Executive Summary

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
GUIDELINES FOR MITIGATING THE UNEVEN EFFECTS
OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FACULTY

April 27, 2021

These guidelines are intended to assist faculty, department, and institutional evaluation committees in assessing ways to address the uneven effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. We note that the pandemic has exacerbated inequities in academic labor conditions, intensifying and multiplying crises that were already present. We further note that institutional responses have been highly varied, and that while a majority of faculty are experiencing increased burnout and fatigue, particular scholars face the risk of amplified negative effects by virtue of increased reproductive labor demands coupled with increased formal labor demands, along with decreased access to research field sites and research productivity. These include but are not limited to female faculty, faculty at under-resourced institutions, racialized faculty, disabled faculty, and contingent faculty. As a result, academia faces parallel crises: the illusion that the effects of the pandemic are fleeting and the intersection of these effects with persistent features of racial and gendered inequity that preceded the pandemic.

We define reproductive labor in the broadest and classic sense: as the labor that is essential to sustaining life, including but not limited to caring for children, other kin, non-kin, colleagues, institutions, and communities. These historic conditions have exposed the fact that universities rely on this invisible yet essential reproductive labor as much as other industries.

At a moment when perspectives from the widest possible array of faculty is more essential than ever, structural pressures on faculty pose the possibility of foreclosing inclusion of that range of expertise in our research and teaching. In other words, limiting the pool of experience potentially produces narrow science.

Universities and employers are uniquely positioned to prevent the uneven effects of the pandemic from becoming permanent. We provide recommendations for mitigating these uneven effects.

1. **Expand criteria for evaluating scholarship for clear and equitable evaluation.** We recommend emphasizing quality over quantity while maintaining standards, expanding categories that count towards tenure or promotion by including open access, engaged, and public scholarship, and eliminating the use of comparisons by external reviewers.
2. **Minimize long-term effects by implementing retroactive support for faculty whose timeline to tenure was impacted.** We recommend reinstating salary increases following a successful tenure review, adjusting sabbatical schedules as appropriate, and employing language about tenure clock stoppages that emphasizes the involuntary nature of delays.

3. **Invite and take seriously Covid-impact statements in evaluations.** The committee notes that such statements may focus on documenting the limitations on productivity the faculty member experienced or the additional teaching, research, and service the faculty member provided. Departments and personnel committees should consider welcoming these, with an emphasis on concision.

4. **Value novel ways of evaluating teaching during the pandemic.** In light of substantial evidence that standardized student evaluations are biased against female and racialized faculty, we recommend evaluating teaching through multiple measures that emphasize evaluating course content rather than instructors.

5. **Consider and consult with other institutions to consider the best practices for implementing these guidelines.** We include links to possible models for evaluating faculty performance at a selection of universities and colleges, with sample letter templates to reviewers or other guidelines. The list is not exhaustive, but does endorse the importance of communicating with partner departments in the discipline and across units on a single campus to share approaches on evaluating scholarship, teaching, and service.

6. **Prepare for the future.** Considering that the epidemiological, social, political, and economic conditions which gave rise to this crisis may generate additional disruptions, implementing these recommendations may assist in broader efforts to reduce harm to scholars, communities, and institutions in the future.
1. General Background and Rationale

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed fragile institutional and financial foundations across higher education in the US. These exposures have been widely documented, in reduced tuition revenue from students, reduced state funding for public and private institutions alike, and in turn reduced services and support for students during the pandemic.

A parallel and equally acute crisis has emerged around the profound strains on faculty who provide the fundamental labor force for research and teaching in higher education. Across the academy, evidence of high faculty burnout and distress are leading to increased consideration of career changes among early career scholars or early retirements for mid-career or senior scholars.¹ For those whose nascent careers have been impacted, these strains risk translating into decreased professional advancement and compensation over the long term. Further, we note that these strains have been unevenly borne by faculty who are either precariously situated or carry a high burden of reproductive labor broadly construed, particularly parents (especially mothers), female faculty, international faculty, insecurely employed faculty, and racialized faculty. Most of these inequities in workload and recognition existed prior to the pandemic, meaning that the uneven experiences and responses exacerbated existing conditions and may persist after the end of the pandemic.

Institutions have offered an array of responses for faculty support and professional development. We are concerned that failures to recognize the range of stresses, particularly on the categories of faculty we identify here, poses a serious risk for higher education. The potential loss of faculty who come from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and whose research as anthropologists addresses the wide variety of social life, historically and in the contemporary context, is not simply a potential loss of professional talent. It runs the risk of reproducing attenuated conceptions of what constitutes the human experience, both epistemologically and

¹ According to an October 2020 national survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education and Fidelity Investments, a majority of all faculty in the US reported burnout, and two-thirds of female faculty expressed substantial increase in their workloads and deterioration in their work-life balance (2021).
pedagogically. At a moment when those perspectives are more essential than ever, structural pressures on faculty pose the possibility of foreclosing inclusion of that range of expertise in our research and teaching. In other words, limiting the pool of experience potentially produces narrow science.

