

2021

# COVID-19 & Faculty Support



“The only way to  
endure the quake is to  
adjust your stance.”

~Oprah Winfrey

Prepared by a sub-committee of the NSF ADVANCE program

# About this Document

## Purpose of Document & Process

During Clarkson University's [NSF ADVANCE](#) women's faculty lunch on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the negative impact of COVID-19 on Clarkson faculty productivity and well-being became abundantly clear. Members of the ADVANCE team presented the concern at the November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Faculty Senate meeting and requested the opportunity to champion efforts to propose changes meant to better support all faculty at the University and to further mitigate disparities caused by the pandemic. The senators requested feedback about how COVID-19 has affected their constituents' research, teaching, and personal circumstances. We also welcomed recommendations for approaches that may alleviate some of the many stresses brought about by the pandemic.

Concurrently, the ADVANCE Program Director contacted partner ADVANCE schools<sup>1</sup> to inquire about processes that they have implemented to account for how COVID has negatively affected their own communities. We also attended the National Academies of Science Engineering and Math (NASEM) Board on Higher Education and Workforce (BHEW) Women & COVID-19 Public Sessions<sup>2</sup>. Using the feedback from Clarkson University faculty<sup>3</sup> and peer ADVANCE institutions, we present this document in hopes that it will positively impact Clarkson community members of all gender identities.



"I am afraid to speak up about an issue/trouble I have during COVID because I am not sure whether this is a personal matter that I have to solve by myself, or whether this is an external shock that our institution should be aware of."

~Anonymous Clarkson Faculty, used with permission<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan, UMass Amherst, RIT, East Carolina University, Clemson

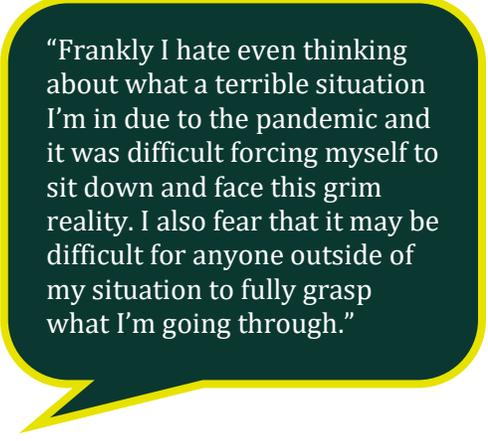
<sup>2</sup> November 1, 5, & 9, 2020

<sup>3</sup> All quotes used in this document were furnished by Clarkson faculty and are being used with their permission.

# Pandemic Inequality

Some individuals may feel it is needless to document pandemic impacts as everyone is affected to some degree. However, it is essential to acknowledge that COVID-19 has had differential effects, some mild, and some extremely crippling, to the point where tasks that were once easy to complete are near impossible without additional support.

If these differences are not highlighted, they could likely be overlooked or misunderstood by internal or external reviewers alike. The context or degree to which a faculty member's work has been disrupted is entirely dependent on their own unique circumstances. Additionally, over time, people may no longer recognize how disruptive COVID-19 has been to faculty careers (University of Massachusetts, 2020).



“Frankly I hate even thinking about what a terrible situation I’m in due to the pandemic and it was difficult forcing myself to sit down and face this grim reality. I also fear that it may be difficult for anyone outside of my situation to fully grasp what I’m going through.”

