
Unit Head Guide - Supporting Faculty Members through the COVID-19

Purpose

This document offers suggestions to academic leaders (Deans, Chairs, Directors) about how to balance faculty member needs impacted by the COVID-19 crisis on faculty members with the need to continue department operations, offer high-quality instruction to students, and support research excellence. While this document offers guidance for leading your faculty, we suggest that you also consult this [document](#), developed by University Human Resources, for guidance on supporting staff. Guidance on supporting [graduate students](#) has been issued as well.

The Uneven Impact

The effects of COVID19 pandemic have transformed faculty work in a variety of ways, creating additional burdens and new challenges. Faculty members, however, have been affected in different ways. Several counties are conducting K-12 education remotely, creating particular challenges for faculty members with childcare responsibilities. Faculty members may also have elder care responsibilities; need to care for sick relatives; they may face mental health challenges; they may suffer from isolation. They may have lost members of their family or be facing financial stress due to a partner or spouse losing their job. The additional pandemic of racism, as well as health disparities, will impact different faculty members in different ways, affecting their ability to fulfill professional obligations. International faculty members may face difficulties related to their status as such. Given their intersectional identities, many faculty members may face more than one of these challenges at the same time.

It is important that Unit Heads remain flexible and help to create conditions in which those with caregiving needs and other challenges can fulfill their professional commitments. The Office of Faculty Affairs has developed the following guidance. Please note that this document is asking you to think about **equity** rather than **equality**. Please see below for a brief delineation of the difference, with thanks to our colleagues in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.*

1. Develop an awareness of the challenges faculty members face due to the pandemic
 - a. Express empathy.
 - b. Acknowledge that different faculty members are facing a variety of challenges, and caregiving may be just one of many problems raised by the pandemic.
 - c. Be aware of the increased danger of faculty burnout during this time. (See, for example, [this article](#).)
 - d. Gain an awareness of challenges faculty members might be experiencing due to the COVID-19 crisis (e.g., through open discussions at faculty meetings, individual meetings with faculty members, departmental surveys).
 - e. Do not make assumptions about who has caregiving responsibilities or is facing challenges due to the COVID-19 crisis.

- f. Educate your entire faculty community about the uneven impact of this crisis to create community support and create the possibility of some faculty members taking on more responsibilities in this emergency situation to support those disproportionately affected.
 - g. Consider raising the issue of uneven impact at a faculty meeting, and/or forming a working group, to brainstorm strategies for addressing the crisis.
 - h. Be open with your faculty about the tensions between your dual obligations to support them and to maintain department operations.
 - i. Recognize that the COVID-19 crisis will impact the research progress, teaching, and/or service of different faculty members in different ways.
 - j. Recognize that assistant professors, as well as PTK faculty members and Librarians without permanent status, may have particular vulnerabilities.
 - k. Recognize that expectations for faculty members differ by type (e.g., tenured/tenure track, PTK, Librarian) and appointment (e.g., instructional, research), and as such considerations and impacts due to the COVID-19 crisis will vary.
 - l. Recognize and acknowledge that some initial indicators suggest that the productivity of women and underrepresented minorities may be disproportionately impacted in both the short and long term.
 - m. Recognize and acknowledge that the COVID-19 crisis has also created a mental health crisis.
2. Invite faculty members facing caregiving and/or other challenges to meet with you individually, as each situation will be different.
 - a. TTK, PTK, and Librarian faculty members may have different needs and levels of flexibility
 - b. If possible, reach out to part-time faculty members as well, who may be less aware of available support (such as TLTC workshops and the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program).
 3. Be flexible when discussing options with faculty members. While it is not within the scope of Unit Head responsibilities to find, for example, childcare solutions for faculty members, it is important to be flexible in assigning and scheduling courses, service commitments, committee meeting times, and other responsibilities. Encourage everyone to have realistic expectations and try to create individualized plans.

Some options to consider:

- Consider school calendars and schedules when scheduling and assigning courses to faculty members with caregiving responsibilities. Ask caregiving faculty members for their input.
- Consider school calendars and schedules when scheduling critical meetings. It may not be possible to avoid all conflicts, but please be mindful when scheduling key meetings (e.g., faculty meetings, APT/AEP meetings).

- Make schedules predictable, avoiding last minute schedule changes.
 - Encourage faculty members to set office hours that balance student and faculty member needs.
 - Consider postponing major department projects, such as a curriculum revision.
 - Consider temporarily reduced committee assignments and service expectations for faculty members with caregiving responsibilities and/or other pressures related to the pandemic.
 - If you are considering allowing a faculty member to exchange a teaching assignment for an administrative one, or if you are considering the possibility of allowing faculty members to defer parts of their workload to future semesters in light of a current situation, consider how this might impact the faculty member's promotion (promotion and tenure, permanent status, and PTK) and/or other review processes.
 - Consider assigning some GA hours or teaching assistants to faculty members faced with caregiving responsibilities or other pressures.
 - Consider starting a conversation about how faculty assessments (e.g., annual reviews, evaluation of instruction) may need to adjust or be adapted in light of the pandemic, balancing the importance of providing feedback and guidance to faculty members with an awareness of the impact of the pandemic.
 - If it does not negatively impact your program needs, you might allow instructional faculty members to repeat familiar classes rather than develop new ones.
 - Allow faculty to use COVID-related leave on an intermittent basis to balance caregiving and academic unit needs. If all else fails, be open to allowing employees to use leave options available to them.
 - Sponsor a workshop from the [Faculty/Staff Assistance Program](#) to help faculty members deal with stress and anxiety.
4. Send an email to the faculty member, your departmental HR representative, relevant program directors, and other relevant administrators documenting the developed individualized plan. It is important to have a record of each faculty member's assignments and expectations, especially for any future reviews (e.g., tenure and promotion, promotion, permanent status, annual, post-tenure). Review the initial plan periodically to determine if any adjustments may be necessary due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on Unit operations and faculty member situations.

Further Considerations:

- Check in regularly with faculty members regarding how the developed individualized plans are meeting their needs.
- Check in with program directors, committee chairs, and others to ensure that unit needs are met.

- Ensure that added flexibility toward some faculty members is not placing undue burden on others. Ask for flexibility and understanding by those within your Unit as you try to balance the needs of the Unit with those of individual faculty members.
- Ensure that faculty members are aware of the supports that are available to them.
- Remain open to alternate arrangements in this unusual time, even if those arrangements may need to continue for an extended period of time.

***Equality vs. Equity**

Equality - *sameness, consistent treatment of individuals or groups regardless of need, and decisions come from those with privilege to deem something 'just'.*

Equity - *fairness, distributing resources based on need, and decisions come from marginalized individuals or groups, transforming the notion of justice.*

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