We define reproductive labor in the broadest and classic sense: as the labor that is essential to sustaining life, including but not limited to caring for children, other kin, non-kin, colleagues, communities, and institutions. The pandemic has simultaneously increased the need for this labor, because of increased anxieties broadly, at the very moment in which the tenuous and privatized system of caregiving in the US closed down. Furthermore, the very nature of a pandemic heightens the awareness of the value of life, thereby heightening the need for mutual support in its sustenance.

Students are among those whose needs have grown in a moment when their care was already heavily borne by particular faculty. Even after the most acute phase of the crisis potentially passes, these effects will not immediately disappear. Indeed, as scholars of trauma argue, the pandemic may have lingering personal, physiological, and professional impacts for years to come. For faculty, this may include ongoing personal stress, damage to their research programs, and continuing mentoring requirements from students. These historic conditions have exposed the fact that universities rely on this invisible yet essential reproductive labor as much as other industries.

Yet universities and employers are also uniquely positioned to prevent these effects from becoming permanent. As scholars of the human, we note that the social, environmental, and epidemiological conditions that generated this pandemic are poised to generate similar crises, highlighting the urgency of addressing both the impacts of this event and preparing faculty and institutions for future disruptions in ways that could avoid multiplying prior inequities.

2. Impact on Anthropologists

These historic conditions have generated specific effects for anthropologists in particular. For scholars whose work entails travel, domestically or internationally, as is the case for many anthropologists, the pandemic has halted long-planned research trips, either by funding agencies or university policies. Further, the fact that anthropological research can entail long-term, often caring, relationships, has potentially intensified feelings of isolation or helplessness when research communities, friends, or family members are separated. For those whose work requires access to laboratories, access to those spaces has also been impacted. For those whose research

---

2 The Lumina Foundation’s report “COVID’s Lessons for Global Higher Education” (Salmi 2020) notes that international and field-based studies the world over face particular and long-term disruptions due to travel restrictions and closures alongside constrained institutional resources.
involves face-to-face interviewing, most Institutional Review Boards have limited this method. For those who are immunocompromised, a return to in-person research or teaching may remain limited. For those whose family conditions have prevented them from leaving home, their work from home may have been divided by the distractions of caregiving. As one faculty member queried for this project said, “creative intellectual work is impossible when you are exhausted.” For those whose work has been tied to analyses of political, racial, or structural inequalities, this historical moment has been both motivating but also aggravating, perhaps expressed through political organizing or increased mentoring, genres of knowledge production that are not always recognized by the systems of evaluation, recognition, and reward in the academy.

The American Anthropological Association has been a key partner in providing guidelines for academic professionals, personnel committees, and administrators in assessing the diverse modes of professional productivity and value from academic anthropologists. In that spirit, we provide here guidance specific to the Covid-19 pandemic designed to clarify the modes of scholarship and teaching that anthropologists have conducted in this era, in order to assist candidates, review committees, and administrators consider effects on faculty, and the ways those faculty have responded under highly uneven and challenging circumstances. We highlight ways to recognize anthropologists’ creative, engaged, publicly oriented, or other novel theoretical or methodological responses. We further highlight recommendations for assessing or rectifying the uneven and potentially long-term effects of the pandemic that might otherwise go unnoticed when comparing diverse records of professional productivity through the single lens of the curriculum vitae. We recognize that institutional memories can be short, even as the effects of these events may linger.

We expect these guidelines to be helpful to faculty, department chairs, deans, tenure and promotion committees, external reviewers, as well as professionals who benefit from the expertise and knowledge that anthropologists generate. Although we focus primarily on the academic setting in terms of employers and employees, we recognize that professional anthropologists who work in non-academic settings have also faced constraints on their work-life balance, increased reproductive labor demands, and may benefit from some of these recommendations as well, especially those calling for expanded categories of knowledge and publication.

**Inequities Revealed by the Pandemic**

The context in which the pandemic was and is being experienced differently impacted individual faculty in categories that frequently intersect and therefore amplify longer-term effects. We note in particular inequities of gender, race, disability and class. Among them, we highlight faculty
1. Who faced high reproductive labor demands (especially in caring for children or elderly kin)
2. Who, by virtue of well-documented salary inequities for women faculty and racialized faculty, faced high financial stressors
3. At under-resourced, often public, institutions, whose reduced salaries and benefits may have constrained their ability to meet their basic needs
4. Serving on international work visas with reduced lower employment and citizenship security
5. With disabilities
6. Who, as racialized faculty in the US, faced increased mentoring and service work associated with the twinned impacts of racial inequities revealed by the pandemic and collective resistance to structural racism.

These correlations are evident in research on the increased demands on faculty energies, generalized anxiety from students on their faculty mentors and advisors, isolation, and increased service and committee work. Exacerbating these factors are the fact that academic institutions have varied in their administrative responses to the pandemic, in part because of varied financial institutional circumstances.

