

**Panel: Evaluating COVID-19 Impact Statements for P&T**  
**August 27, 2021**

Hosted by UD ADVANCE and the Faculty Senate Diversity and Equity Committee

**Panelists:** Maria Aristigueta, Toby Driscoll, Nancy Getchell, Daniel Smith

**Introduction:** Matt Kinservik, Vice Provost, Faculty Affairs

The Task Force on Equity in Faculty Evaluations was charged with drafting a report to recommend potential policy changes to account for COVID-19 related impacts on faculty careers. The recommendations in this report were reviewed by the provost and passed by the faculty senate. The policies serve a single purpose, to help reviewers provide a fair and contextual evaluation of candidate's work. A key principle guiding these policies and related faculty evaluation is to consider the candidate's achievement relative to their opportunity. If the pandemic impacted a faculty member's opportunity to achieve, they can explain this in their COVID impact statement. This impact statement is required rather than optional, to ensure there is no barrier to providing the information reviewers need.

The new COVID policies can be found in the [Faculty Handbook section 4.4.18](#)

The Task Force Report and related materials can be found on the [Faculty Affairs website](#)

**Q&A:**

**Q: What if candidate does not include a COVID impact statement in their dossier?**

- The Provost's office is checking for impact statements as faculty are uploading their dossiers and will remind individual faculty to submit an impact statement as needed.

**Q: Should standards be adjusted due to impacts of COVID-19? And if so, to what extent and in what ways? This may matter more for candidates "on the bubble" rather than clear cut cases.**

- Committees should look for evidence of a candidate's positive trajectory and positive steps taken to mitigate pandemic effects.
- *Standards are set, but we should allow for flexible interpretation of promotion criteria.* Departmental committees can, and should, discuss flexibility before even looking at a dossier. There is a process in place within departments to develop P&T standards and they cannot be modified on an ad-hoc basis. The departmental committee is a key part of the P&T process, as this is where the interpretation of standards should be made. As a dossier moves up the chain, people will be less familiar with the candidate and their work. The interpretation of the departmental P&T standards should be clear in the evaluative letter from the department, as this will aid committees at the college and university level.
- In interpreting promotion criteria flexibly, possible pandemic impacts need to be considered. The impact statement can help committees evaluate candidates in light of these impacts.

- For example, if a book is required for promotion, were there delays that were caused by the publisher? Or were there factors that caused the faculty member to delay completing the draft? Committees can consider using book contracts as acceptable as evidence of a book required for promotion.
- Also think about the journal review process and potential delays. Is the review process what caused the journal submissions to not be in print in time for promotion? Candidates may be able to provide correspondence to journal editors about timeliness of reviews.
- Perhaps a candidate's grant funding is less than expected given the financial impact of pandemic.
- Use caution when calculating a publication rate metric. If you are looking at this measure, make sure the denominator doesn't include a COVID year.
- Exercise caution and avoid limiting the discussion of a candidate to the pre-COVID part of their record. If a candidate has a 5-year plan and has a disruption in year three, you can't evaluate them based on only their first two years. Look at the whole dossier, rather than parsing it into pre-COVID and post-COVID.
- Remember you are evaluating whether candidates meet the P&T standards, not comparing one candidate to another. The COVID pandemic occurred at the same time as increased attention to systemic racism and disparate impacts on certain populations. Keep this context in mind, as well as our university's longstanding commitment to evaluating candidates on whether they meet the standard, rather than comparing them to another candidate from prior years, or an "ideal" candidate.

**Q: To what extent should candidates be required to supply evidence of COVID impacts and how should committees respond if they don't see evidence?**

- The COVID impact statement is an opportunity for candidates to describe pandemic effects on research, teaching, and service work, not an obligation to reveal causes. We expect everyone who is involved in the review process will take candidates at their word for when it comes to impacts; we will continue to train and educate the UD community about this expectation.
- The evidence candidates supply will likely depend on the type of impact – those related to personal circumstances (e.g., health, family, etc.) versus those related to professional circumstances (lack of access to labs, human subjects, online teaching, etc.).
  - For personal circumstances, such as caregiver responsibilities or medical circumstances, we are taking candidates at their word. Candidates do not have to provide personal details in their impact statement, rather they can simply state that they had impacts to research, teaching, and/or service work.
  - For professional circumstances, such as lab closures or journal delays, the candidates should have conversations about this at the department level. Some journal editors communicate reasons for delays, while others do not. Committees may ask candidates to make an effort to document impacts, (such as date of manuscript submission, date of response, etc.). If faculty had a letter from their granting agency, or an update from the university documenting a lab closure, they should provide this information.