## The Facts

- COVID-19 has created a change in the distribution of work with **less time devoted to research and more to teaching** (Myers et al., 2020; Wachorn & Heckendorf, 2020).
- **Women reported less time for research and writing than men**, and particularly those with young children (Myers et al., 2020) due to greater caregiver responsibilities (Wachorn & Heckendorf, 2020).
- **Women are submitting fewer papers**, are less likely to hold first authorship or to submit single author works (Flaherty, 2020; Oleschuk, 2020).
- In terms of concurrent pandemics, racial disparities have created **increased distress for faculty of color** (Weissman, 2020).
- Women and faculty of color are conducting more **emotional labor** through service roles and supporting students (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020)
- The burden brought about by COVID-19 is **heavier for women facing intersecting** systems of oppression such as race or sexual orientation (Malisch et al., 2020).
- STEM faculty, and particularly those in the bench sciences, have had the largest decrease in time for research given the **lack of access to lab space** (Myers et al., 2020).
- Faculty in the humanities and social sciences expressed **obstacles to accessing materials and participants** (Wachorn & Heckendorf, 2020)
- One of the most common responses to COVID-19 has been the tenure clock extension or stoppage. While helpful for some, National Academies of Science scholars warn “**stoppages hurt scholars** by decreasing their long-term earning potential, putting them out of sync with time-restricted funding mechanisms and delaying the power that comes with tenure, such as applying for large research center grants that require the principal investigator be tenured (Malisch et al., 2020).”
- “One of the most important lessons from the pandemic could be to **follow multi-dimensional criteria in any academic assessment**, which truly reflect a variety of factors describing the potential of an applicant either for an academic job or a grant” (Squazzoni et al, 2020).

# Proposal Overview

With the plentiful feedback received from our faculty, learning what our peer ADVANCE institutions had already implemented or were planning to execute, and hearing the national conversation through the National Academies events, we compiled the following list of recommendations. In compiling these recommendations, we were cognizant of time-to-implementation and also of potential university resource limitations. Consequently, these recommendations are realistically achievable, quickly executable, and would positively affect our faculty who have been disrupted by the pandemic. In many cases, the recommendations complement efforts that are already being executed by faculty and chairs at the department level as well as the University administration.

The following items are meant to be recommendations for how we at Clarkson University can endeavor to account for COVID-19 impacts on productivity by affording support to all faculty in our community. Some of the recommendations are more broadly supportive of all faculty while others focus on the faculty evaluation and review processes, which is particularly relevant to pre-tenure women faculty members, faculty who identify as individuals of color, and those with family care responsibilities.

## Recommendations:

### 1. Structural Supports

#### *A. COVID-19 Faculty Research Support Fund –*

In academic year 20/21, Clarkson’s internal Research Advisory Committee (RAC) initiated a new effort to explore ways to support faculty scholarship. The goals were to identify paths and funding needs to expand scholarship and research engagement and success, facilitate the success of our mid-career and senior faculty as they take on more risky research endeavors, translate their disciplinary research to the classroom, re-engage with their scholarship, or change research directions, and more. This year funds were reallocated to Sponsored Research Services (SRS) and authorized for distribution to support faculty scholarship. SRS has tasked a working group within the RAC to propose how this funding (\$36,000) can be reallocated (max \$3,000 per) to members of Clarkson’s research community this year. This year the working group opted to use the funds to support COVID-19 relief.

Though these funds are an important first step in addressing the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on faculty work and, more broadly, in developing internal resources for support of faculty scholarship, the source of funding is not an annually allocated fund. As we continue to discover the complex impacts of COVID-19 on faculty work while we simultaneously seek to support all of our faculty, particularly mid-career faculty, several funding strategies will be needed.

Specific to supporting faculty research that has been negatively impacted by COVID-19:

**Recommendation 1A:** We recommend that the Deans and Directors, with the support of the Provost, be tasked with establishing a contributed cross-school fund to support faculty research that has been interrupted by COVID-19. Deans and Directors would work with the RAC working group to parameterize the funding source duration and provide input into the proposal management and award process.

***B. Protecting Financial Equity –***

The literature notes the importance of avoiding circumstances that might have unintended financial consequences to faculty who prolong their pre-tenure period due to COVID-19. Extension of the tenure “clock” – particularly multiple delays – may decrease long-term earning potential (Malisch et al., 2020). Ensuring that salary equity includes consideration of COVID-19 tenure delays and the potential impacts on salary will make certain that those most affected by COVID-19, especially those from underrepresented groups, are not unduly and negatively impacted, financially, by the tenure delay.

