timelines. Clear metrics, tangible benchmarks and effective communication are critical for decreasing bias in merit and promotion decisions. **This primer will aid committees during evaluation of faculty impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions will be important for evaluation of all faculty members, but careful attention to these topics will be exceptionally beneficial when evaluating minoritized faculty.**

This list is meant to provide a starting place for discussion and a way to help make evaluation more thoughtful, transparent, and equitable. We also recommend that committees use the handout about biases and solutions created by JoAnn Moody ([Rising above Cognitive Errors Guidelines for Search, Tenure Review, and Other Evaluation Committees](#)); that document is linked on our website for ease of access.

The answers to the below questions will vary based on the individual faculty member, the department, and the research program. Not all questions will be applicable to all faculty members. Throughout the pandemic our academic community was strongly encouraged, rightfully so, to aid students and to make financial, personal, and academic accommodations to lessen the impacts of the pandemic. The same considerations should be extended to faculty.

Research and Scholarly Work Questions

- Did the faculty member lose access to their research lab? If so, for how long? And, to what extent is the physical research space or wet lab necessary for completion of research?
- Did the faculty member lose access to their studio or venues for creative works or performances?
- How many manuscripts did the faculty member submit during the 2020 year? And, how many reviewer requests did the faculty member accept during that same time frame?
- If funded by grants, was the faculty member able to gain no-cost extension time to address time lost to COVID-19?
- Did the faculty member continue to pay their students and lab personnel with federal or internal funding during the pandemic.
- Does the faculty member do aging research or conduct longitudinal studies? If so, the disruption caused by the pandemic will likely have long-reaching impacts.

- Did the faculty member have to euthanize irreplaceable research animals or triage cell cultures?
- For those that work with animals or plants, did the faculty member need to reduce lab population sizes and thus reduce breeding of experimental subjects? This could be especially problematic with species or strains that do not breed well, thus increasing the amount of time needed to obtain subjects. This will also severely impact those who do aging or longitudinal work if subjects were sacrificed mid study.
- Did the faculty member lose out on a complete field season or essential research travel? Did they experience longer-term inaccessibility field sites?
- Does the faculty member do seasonal work or study a seasonal phenomenon? If so, missing spring, summer, fall of 2021 and spring and maybe summer of 2021 means the loss of an entire two years year of data.
- For those working with human subjects, did the faculty member lose out on access to participant pools?
- Is the faculty member doing work with human subjects where data may not replicate past (or future) results, thus impacting publishability due to the pandemic?
- For those who work with human subjects, did the pandemic severely limit the data that could be collected (e.g., for those that work with saliva, blood, or other biological samples)?
- Did faculty alter or pivot their research program to address issues related to COVID-19?
- Was the faculty member responsible for advising research students (undergraduate or graduate) in the laboratory? If so, what was done to support those students during this time? Did the faculty member require that students maintain a certain level of research activity or lab time?
- Were any of the lab personnel impacted by visa or travel restrictions?
- Were any lab personnel impacted by altered allocation of TAs or funding based on citizenship status or on date when they left/returned to campus?
- Did the faculty member have manuscripts or scholarly work under review during the spring and summer of 2020? If so, be mindful that the duration of the review and publication process may have been increased during this time.
- Was the faculty member on a research sabbatical during spring or fall of 2020?
- Did the faculty member have invited seminars or presentations cancelled?
- Did the faculty member, or their lab personnel, have accepted conference presentations cancelled?
- What was the faculty member's research productivity during and after COVID-19 compared to their own performance prior to this pandemic? Using within-person benchmarks can help understand the scope of impact.

Teaching Questions

- Was the faculty member teaching course(s) that had to be transitioned to an online mode during spring of 2020?
- If the faculty member was teaching in spring 2020, how many courses? What were the enrollment numbers and credit hours of those courses? Were these lecture or laboratory courses? Did the faculty member have the aid of teaching assistants? Were these new preps or were they courses the faculty member was familiar teaching?

- Was the faculty member able to obtain the resources necessary to complete their online teaching? (e.g., WiFi, hot spots, computers, etc.)
- Did the faculty member take additional steps to help students adjust to the transition to online?
- Was the faculty member required to complete online-education training or meetings related to teaching and mentoring?
- Did the faculty member lead any training sessions or webinars related to online teaching?
- Did the faculty member help other faculty with the transition to an online environment?
- Was the faculty member responsible for mentoring students in the laboratory as part of a course or credit program during spring of 2020? If so, how was that transition handled?
- Did the faculty member take on a paid or unpaid increase in teaching load to help the department or university cope with the fallout of the pandemic? If so, for how many quarters/semesters did this increase in teaching last? And, what was the percent increase from the load described in their contract/offer letter? Lastly, how does this increase in teaching compare with what was asked of other faculty in the department?
- If the university is using the student evaluations of teaching from spring and fall 2020, how do the faculty member's values compare to their evaluations prior to this pandemic? Using within-person benchmarks can help understand the scope of impact.

Service Questions

- Did the faculty member contribute to department or university initiatives related to COVID-19?
- Did the faculty member contribute to public discussions of, community engagement related to, or research on the COVID-19 crisis?
- Did the faculty member shift any of their major service duties to an online format (e.g., plan a virtual conference; aid in a virtual graduation ceremony)?
- Did the faculty member have student advising responsibilities during spring/fall 2020? If so, what alterations were made to adjust to online?
- Did the faculty member spend extra time helping students/advises navigate credit/no credit situations?
- Did the faculty member aid students with coordination of changing requirements for graduate or professional school, or assist students in other ways with their career plans?
- Was the faculty member informally or, more formally, through student organization groups involved in mentoring and supporting students from their ethnic/race or economic class during the pandemic?
- For faculty with assigned student advisees, did the faculty member take on a paid or unpaid increase in assigned advising load to help the department or university cope with the fallout of the pandemic? How does this increase in advising load compare with what was asked of other faculty in the department?
- In an effort to increase the diversity of committees, is the faculty member now serving on a disproportionate amount of departmental and/or university service compared to other faculty?

Additional Questions and Considerations

- Did the faculty member take a stop-the-clock option? If so, make sure that evaluation standards are only applied to the time on the clock.
- Did the faculty member take FMLA or any other type of leave? If so, make sure this time is handled accordingly and that the faculty member is not penalized for using their options.
- Ask the faculty member if there is anything they would like to disclose to the committee, the chair, and/or to Human Resources.*
 - Did the faculty member or one of their dependents or family members get ill with COVID-19?
 - Does the faculty member have dependents to care for at home?
 - Was the faculty member responsible for homeschooling children?
 - Does the faculty member manage care for someone with a disability or potentially life-threatening illness (not COVID-19)?
 - Do they have a preexisting condition which made life during this pandemic more stressful or impacted their ability to return to campus and/or the classroom?
 - Is the faculty member a single parent?
 - Is the faculty member partnered to an essential/frontline worker?
 - Did the faculty member experience the death of a loved one due to this pandemic?

**Disclaimer: These questions relate to a faculty member's personal circumstances, if an individual chooses to disclose the information it may convey protected status under federal or state laws.*