- A [timeline of pandemic related disruptions to university operations](#) is included on the faculty affairs website. This timeline may be useful for both candidates and committees.
- It is important to remember the pandemic has affected a wide range of faculty in many ways. Candidates may not want to be too detailed in their impact statement. Evaluators should be aware of commonalities in pandemic impacts, so that candidates can be concise rather than provide an exhaustive list of all known impacts. [The Task Force on Equity in Faculty Evaluations report](#) includes examples of research, teaching, and service impacts.

**Q: Given the wide range of potential impacts, how do I evaluate candidates fairly?**

- Keep the review as contextual as possible and review candidates relative to the P&T standards. Committees should exercise flexibility in interpretation of standards. While we don't want candidates to be any less impressive than usual, the ways in which committees document excellence may be different.
- One potential pitfall when reviewers move away from evaluating candidates per departmental P&T policies and instead invoke comparison to other people is in external review letters. Sometimes departments ask reviewers to do this, but often reviewers do it automatically. Internal reviewers should be mindful of this when interpreting external letters.

**Q: How do you evaluate dossiers where the external reviewers received COVID impact statement and those where the external reviewers did not?**

- Faculty may perceive that external reviewers in their particular field will evaluate impact statements in a certain way. Some faculty—likely those who are most disparately impacted by things like COVID—are afraid of reviewers being insensitive to their circumstances.
- Candidates made a personal choice to include or not include impact statements in the materials for external reviewers and ultimately this choice is not relevant to their research, teaching, and service performance. Keep in mind that a good external letter is not just an opinion, but also provides evidence for it. Committees can look at this evidence to see if external reviewers took COVID impacts into account. It is up to the departmental committee (and later chair and deans) to contextualize the pandemic impact if a candidate did not send an impact statement to external reviewers.

**Q: 2020-2021 student course feedback was not required as part of P&T dossiers. However, annual faculty appraisals include this course feedback. What happens if material that does not appear in the dossier, per the candidate's choice, is then included in the letter from the chair?**

- The Faculty Senate P&T Committee has seen similar instances, where material that is not in the dossier is referenced in their chair's letter. The chair's letter is part of the dossier, but the information referenced in the chair's letter is not. The committee does not have access to this supplementary information and thus should not evaluate it.
- Keep in mind appraisals and P&T are two different and distinct processes. If the chair brings this information into the letter, the next committee should pay no attention to it because it is not part of the dossier they are evaluating.

**Q: Faculty had to decide quickly whether to take their one-year extension or go up on a normal schedule. Should committees adjust standards if they perceive the candidate would benefit from one more year, but chose not to take it?**

- It would be a mistake for committees to think about what might have been versus what is in front of them. Candidates have a choice to take the extension or not and committees should review the dossier as it stands.
- Again, committees should not change standards, but may contextualize their assessment of a candidate's success given the circumstances and the candidate's opportunity to meet standards. For example, how do you judge scholarly impact when the rate of production has been affected by external factors? Committees should consider things like the rate of production at journals and university presses, invitations to speak or conference presentations that were cancelled. This is not changing standards but being aware of context.

**Q: Is there a plan to make it mandatory for committee members to attend this kind of COVID impact panel or workshop prior to reviewing dossiers?**

- No, we have not required attendance at session like this for all reviewers. We're at about 200 people who have attended this session or a prior session. There is ongoing work to disseminate the new policy and related expectation in other ways. Attendees from today's session should speak up in committee meetings. Notes will be posted to the ADVANCE website soon.
- At each level of review, the results are shared with candidates. There is an appeal process, so candidates have a voice if they think reviews are not taking into account COVID impacts.

**Q: Will the COVID statement be required for 2- and 4-year reviews?**

- No, this policy is explicitly about P&T review.
- 2- and 4-year reviews are meant to be formative evaluation, or progress towards promotion reviews. Everyone doing these reviews will be going up for promotion while this policy is in effect, so people should still get into the habit of documenting pandemic impacts while things are fresh. Keep in mind pandemic effects may change, both positively and negatively, over time.

**Final Comments:** Matt Kinservik, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

As we start the process of faculty searches, we're going to have the same set of questions as search committees review candidates. We need to judge our prospective faculty fairly. UD ADVANCE will be offering faculty search committee workshops and will have revised the workshops to speak to evaluating COVID impacts.