

Developing and Using Impact Statements in Faculty Reviews January, 2021

In November, 2020, [guidance on evaluating faculty members](#) during the pandemic was sent to all department heads and chairs. In the memo, leaders were asked to invite, but not require, faculty, librarians on the continuous appointment track, and P&A teaching specialists and lecturers to submit an impact statement. Since the distribution of that memo, questions have been raised about how impact statements should be used. This communication attempts to provide guidance on these questions.

What is the purpose of impact statements?

An impact statement provides faculty with the opportunity to document the effects that the coronavirus pandemic, racial unrest or other significant disruptive events of 2020-21 have had on their work. While no one is required to submit a statement, doing so allows department leaders and review committees to consider each individual's unique circumstances both in review processes and in other communication with the faculty member.

What are the University's expectations for how units use impact statements?

The Provost's Office is working closely with collegiate and campus leadership to provide guidance regarding faculty evaluation during this challenging time. We expect the following:

- Unit leaders should invite faculty members to submit impact statements for the 2020 annual review year, and each eligible year thereafter, using the following language.

As part of your review process, you are invited to submit a statement articulating the impact of the pandemic on your professional work. This statement, which should normally be limited to one page, should explain how your research, teaching, or service has been affected since March 1, 2020. Examples include:

1) Changes in research or creative effort. Indicate if there was a shift in research or creative focus, whether voluntary or directed; diversion of laboratory capacity to pandemic-related work; changes related to travel restrictions; effects of changes in teaching or advising conditions, etc. This statement should provide details about the nature and extent of the scholarly impact.

2) Personal situations affecting productivity. State the nature of the circumstances (e.g., medical, bereavement, family responsibilities, etc.). Details about personal situations, such as details of an illness, should not be included. For example, stating that you were unable to work or worked at a reduced capacity during a specified period of time due to medical reasons is sufficient for the impact of the circumstances to be taken into consideration.

Further guidance to share with faculty about writing impact statements can be found [here](#).

- In consultation with their college/campus administrative offices, departments should develop guidance on how impact statements will be used in the evaluation process. It is important that individuals not be held to standards that were unusually difficult or impossible to meet given their circumstances. Department heads and review committees must consider impact statements submitted during annual reviews of faculty (performance reviews and probationary reviews), and must document that consideration in annual appraisal feedback. Appraisals should describe how review committees reconsidered their expectations for faculty based on the circumstances described in the impact statement. Documentation could take the following form:

Dr. X's lab was shut down for Y months due to the pandemic and they had significant family care responsibilities for Z months while their children's schools were remote. While they were not able to meet the typical expectations of our unit, they put two courses on-line, advised three graduate students, and drafted two manuscripts that they intend to submit in 2021. Given Dr. X's need to reallocate their time during the review period, we find that they met the expectations in research and service and exceeded them in teaching.

For tenure-system or continuously appointed faculty, this documentation should be included in the unit leader's report included with the Form 12 (for probationary faculty), Form 13 (for tenure-system associate professors) or Form 26 (P&As on continuous appointment track). For tenured faculty, contract faculty, and other P&A instructional staff, the documentation should be included in the annual performance appraisal or merit letter. It is not necessary to include the faculty/P&A staff member's impact statement with the annual review materials that are submitted to the Provost's Office. However, faculty may choose to do so.

- Any impact statements that are submitted with promotion and tenure reviews must be included with the dossier for all levels of internal review. The statement should not be shared with external reviewers or anyone outside the evaluation process. Units may wish to include a statement in letters to external reviewers about how the scholarly field or discipline of the faculty member under review was affected by the events of 2020. If they choose, a faculty member may communicate their specific circumstances in the narrative statements sent to reviewers. The unit head must also document in their report how the impact statement was considered in the P&T/continuous appointment process.

Should impact statements be used in both annual reviews and P&T dossiers?