**Recommendation 1B:** We recommend that the Provost work with HR to ensure that annual merit allocation and equity adjustment processes include consideration of salary impacts due to COVID-19 tenure delays.

***C. Formalizing Access to Mentoring Opportunities –***

In collaboration with the NSF ADVANCE program, regular programming will be offered to increase opportunities for mentorship. While some programming already exists, like the School of Arts & Sciences junior faculty monthly meetings hosted by Dr. Silvana Andreescu or the School of Engineering meetings hosted by Dr. Doug Bohl, other programs will be implemented to ensure the other schools are satisfying this need. In particular, in conjunction with the Committee for Faculty Development under the Associate Provost for Faculty Achievement and in partnership with the Deans, all early career faculty will be guaranteed a formal mentor, who will be equipped with training (see Recommendation 1D) to best support their mentees, especially as the impacts of COVID-19 become clearer. While the mentoring program will be geared towards early career faculty, the program will be available to any full-time faculty member (all ranks) who wishes to participate and be partnered with a mentor.

**Recommendation 1C:** We recommend that each Dean and Director, in partnership with the Associate Provost for Faculty Achievement, establish a school/institute-wide formal mentoring program. This program would include a formal assignment of, at least, all early career faculty with a mentor. However, all faculty can benefit from additional mentorship and so all ranks and all tracks will be welcome

and encouraged to participate. At a minimum, all formal mentoring programs will require documented and verified mentor-mentee meetings each semester. Until such time that it is unnecessary, as deemed by the faculty of the school/institute, each formal mentoring program will include provision of guidance in the construction of Pandemic Impact Personal Statements (included in annual FARs and tenure as well as promotion dossiers). All formal mentoring programs will provide mentees with guidance and advice in maintaining a trajectory of excellence in scholarship (including clinical licensure and practice), teaching, and service.

#### *D. Training of Mentors –*

In addition, mentors, like everyone else, lack experience navigating a career, or helping others navigate a career, through and after a pandemic. Therefore, mentors need training to guide their peers as they write these personal statements and figure out the next steps to take in their research, teaching, and service. They need to have particular sensitivity to the differential impacts that the pandemic has had on individuals.

**Recommendation 1D:** We recommend that the Associate Provost for Faculty Achievement, in conjunction with resources obtained from other ADVANCE institutions<sup>4</sup> as well as the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, accelerate the work being done to 1) train mentors to support their colleagues as they write Pandemic Impact Personal Statements and navigate their careers through and after the pandemic, and 2) provide opportunities for mentors to share best practices with one another.

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<sup>4</sup> See additional resource from ADVANCE program at UNC Chapel Hill: <https://cfe.unc.edu/team-advance/covid-mentoring-resources/>.

## 2. Supports Associated with Faculty Evaluation

### *A. Training of Department Chairs, Tenure & Promotion Committee Members, Deans, and the Provost –*

It is important to recognize that there are several initiatives being conducted by the Office of the Provost, Office of the Associate Provost for Faculty Achievement, Human Resources, and Office

“Research hours are seriously limited when we WFH (work-from-home) with little kids... I couldn't send my 7-year-old daughter to in-person school this year, so helping her to do online classes and taking care of her at home all-day significantly limits my research hours. My (productive) working hours now are set up at 9 pm-2 am after my daughter sleeps, so I couldn't start a new project with this limited time but only focusing on R&R papers and old projects.”

of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion pertaining to developing and enriching leaders in the campus community. With COVID-19, these efforts become all the more imperative for equitable assessment of our faculty. The problems faculty face associated with disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are structural, not individual, even though individuals face different challenges and a scale of difficulty dealing within specific challenges depending on their personal circumstances. Because of this, it is increasingly difficult to equitably review faculty performance. Many of our partner

institutions have advocated the need to "reimagine productivity" at this time.

