

COVID Equity in Faculty Evaluations Task Force 21-22 Final Report to Academic Senate

Prepared by Emily Berquist Soule, Jessica Russell, and Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson

Background and Overview

Established with the approval of Provost Brian Jersky and Academic Senate in Spring 2021, the Covid Equity in Faculty Evaluations Task Force was charged with developing campus guidelines for advancing equity for parents, caregivers, and other faculty at the intersection of race and gender who were negatively impacted by COVID-19 during the evaluation process (lecturer faculty), and evaluation, retention, tenure & promotion (tenured/tenure-track faculty). The Task Force was given three primary objectives. The first was to develop a campus-wide set of informed best practices for how evaluators can read candidates' files through an equity lens, so as not to perpetuate inequities caused by the Covid pandemic, particularly for parents and caregiving faculty, keeping in mind the acute impacts for women and faculty of color and those at multiple intersections of inequities. Second, the Task Force was to create procedural guidelines that address both how candidates and evaluators can promote equity in the evaluation process post-COVID. Third, the Task Force was to offer structures for College and Department COVID Equity Committees to aid college faculty and evaluators in the evaluation/RTP processes.

Task Force Guidelines

The Task Force members were voted in and included a diverse group of tenured, tenure-track, and lecturer faculty representatives from each College, the University Library, and Counseling and Psychological Services (Division of Student Affairs), as well as several administrators, the Office of Faculty Affairs, and the California Faculty Association (CFA). During the initial meetings, the Task Force voted on three co-chairs: Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, Emily Berquist Soule, and Jessica Russell. The Task Force met bi-weekly over the summer 2021 and then monthly throughout the fall and spring semesters. The co-chairs and AVP Fleming also collaborated on an ad-hoc basis outside of these regular meetings.

Preliminary efforts were structured around investigating existing institutional responses and programs of relief for COVID impact on faculty. Research was presented regarding the disproportionate impact on marginalized faculty and the exacerbation of existing inequities in academia. A model of best practices was identified from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst ADVANCE initiative. Following best practices prescribed, the Task Force began drafting a set of guidelines. The guidelines provided a set of questions about how COVID may have impacted faculty in the three areas of evaluation: RSCA, teaching & service. The guidelines were to be used by T/TT faculty & evaluators as they prepare and/or evaluate files. The guidelines were separate from the COVID Impact Statement issued by Faculty Affairs, but could be used in conjunction. If desired, candidates could opt to use the guidelines to inform their COVID Impact Statement or Narrative. The guidelines were a collective effort of the Task Force and ultimately endorsed by the Academic Senate, Faculty Affairs, and the Provost. The Task

Force also presented the guidelines and consulted with the College of Engineering who simultaneously were examining how to proactively address issues of inequity in the RTP process.

Dissemination and Training

From there, the Task Force focused its efforts on dissemination and training of candidates and evaluators. AVP Fleming and Task Force co-chairs facilitated the three Faculty Affairs RTP Candidate Workshops in September 2021 followed by three Faculty Affairs RTP Evaluator Workshops in October 2021. These 90-minute workshops were centered around COVID Impact and the available guidelines as a tool to promote equity. In the candidate workshops faculty members were provided guidance on how to address or evaluate the impact of the pandemic in the evaluation process, particularly for reappointment, tenure, and promotion. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on the guidelines and how they could utilize the prompts to structure and frame impacts within their file. We also provided information on how to disclose the impact on faculty's work without having to focus on their personal protected statuses.

The co-chairs and AVP Fleming also conducted three Evaluator Workshops through Faculty Affairs. Faculty performing RTP evaluations were informed of the Task Force guidelines and given training on how to consider the impact of the COVID pandemic in the evaluation process. Specific attention was given to how evaluators can employ an equity lens in reading and interpreting files and how the guidelines can serve as a tool to help encourage flexibility in evaluations while still adhering to RTP policy. Following both candidate and evaluator workshops anonymous survey feedback was solicited. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and suggestive that greater efforts should be made in disseminating the information covered.