Faculty members may submit impact statements as part of the annual review process and/or as documentation in promotion files. A statement submitted in a faculty member's promotion file could address the impact of the pandemic on their scholarly work over time. Departments should make it clear to faculty that they have this choice and provide appropriate guidance. Faculty must submit impact statements no later than the department's due date for annual review materials or promotion and tenure dossiers; they cannot be added retroactively.

We use a rubric to evaluate our faculty that is based on quantitative indicators of productivity. This rubric is then used to inform allocation of merit. How should impact statements affect people's ratings and, subsequently, merit?

The pandemic made it impossible for some faculty members to achieve typical expectations. In using impact statements to allocate merit, we encourage units to use the statements to learn how a faculty member's unique circumstances affected their ability to meet scholarly expectations. For example, if faculty are expected to present their work at conferences, but conferences were cancelled, they cannot be held to that standard. If faculty describe in their impact statements how they were unable to meet particular expectations related to their teaching, research and outreach, they should not be penalized for failing to meet those expectations. Instead, evaluations should focus on what faculty were able to accomplish. For example, work in progress could be considered, even as the work is not complete. Time spent advising and mentoring could be recognized, even if planned curricular revisions did not occur. Developing a new research area to respond to community needs could be valued, even if it had not yet produced traditional scholarly products. Work spent advancing institutional goals associated with diversity, equity and inclusion should be valued. Due to the challenges of this year, we encourage units to consider multiple years in assigning merit.

Impact statements can inform evaluations. How can they also be used to support faculty?

To provide support for faculty, unit leaders should consider how the pandemic has impacted the disciplines represented in the unit, the work of their faculty generally and the work of individual faculty. That information should be used to inform teaching and service assignments. We ask that unit leaders prioritize support for pre-tenure faculty, while also seeking to meet the needs of associate professors and term faculty. Departments, in consultation with collegiate leaders, should assess their collective capacity and, given that capacity, determine short- and long-term priorities as the unit recovers from the pandemic.

We urge unit leaders to discuss impact statements with faculty members who submit them in order to gain understanding and offer support. These conversations might consider:

- You have shared that you encountered challenges associated with the pandemic. What did you do to overcome or circumvent these challenges?
- How did your time use change? For example, have you spent more time teaching or advising students than typical?
- When you think about the challenges associated with the pandemic, how do you think they will affect your scholarly work in the short and long term?
- You are a valued member of the department. What could we do as a departmental community to support you in returning to full participation?
- What do you need to recover from setbacks you experienced during the pandemic (modifications to teaching, research seed funding, modified service, mentoring relationships, etc.)?

Informed by these conversations, departments should be transparent about what will be prioritized and how resources will be allocated. Decisions should be grounded in the processes developed by the units about how they will consider impact statements in the evaluation process. Given the disparate ways in which the pandemic has affected faculty, it will be important to focus on equity (fairness) rather than equality (sameness) in these decisions.

Some faculty believe that there are risks to sharing the difficulties they have faced during the pandemic in a formal process. Any advice for those people or their unit leaders?

Faculty members have experienced the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in many different ways. People with different identities, in different fields of research, at different career or life stages, or with different types of work responsibilities may experience the effects of the pandemic differently. To be fair, the University's evaluation processes should take those differences into account.

Impact statements should be used as a tool for faculty to communicate challenges and/or opportunities they have encountered during the pandemic and to guide unit leaders' efforts to recognize, support and fairly evaluate faculty members' contributions. The University is committed to ensuring that impact statements are used to help unit leaders contextualize faculty members' contributions given that faculty have experienced the pandemic differently. They are not meant to be interpreted as documenting faculty members' deficiencies. While we hope impact statements will be used to support faculty, they are not required and faculty who choose not to submit them should not be penalized or more highly scrutinized.

The University's tenure policy promotes fairness in faculty evaluations by providing multiple levels of reviews as well as procedures to ensure that extensions of the probationary period do not negatively affect a faculty member.