Such training can help show Chairs and Tenure and Promotion Committee members what to look for, what to be aware of, and how to holistically consider each case. Consideration should be given to overall trajectory and evidences of continued growth. This training would facilitate interpretation of personal impact statements, tenure/promotion narratives, and the teaching, scholarship, and service records of candidates prior to, during, and after the time of COVID-19. The training is designed to ensure that those individuals charged with the responsibility of reviewing know what to look for and to consider. It is also important to train the committee members on concerns of bias to ensure that those with delayed clocks are not held to a higher (inequitable) standard.

Including the Deans and Provost in the training is imperative as will ensure that levels of review are aligned and that the standards for review and performance are understood and equitably applied.

To unequivocally support faculty and to convey more accurate messaging, the NSF ADVANCE team will share resources documenting impacts of the pandemic on faculty which will be used to develop and support training efforts and to prevent further internalization of the struggle by faculty.

“Tenure track faculty are understandably apprehensive to draw attention to low productivity but my position as chair is to champion their positions...”

**Recommendation 2A:** We recommend that Department Chairs, Tenure & Promotion Committee Members, Deans, and the Provost be trained by the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester (to coincide with the next tenure cycle) on how to evaluate faculty in a way that equitably considers the influences of the pandemic.

***B. Message from Chairs in the Annual Review Letter –***

All faculty faced unique challenges due to the pandemic during the past year, many of which will persist into the future. Much of the burden for documenting these impacts falls on each individual faculty member via a recommended voluntary Pandemic Impact Personal Statement (see Section 2D). An approach to consistently and formally acknowledge and document the challenges faced by all faculty during the pandemic is to include a non-voluntary statement made by the faculty members' first-line supervisors (e.g., Chair, Director, Associate Dean, Dean). An example statement currently in use within the Clarkson Community states:

“The most important matter to note is the professional challenges you faced in 2020 as caused by the COVID pandemic. You had to adapt and redouble efforts to provide leadership and support of your department. You had to retool your teaching, and participate in professional development to improve it. You had to adapt your research, and indeed the ‘covid-year’ reduced your scholarship activities, as it did for all of us.”

Such a statement could readily be adjusted to reflect individual responsibilities and balance of teaching, research, and service.

**Recommendation 2B:** We recommend that the Faculty Senate mandate the incorporation of a statement by first-line supervisors into all faculty annual review letters that acknowledges broad COVID-related challenges beginning in the academic year 21/22.

***C. Letter for External Reviewers –***

Several of our peer institutions are implementing a letter that will be distributed to external reviewers for tenure and promotion evaluations. The letter is meant to guide external reviewers in how to consider an individual's candidacy given the pandemic and associated disruptions. The following example was provided by our peer ADVANCE institution, University of Massachusetts at Amherst:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a serious toll on productivity and faculty career progress throughout higher education. [Clarkson] seeks to be attentive to the pandemic's extenuating circumstances as we evaluate this candidate's case. As you consider this candidate's professional achievements, we invite you to also consider and acknowledge the very real toll of the COVID-19 crisis. It is reasonable to expect that pandemic mitigation efforts such as moving to remote learning, limited access to campus research spaces/resources, restricted travel, and inadequate working conditions (working while homeschooling, being primary child care givers, etc.) [*←previous sentence*

*edited from original*], have and will lead to variation in the probationary period for tenure. Therefore, we would appreciate that in evaluating this candidate, you do not consider the number of years since PhD or years in position. Instead, your evaluation should consider the quality of the work and the impact on the field rather than the quantity, rate, or timeliness of the accomplishments - particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic effects. We hope you will use an empathic assessment of productivity that acknowledges the vastly different circumstances faculty are operating under and adapting to.”

