

To: West Chester University Faculty
From: Jeffery L. Osgood, Jr., Deputy Provost & Vice President for Academic Operations
Margaret Ervin, President WCU-APSCUF
Re: Tenure & Promotion Updates/Impact of COVID-19 on the Faculty Experience
Date: November 11, 2021

We understand that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic goes far beyond the semesters during which we delivered the educational mission of this institution remotely. Its impacts range from limiting a faculty member's ability to present at conferences to completing service obligations in ways that had not originally been planned. It is because of this that we want to reaffirm previous communications on the impact of the pandemic on the faculty experience. In general, the following statement can be used by both faculty and reviewers when explaining the unique circumstances under which a faculty member accomplished their work:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty members have been asked to radically alter their pedagogies ranging from moving to remote delivery during the height of the pandemic to returning to the classroom where masking and other disease mitigation efforts complicated and, in some cases, prohibited a faculty member from using pedagogies they have traditionally deployed in the classroom. Additionally, because of travel restrictions and other social distancing protocols in place across the globe, faculty members were unable to travel to conferences to present already accepted paper(s), were not able to meet with certain committees/service groups due to meeting cancellations and were not able to or fully carry out their service obligations in the ways originally planned. Reviewers are reminded to carefully consider these exceptional circumstances in the review of faculty work.”

As a reminder, it is at the discretion of the faculty member to include student evaluation data as part of their performance review for the spring 2020 semester. Because our university did not generate any student evaluation results reports from that semester, no faculty should be in a situation where they feel compelled or required to include any student evaluation data from the spring 2020 semester. As it relates to the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, an abbreviated student evaluation instrument was deployed. These results reports are unlike those from previous years and those being issued again beginning with the fall 2021 semester. Because reports from fall 2020 and spring 2021 simply provided item means, we must strongly remind all evaluators that data points collected from those semesters cannot be used to make general inferences about a faculty member's teaching and they represent only one aspect of evaluating teaching effectiveness.

It is in this spirit that we also offer the following as a strong statement of our joint philosophy on student data from the pandemic, which may be included in the narratives accompanying any faculty review:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty members have been asked to radically alter their pedagogies ranging from moving to remote delivery during the height of the pandemic to returning to the classroom where masking and other disease mitigation efforts complicated and, in some cases, prohibited a faculty member from using pedagogies they have traditionally deployed in the classroom. While the faculty rose to the challenge, the student evaluation data generated from the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semester was generated using an abbreviated student evaluation instrument, simply providing item means, and is likely a very small snapshot of the overall quality of the course, and not a true reflection of the faculty member's skill and effectiveness in the classroom. Similarly, the challenges of the pandemic continue to impact the

classroom environment even with the return to in person instruction. Faculty and reviewers alike should be sensitive to these circumstances when completing faculty reviews and recommendations.”

In terms of scholarly activity and professional development, opportunities to complete research projects, perform, or do other kinds of work might have been impacted by the pandemic since the spring of 2020. It is understood that faculty may still be encountering some difficulties due to the pandemic slowing down or cancelling certain opportunities for research, creative work, or professional development. While some conferences, exhibitions, concert series, or libraries with special collections may have returned to in person, others may have remained virtual, been postponed, cancelled, or closed indefinitely, impacting many of our colleagues.

We would like to offer narrative language for this area that can accompany faculty reviews conducted during semesters impacted by the pandemic. It is imperative that faculty find ways to document or explain these situations and how they have impacted their scholarly or creative activity agenda.

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty member X’s plan of research or creative activity was impacted in the following ways: [insert explanation of specific barriers here]. Therefore, they were unable to achieve their original research or creative activity goals, which included: [insert original scholarly or creative activity goals here]. However, the faculty member sought to continue their work in this area by accomplishing the following outcomes despite the barriers encountered: [insert outcomes that were achieved during review period]. Reviewers are reminded to carefully consider these exceptional circumstances in the review of this faculty member’s work.”

Finally, faculty and reviewers should be mindful that the training needed to create an effective remote experience for our students and the sheer amount of unplanned work needed to manage the return to in person classroom instruction have increased the work it takes to effectively fulfill all aspects of a faculty member’s work and is likely to have impacts that cannot be fully detailed in this memo. It is in this spirit that we ask faculty and reviewers to be mindful of this when evaluating a faculty member’s work.

For the reasons set forth above, the Tenure and Promotion Committee, Provost, Deans, Chairs, and all Evaluation Committees should consider the effects of uncertainty, anxiety, and instability when evaluating faculty performance for this and last academic year. The APSCUF Collective Bargaining Agreement states that “Evaluation of teaching effectiveness and fulfillment of professional responsibilities will not be based on a single datum. Further, with regard to student evaluations, sensitivity to the effects of cultural and social bias is advised, as for all evaluations.” (Article 12.B.1.b.). These cautions apply in any semester or year. Faculty are further encouraged to acknowledge these circumstances when interpreting student evaluations, and applicants for tenure and promotion may wish to include or reference this memorandum in their Tenure and Promotion applications.