

January 25, 2021

To: Academic Senate Faculty (via SBFACU-L)

From: David Marshall, Executive Vice Chancellor
Dana Mastro, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Personnel
Susannah Scott, Academic Senate Divisional Chair
Ruth Finkelstein, Chair, Committee on Academic Personnel

Re: COVID-19 and Merit and Promotion Reviews

As we continue to confront the ongoing challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are writing to provide reassurance and advice about the academic review process. We understand that many faculty are concerned about the potential impact that the conditions associated with this crisis might have on them in advancements and promotions. This memo adds to our ongoing efforts to provide guidance on policy and procedures for academic evaluation and advancement in the context of these unprecedented circumstances.

This guidance was developed in consultation with the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP), the Office of Academic Personnel, Academic Senate leadership, Deans and Associate Dean-Faculty Equity Advisors, and other administrative colleagues. We all acknowledge that COVID-19 has transformed our lives in ways that are likely to have implications for teaching, research, and professional activity for years to come. Accordingly, we reaffirm that the effects of these emergency conditions will be taken into consideration in advancement decisions, and recognize that the effects (especially on scholarly productivity) are likely to have disparate and inequitable impacts across our faculty.

In discussions with reviewing agencies at all levels, we have emphasized the critical need to utilize the flexibility explicitly acknowledged in our campus and system-wide Academic Personnel guidelines in order to properly recognize and reward faculty efforts and to help faculty stay on track in reaching career milestones.

UC Academic Personnel policies (APM 210-1-d) are clear in asserting that under circumstances such as those resulting from COVID-19, in which the “work of faculty members departs markedly from established academic patterns... review committees must take exceptional care to apply the [evaluative] criteria with sufficient flexibility.” This does not imply that advancement standards will be disregarded; it means that the record should be considered in the context of individual conditions, holistically, sensitively, relative to opportunity, and with “flexibility, balancing when the case requires, heavier

commitments and responsibilities in one area against lighter commitments and responsibilities in another.”

As the consequences of this situation continue to unfold, we will continue to track and evaluate the implications of the crisis on academic personnel processes, make efforts to adjust for new or ongoing needs, and widely disseminate any updates to processes and practices. The unparalleled teaching, research, and service demands placed on our colleagues in these circumstances should not be exacerbated by anxiety about their impact in merit reviews.

Below we describe ways that our current policies can address faculty needs in the context of these emergency conditions.

Optional COVID Impact Statements

We encourage faculty who have experienced disruptions and/or hardship due to conditions related to COVID-19 to include a COVID Impact Statement in their merit cases. Like self-assessments, these statements will help place the record in context and assist departments and reviewing agencies in understanding how these conditions have impacted the record. Personal circumstances need not be disclosed but they can be addressed at the discretion of the faculty member.

Reviewing agencies at all levels understand that appropriate adaptability and compassion are expected under such unprecedented circumstances, consistent with established UC (APM 210-1-d) policy. For example, an assistant professor undergoing a two-year review might have been impeded in the area of research due to such obstacles as caregiving responsibilities, a lab or studio closure, or an inability to access an archive, resulting in an inability to complete ongoing projects. In such a case, if the record might seem to fall short of what is normally required for a routine advancement, it is reasonable to consider any completed work and to take into account some work in progress, and consider the record for the review period to be satisfactory. Campus policy (Red Binder I-67) offers additional precedent for exercising flexibility in setting expectations for achievement, which by analogy can be applied to a holistic and realistic review of the record in the current context.

COVID Impact Statements also may explain adjustments that have been made to workload, scheduling, or teaching assignments due to the impact of COVID-19 on dependent care or other responsibilities. (See “Temporary Adjustment of Workload” below). Faculty members who have assumed significant additional responsibilities, without remuneration, in an effort to assist in offsetting the hardships experienced by colleagues also are encouraged to document such efforts.

Suggestions about the content of these statements and their function in the review process are provided in greater detail in an informational memo on [COVID Impact](#)

[Statements](#), on the AP COVID-19 Information & Resources page. Note that it is also the responsibility of the department chair to additionally explain and contextualize the candidate's record in each review area in all merit reviews.

Documenting Temporary Adjustments of Workload

We reiterate here that in order to assist faculty who are experiencing challenges stemming from COVID-19 (such as homeschooling, dependent-care responsibilities, etc.), some workload obligations may be modified or excused in consultation with department chairs and deans. (See “Flexibility in Faculty Assignments” in [this November 9, 2020, memo to faculty](#).) In a given quarter, this might include a release from or shift in service expectations, changes in course assignments and/or scheduling of courses, co-teaching, among other agreed-upon modifications. In some cases, a modification might take place in a year following the pandemic—for example, to allow a faculty member previously unable to access to lab facilities to accelerate a research project or make up for lost time.

Faculty, chairs, and deans have been advised that such accommodations should be documented in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the faculty member, chair, and dean, and included in the case materials during the merit review. These MOU's can help reviewing agencies understand the record and adjust expectations for review areas, if appropriate. Chairs have been instructed to make every effort to thoughtfully, creatively, and earnestly consider ways to make adjustments for faculty experiencing caregiving challenges, including reaching out to their colleagues to help identify opportunities for assistance.

