



**Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence**  
© 2021 SBBCLE

**Best Practice Tool #2 (01/11/21)<sup>1</sup>**

**Impact of COVID-19 on Faculty: What can Purdue Do?<sup>2</sup>**

Mangala Subramaniam, Professor & Butler Chair and Director, Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence

---

Documenting the impacts on three main parts of faculty records: Discovery, Teaching and Learning, and Engagement is the focus of the Best Practices Tool #1: Documenting the Impact of COVID-19 on Faculty (tenure track/tenured faculty). Such documentation, as a condensed version, can provide valuable insights and input for annual evaluations. It can also be included as an attachment to tenure/promotion documents in the years to come. But what can University Administrators do to ensure that the COVID-19 disruptions faced by academics are accounted for in assessments/evaluations now and in the coming years? And how can they recognize faculty contributions during these challenging times? This document is intended as a 'think piece' for administrative leaders and faculty. It is not policy.<sup>3</sup>

**What can Purdue do?**

Purdue can provide support, ensure clarity in annual and Promotion and Tenure evaluations, and resources to fulfill teaching responsibilities. The goal should be to support faculty by invigorating the intellectual vitality to the extent possible and mitigating unequal impacts. Work that is novel and creative most often emerges from a positive, steady, and supportive work environment, and only rarely from a work environment characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, and strain. Being cognizant of the disruptions due to the pandemic in supporting, evaluating, and recognizing faculty is much needed. As Amelia Nagoski, associate professor and coordinator of music at Western New England University and co-author<sup>4</sup> of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* (2020) [notes](#), "Starting every email with, 'The health and safety of our campus family are our first priority' [is] not soothing or helpful when you follow the words with actions that negatively impact your faculty." Note also that even small adjustments and gestures can contribute immensely to mitigating stress.

***Support: How can Purdue address anxiety and stress?***

- Support of faculty in every way possible is important to mitigate anxiety and stress. Stress, in the current circumstances of the pandemic, cannot be eliminated.
- Be empathetic. Hear what faculty members are communicating. Some of them are handling family related illnesses and deaths in other places and even other countries.
- Remember that anxiety and stress can cause errors and some (not excessive unless it is an emergency) delay in responding to emails and notes.
- Encourage faculty to "step away" from work when possible, such as, but not limited to, go for a walk or a run or simply enjoy nature. This may be hard to do during these times but remember to advise faculty members to engage in activities to destress.
- Reduce non-essential meetings and continue to support remote workplace accommodations.
- Suggest faculty use informal 'safe' spaces created to share experiences. It can be cathartic. One example is to contact the [SBBCLE Support Circle](#) Faculty Allies. Faculty may choose to

participate in events or workshops that allow for gaining information about aspects that are important in the current context such as self-care and community. ([Formal Resources](#) are important too.)

- Encourage faculty members to connect with mentors within and particularly those outside the department to seek advice on how best to navigate challenges. Established relationships of trust prove most useful and they cannot be created immediately. [Coaching and Resource Network](#) (CRN) members are available to their mentees and can be an additional path for faculty to raise concerns within those already available 'trust' relationships.
- Create an alternative path for faculty to share the continuing challenges being faced in the classroom. These spaces would allow faculty to share concerns confidentially. There is a need to consider climate, inclusion, teaching, and safety jointly especially because Purdue is requiring for almost all classes to have an in-class component. Faculty of color are particularly vulnerable.<sup>5</sup> See reporting options [here](#). This website lists who to contact for concerns related to specific areas. They include reporting through your supervisory chain, and others such as Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS), Environmental Health and Public Safety (EHPS), Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT) among others listed on the website.
- Guidelines to Heads/Deans about COVID-19 related decision-making such as on scheduling teaching what decisions should be made under what conditions is essential. Refer to guidelines of October 15, 2020 [here](#).
- Encourage faculty to pursue activities that may be beneficial to themselves and to the institution.
- Respect challenges of attending meetings virtually and its associated impacts on inclusion during meetings. Voices of women and faculty of color could be further marginalized in a virtual setting. Consider providing faculty the opportunity to submit comments/notes related to any meeting via email.
- Support assistant professors by adjusting teaching responsibilities in a subsequent semester in cases where they have led large classes (200 or more) single handedly with graduate assistants.
- Create a list of websites which provide information about Purdue's policies during the pandemic with two sentences on what is on each website. It will help faculty to find what they need faster and reduce frustration and stress.
- Provide resources for faculty to attend voluntary workshops and other events on campus and beyond to support their life-work balance.

***Annual Review/Evaluation: How should annual/P&T review be considered?***

Purdue's annual review occurs at the department level. Tenure and promotion decisions are made through a multi-level process that is the department primary committee, college level area committee, and university level committee. The following points may be considered for the annual review as well as for tenure/promotion. Overall, demonstrate some flexibility in reviewing records for annual review and/or tenure and promotion

- Consider seeking an impact statement from all assistants and associates (no exceptions) about the impact of COVID-19 on discovery, teaching and learning, and service. This could be in the form of an 850- or 1,000-words statement to be attached to Form 36 (Purdue's Promotion and Tenure related form) for assistants and associates and annual activity reports for all faculty for the next 5 years or more. Such an impact statement will be in addition to any other statement (discovery only or discovery and teaching) that may be required by departments.
- Level the playing field to enable a fair assessment that recognizes disparate impacts and differences in individual contexts and situation.