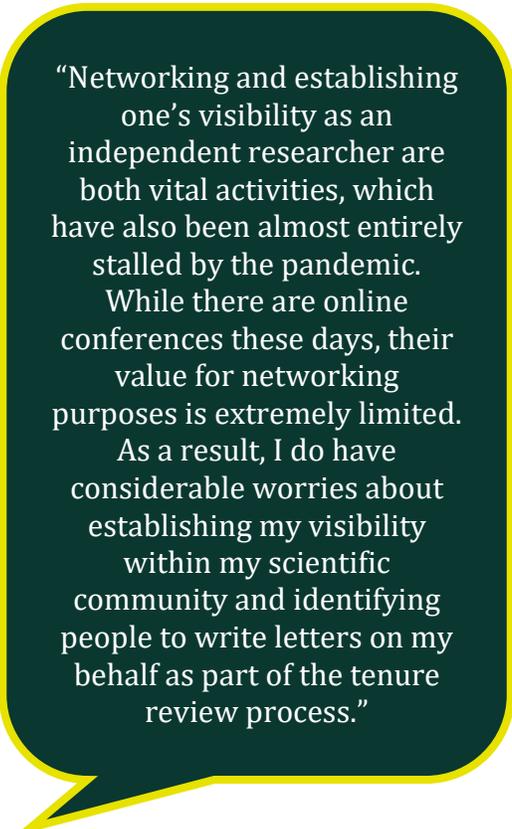
**Recommendation 2C:** We recommend the Faculty Senate mandate that the letters sent to external reviewers include an explicit COVID-19 statement for at least the next three years (2021-2024).

#### *D. Addition of Pandemic Impact Personal Statement –*

Many of our peer institutions have implemented voluntary statements designed to capture some of the ways that the pandemic has affected our research, teaching, and personal situations.<sup>5</sup> This statement is intended to provide faculty the opportunity to express the variation of their lived experiences during the pandemic that may not otherwise be adequately or sufficiently captured in the more traditional documentation or that may be less apparent.

However, in order for these statements to optimally serve the faculty who opt to use them, and to not perpetuate disparities or introduce biases, mentors, chairs, tenure and promotion committee members, as well as Deans will need to experience the aforementioned training (listed in 1D and 2A). As suggested, we recommend that the training include considerations and strategies for interpreting these personal statements so that individuals deciding to use them are not penalized for exercising this right, are not put in a place of increased vulnerability, or do not suffer unintentional consequences of heightened scrutiny.

At Clarkson, such a statement could be woven into the annual Faculty Activity Report (FAR) completed by faculty of all designations, and could be submitted in addition to the traditional Statements of Research, Teaching, and Service in the tenure and promotion review processes.



“Networking and establishing one’s visibility as an independent researcher are both vital activities, which have also been almost entirely stalled by the pandemic. While there are online conferences these days, their value for networking purposes is extremely limited. As a result, I do have considerable worries about establishing my visibility within my scientific community and identifying people to write letters on my behalf as part of the tenure review process.”

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<sup>5</sup> See additional resource from ADVANCE program at RIT: <https://www.rit.edu/nsfadvance/covid-19-pandemic-impact-faculty>

**Recommendation 2D:** In order to support tenure track, tenured, clinical, research, and teaching track faculty, we propose that the Office of the Provost add a voluntary Pandemic Impact Personal Statement as a component option to the personnel review system to be available as part of the faculty evaluation processes (e.g. FAR, tenure and promotion, etc.) beginning in academic year 21/22.

# Looking Ahead

## — These efforts are meant as a start...

As noted, the purpose of the present document is to implement mechanisms to support all faculty and to diminish the negative effects of the pandemic on productivity and well-being. It is our



“It's something that we're going to be dealing with the consequences of for a long time after it's over.”

sincere hope that this document can serve to inform other facets of university life as we continue to learn how to protect our community. But – it is pertinent to note that it is JUST a start.

Looking ahead, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, it would be useful to monitor how the pandemic has continued to affect the members

of our faculty, inclusive of pre-tenure, tenured, teaching track and clinical track members of the community. In this light, we recommend regular assessment in order to track and to reduce the long-term consequences of the pandemic and its effect on the faculty experience.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the Provost work with the ADVANCE team to determine ways to assess how our faculty have continued to be impacted by COVID-19. We recommend that assessment consider differences experienced by race and gender as well as incorporate both quantitative and qualitative metrics of the impacts of COVID on faculty productivity, evaluation, and progress toward tenure and promotion.

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