Chairs should make parallel efforts to provide background and explanations about workload adjustments in merit reviews for as long as it is relevant (recognizing that some impacts will be experienced in subsequent reviews). Although self-assessments, teaching statements, and COVID Impact Statements are encouraged, it is the chair's responsibility to explain the record and adjusted expectations as documented in the MOU if it appears that there is a diminution of service, for example, or fewer courses than expected taught during the review period due to rescheduling or shifts in assignments. Faculty members will not be penalized for these accommodations and reviewing agencies will consider any revised workload expectations in assessing the record.

Stopping or Extending the Tenure Clock

Faculty whose appointment is at the assistant level, including Lecturers with Potential Security of Employment (LPSOE), have an eight-year clock. Our policies allow that clock to be extended for such personal reasons as “childbearing, childrearing, serious health condition, disability, bereavement, or significant circumstance or event that disrupts a faculty member's ability to pursue his or her duties.” The extension of the clock provides a possibility of additional service in the title beyond the 8-year limit. (See APM 133-17 h.)

Upon request, a one-year extension for COVID-19-related reasons will be automatically granted, without prejudice. Requests do not have to provide detailed accounts of delays or impacts related to COVID-19. The request may simply state that work was interrupted or impeded for a particular time-frame, due to the COVID-19 remote work environment, research shut-downs, and/or dependent care responsibilities, as appropriate to each situation.

Stopping the clock does not change advancement eligibility; in other words, faculty can choose to have on-time reviews even if they previously received an extension. However, faculty may request a deferral of the next review based on the extension of the clock if they choose to do so. These deferrals can be applied to Formal Appraisals.

As always, tenured faculty also have the option to defer their merit or promotion review, although all faculty must still be reviewed at least every five years.

Teaching Evaluations & Optional Teaching Statements

Although ESCI's are still a routine aspect of our review process, faculty will not be penalized if they receive unfavorable evaluations and scores based on factors beyond their control due to the remote instructional context.

We understand that faculty have made extraordinary efforts to maintain instructional standards, ensure continuity of teaching, and create supportive and engaging learning environments for their students in this remote context. In many cases, preparation time has increased as courses and pedagogy have been adapted, and advising demands have increased as faculty have sought to mentor and counsel students. Teaching Self-Assessments, although optional, are critical in providing reviewing agencies with information about the particular challenges, accomplishments, and activities resulting from the transition to remote teaching.

Different disciplines, types of courses, course levels, class sizes, and subject matter present different pedagogical and technical challenges in adapting to remote instruction, whether synchronous or asynchronous. Teaching assessments should be used to provide the specific background, details, and explanations of challenges alongside efforts to address them, strategies to enrich educational experiences for students by adapting pedagogical or curricular goals, and efforts to support students and ensure their success. For example, some faculty have attended workshops and sought special training; some have worked with Teaching Assistants and colleagues to develop new curriculum and innovative pedagogical strategies to meet the challenges of this environment. Faculty should also utilize teaching assessments to describe work providing personal and other support for students needing assistance due to the pandemic. Such labor can represent a significant time and emotional commitment for faculty, often disproportionately women and underrepresented faculty.

Conclusion

There is no policy manual or playbook for factoring into Academic Personnel reviews the impact of COVID-19 and the emergency conditions that have transformed our personal and professional lives. We have emphasized that existing APM and Red Binder policies provide a precedent and a framework for assessing standard criteria with flexibility and understanding. Just as we have relied on good will and flexibility as we have strived to carry out our educational mission and support our students and our faculty and staff colleagues, we expect that departments, deans, and CAP will implement our policies and uphold University of California standards with flexibility and understanding, based on both principles and efforts to place academic records in the context of these unusual conditions. We will continue to work with deans and CAP to develop and refine guidelines for implementing our policies under these extraordinary circumstances. Ongoing conversations on our campus will take place in the context of discussions about expectations for tenure and promotion in professional societies and in universities all over the world over the next few years. We have confidence that our colleagues will be conscientious, judicious, and insightful as they oversee the most comprehensive, fair, transparent, and rigorous merit and promotion system in academia.

Thank you. We remain grateful for everyone's extraordinary work and look forward to better times in the year ahead.

Communications and Policy Statements

[March 17, 2020: Academic Personnel Updates Related to the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

[October 1, 2020: Upcoming Academic Personnel Review Cycle \(Faculty Case Preparation & Departmental Case Review\)](#)

[October 7, 2020: COVID Related Leave Options for Academic Employees](#)

[October 12, 2020: ESCI Scores and Teaching Evaluations](#)

[November 19, 2020: Instructional Planning and Related Issues](#)

[Review and Appraisal Committees \(APM 210-1-d\)](#)

[Stopping the Tenure Clock for Care of a Child or Children \(APM 133-17-h\)](#)

[COVID Impact Statements](#)