During the fall semester, co-chairs also presented COVID Equity Guidelines to each of the seven college Faculty Councils and university Library. Additionally, presentations were made to all College RTP committee where guidelines were presented and promising practices for advancing equity in evaluations were noted. A presentation was also made to the Associate Deans given their central role in the RTP process.

Collective efforts then shifted towards curating a similar set of guidelines for lecturer faculty. Formative research was conducted to gain insight into the lecturer evaluation process. From there, Task Force co-chairs facilitated interviews, gathered feedback from the CLA Lecturer learning community and constructed a survey to elicit feedback on the challenges that faculty lecturer faculty face in their evaluations due to the pandemic throughout the various colleges. Lecturer guidelines were drafted and subsequently endorsed by the Academic Senate, CFA, and the Provost. At the start of the Spring semester, co-chairs and lecturer Task Force members, Raven Pfister and Kierstin Stickney, facilitated two workshops for lecturers undergoing evaluation. These were also recorded and circulated for those unable to attend.

Additional Efforts and Contributions

Beyond the initial call, the Task Force also served in a consultative role for FPPC and the current revision of university-level RTP policy. Alan Colburn, the current Chair of FPPC, requested the

Task Force to review sections of the current University RTP document with specific attention to section 3 of the document speaking to the evaluating committee. A written report to FPPC was provided with suggestions surrounding committee composition, evaluation processes, and suggestions for professional development for evaluators.

Future Recommendations for Task Force and Guidelines:

1. The COVID Equity Guidelines for tenure-line and contingent faculty should remain in effect for at least five years, as the impact of the pandemic is ongoing. Since faculty produce research over multiple years, their publication pipeline will remain impacted along with delays in turnaround times at journals and book publishers due to longer wait times for peer review.
2. The COVID Equity in Faculty Evaluations workshops should be continued, following the model outlined above, and keeping in mind that this work required an extensive outlay of time and effort that should be somehow compensated for future faculty who take it on.
3. Lecturers benefitted greatly from the workshops and those should continue with the formalized support of Faculty Affairs similarly to the workshops designed for tenure track faculty.

RTP Committee Composition:

1. The Task Force recommends the Faculty Equity Advocates program be expanded to include work on RTP, by integrating a Faculty Equity Advocate into each College RTP Committee. The FEA on the RTP committee would have an advisory, non-voting role, focused on promoting equity throughout the process.
2. Service on College-level RTP committees should be compensated with course releases to encourage faculty who experience cultural/identity taxation to be more likely to serve and benefit candidates who may be doing more marginalized RSCA.
3. Consider allowing candidates undergoing RTP actions the ability to have one individual recused from evaluating or accessing their file, in order to pre-empt conflicts of interest and/or prior history between candidates and evaluators. The candidate should not be forced in any way to explain why they would like said individual recused and should face no retaliation for doing so. This may also help reduce potential conflicts between faculty members from the same department who serve on college committees.
4. The current composition of the FPPC committee, which is charged with overseeing university wide RTP documents and processes, does not reflect the diverse majority of those undergoing RTP. The committee should reflect those that their decisions impact. Allowing tenured Associates to serve on the committee could open the door for greater diverse representation.

Recommendations for RTP/Evaluations Policy and Process:

1. Reconsider the current RTP policy that categorizes community-based research projects as service, not RSCA, as this policy appears to disproportionately impact our newest, and most diverse faculty members. In colleges where community-based research is mentioned under RSCA, a process for peer review should be specified for assessment.

2. Clarify RTP policy regarding how to demonstrate that RSCA publications are peer reviewed, because currently if a candidate submits readers' reports that contain critiques of their work, RTP evaluators can use these critiques in their evaluations (even though readers' reports are simply a phase of the publication process, and do not represent final products).

Lecturer Implications:

1. Task Force members note the need for enhanced infrastructure surrounding lecturer evaluations, including making information about how to prepare files readily available to lecturer candidates, and informing them more systematically about evaluation schedules and processes.
2. The Task Force also recognizes that many of the considerations and revisions it has worked on are directly applicable to lecturer faculty, who are the most vulnerable among us. The Task Force encourages future efforts to examine the evaluation of lecturer faculty and how many of the suggested best practices can be applied.