- Note that most discussions of the impact of COVID-19 have focused on gender. Keep in mind that disparate impacts could be based on race/ethnicity, immigrant status, socio-economic status, rank, and age.
- Avoid comparison of records as variation could be evident from COVID-19 impact statements. Variations can be due to different working conditions, different family and support networks, differential caregiving responsibilities, or access to research facilities.
- Because some faculty have sought extension of the tenure clock and there are some who did not, it is important to not compare records/promotion and tenure documentation. Faculty members who sought an extension should not be judged differently in terms of productivity.
- Ask pertinent questions based on the 850- or 1,000-word COVID Impact Statement in reference to the CV/Form 36 (Purdue's Promotion and Tenure related form).
  - Overall, consider how has the professional life of this faculty member changed because of COVID? Examples: after how many months was lab being revived; impact on time to do research/write because of children's e-learning or care for the elderly; immigrant status and family illness and deaths influences on being able to do research/write; teaching loads and retooling for large enrollment classes; whether had a new course prep; managed labs for teaching; Has faculty member noted canceled fellowships, conference, or speaking engagements on their CVs?
- Adjust expectations regarding research (publications/grants/presentations and so on) and teaching evaluations rather than continue expectations as per usual for departmental annual review of research requirements
- Consider carefully the teaching evaluation for semesters that are completely or partially disrupted? Be attentive to those who taught online only (which would have been more consistent) compared to those who taught in-class + online and faced extensive absences. This could influence teaching evaluations.
  - Also consider if there is any change in university's rules and policy in case there is a complete shift to online teaching.
- Weigh 'discovery' section accomplishments with the teaching needs that were met. The COVID Impact Statement of the faculty member can provide insights.
  - Assess class sizes for courses taught, class modality, availability of graduate assistance.
  - Barriers to research will differ across disciplines such as those who rely on labs (including computer-based work), those who conduct experimental research, those who rely on field-based data, those who use archival data.
  - As noted in Best Practices Tool #1: Documenting the Impact of COVID-19, submissions to journals have declined. Moreover, publication processes may be slower for many scholars. Review process is longer than it would be typically because of increases in declines to review as well as increases in requests for review extensions.
- Requests for external review letters *must* mention the need to be attentive to different circumstances for different individuals. Communicate this explicitly.
  - Craft clear and consistent language to be used for request for external review letters across Colleges to be used this year and for the next 5 years.
  - Candidates should not to be judged more severely because they were given an extra year before the tenure/promotion decision.
- A draft template for annual evaluation is being refined and will be included, with this Tool, soon. The template will emphasize assessments being simplified to a 'check mark' rubric keeping in mind that teaching has been priority and most other work has been set aside.

The time spent across activities will be key to assessment. Meeting teaching commitments during this time should be considered as a major accomplishment.

**Recognition: How can Purdue recognize faculty work during the pandemic?**

Recognition of knowledge and competence are hallmarks of status in professions. Recognition of faculty contributions even as they continue to navigate challenges can be key to maintaining motivation and momentum. These awards should be at the university level. In the current context of the pandemic, the disparate impacts based on gender and race may also influence recognition using criteria and parameters typically used (in “normal” times).

- Take bold steps to consider awards with new criteria and basis for selection. Call for applications should be open – and not as nominations through departments or colleges. Keep applications short so that it is not cumbersome or time consuming for faculty to assemble material. Utilize diverse committees to assess applications. Examples:
  - (a) Award for teaching – not for evaluations but for being efficient by being innovative, creative, and being resilient even while feeling vulnerable.
  - (b) Award for continuing non-COVID-19 related research in creative ways. A 1,000 word or less note about how faculty re-started research such as writing, collecting data, and any effective innovative means they may have used. Alternatively, application could comprise 2 or 3 questions about research specific activities and adjustment; each to be answered in 150 words or less.
  - (c) Award for supporting other faculty to recognize work of taking the time to listen and understand the circumstances of others lives. Process can be as in (b) above.
  - Create funding opportunities for (a) non-COVID related research and (b) topics/areas in which RFPs are cancelled or withdrawn.<sup>6</sup> Prioritize assistant professors and associate professors, especially women for the awards, by being attentive to how criteria are created, but do not develop awards for specific groups/constituencies. ‘Exclusive’ calls can have less than positive effects in evaluation of records in the long term. The playing field (gender and/or race and ethnicity) can be leveled by laying out clear criteria for awards/grants/promotion and by mitigating bias in reviews rather than considering physical appearance as a basis for categories of awards.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Recommended Citation: Subramaniam, Mangala. 2021. Best Practices Tool #2: Impact of COVID-19 on Faculty: What can Purdue Do? Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence, Purdue University.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks are due to Jay Akridge, Provost and Chief Diversity Office, Purdue University, Laura Zanotti, Professor and Co-Chair SBCCLE Support Circle, Purdue University and Teresa Sullivan, President Emerita, University of Virginia for discussing these issues with me.

<sup>3</sup> This document draws from (1) Note on [documentation and evaluation developed by UMASS-ADVANCE, Amherst](#), (2) [University of Michigan ADVANCE, Faculty Equity & COVID-19](#): The problem, the evidence, and recommendations, (3) [American Sociological Association Statement Regarding Faculty Review and Reappointment Processes During the COVID-19 Crisis](#) (in collaboration with scholarly societies), (4) discussions with 2020 HERS cohort, and (5) informal conversations with Purdue faculty.

<sup>4</sup> Nagoski, Emily and Amelia Nagasoki. 2020. *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>5</sup> Faculty members have specifically identified this as a continuing source of stress.

<sup>6</sup> See Shah, Amisha D. 2020. “Conducting Research during COVID-19: An Assistant Professor’s Perspective.” Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence and ADVANCE Working Paper Series 3(3) Special Issue (Higher Education and COVID-19), forthcoming.