On this point, we note that while some institutions were able to offer limited access to childcare, compensate faculty for reskilling to teach remotely, and maintained faculty salaries, others increased service and teaching loads, and reduced faculty salaries.

An important facet of the disparate experiences of the pandemic was the degree to which faculty were at liberty to select the modality through which they offered their courses. Depending on the institution or the particular unit, the decision to teach remotely or in-person varied, with some faculty granted the latitude to teach remotely if they preferred, while others were obliged to teach in-person even if they felt it was dangerous. These pressures could lead to feelings of faculty estrangement or abandonment by their employers when teaching decisions did not align with faculty sentiment. For example, some faculty were obliged to, in effect, teach a double course load by teaching in hybrid mode, offering the same course to one group of students in-person and another online. Similarly, faculty who actively retooled to teach in remote modes could be made to feel selfish in institutional rhetoric that celebrated in-person teaching as a form of sacrifice.

There is now a growing literature documenting the effects of these varied and potentially long-term effects on faculty development. Among the most consistent and widely confirmed are the correlations with female faculty. Although men and women faculty alike lost time due to increased domestic roles and stresses, women faculty submitted far fewer grant proposals and less research for peer-review during 2020-21 across the sciences, on average dropping
approximately 10% over previous years. These decreases run the risk of amplifying already unequal representation of women in the academy, where prior to the pandemic women comprised only one-third of all full professors across all disciplines in the US.

Publishing outlets for scholarship have also faced pandemic-related constraints, including decreased university funding to presses and decreased availability of reviewers, further constraining faculty productivity. Many journals in the discipline have public disclaimers warning authors that the review process has been substantially slowed due to the pandemic. Impacts to the entire publication process have been widespread. At the same time as traditional scholarship venues have become constrained, Open Educational Resource (OER) publications have become central to the circulation of knowledge and addressing structural inequities. During the pandemic scholars have also pivoted to digital, public, and engaged scholarship to address current policy debates as well as social inequities.

**Recommendations for addressing these inequities**

We therefore propose a combination of questions, expanded categories for evaluation in consideration of faculty performance, and best practices offered in the spirit of mitigating the long-term and uneven effects of the pandemic.

**For Tenure-Stream Faculty**

1. Criteria for Evaluation of Scholarship
   a. Quality over quantity
      i. Reduce or eliminate quantitative metrics of evaluation in recognition of the fact that reviewers themselves are likely being discouraged to reduce their peer-reviewing labor. In particular, over-reliance on impact factors or indices, along with focus on total numbers of pages or publications, may produce overly simple and biased interpretations. For example, delayed publication processes should not be taken as evidence of the lower quality of a scholar’s intellectual contributions.

   b. Expand categories of scholarship that count towards tenure or promotion
      i. In consideration of the [American Anthropological Association’s 2017 guidelines on public scholarship](https://www.aaa.org/2017-guidelines-on-public-scholarship), articles in the popular press, public talks to community groups, and digital scholarship should

---

3 A mid-2020 survey of over 2,300 Elsevier journals found that submissions from women had dropped substantially, while decreased submissions from younger cohorts of women was especially “pronounced,” suggesting that the pandemic has the potential to create “cumulative advantages for men,” (Squazzoni et al. 2020). Related research shows similar patterns of decreased submission rates by female faculty, peaking at a decrease of 38% in April 2020 (Myers et al. 2020), while additional research suggests that the disruptions threaten to reverse gains for female faculty (National Academics of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).
be considered contributions to both the faculty member’s home institution and to the discipline. These categories are expanding even as standard academic publishing outlets are reducing their output. OER resources are increasingly recommended as avenues for increasing access to scholarship and narrowing the opportunity gap.4

We note a growing pool of resources as universities and departments begin to address ways to maintain high standards for scholarship while expanding categories of recognition that include a scholar’s total contribution to the field. Appendix A offers some examples of updated tenure and promotion standards revisions that may be helpful. They emphasize that books, articles, or papers published in venues whose primary audience is not scholarly, but which draw on the faculty member’s research expertise, are forms of intellectual production.

ii. We particularly note the increasing visibility and value of a genre of scholarly writing broadly classified as “editor-reviewed” publications. Although these publications may not have undergone full peer review, they often involve considerable feedback and revision from a leading scholar who has invited a select pool of anthropologists to write on an area of their expertise, often in prestigious outlets and with a view to blending efficiency and rigor. These are distinct from other genres of public scholarship and should be weighed favorably as part of a faculty member’s total record of scholarly output. Appendix B offers a selection of titles in this category. We recommend that the American Anthropological Association create an actively maintained list of publications in this genre so that faculty, personnel committees, and reviewers can confidently evaluate editor-reviewed publications. We further recommend that university review policies consider including this as an additional genre of assessment.

iii. Given the constraints on field and laboratory-based research, a faculty member may have pivoted towards publicly engaged, open source, or rapidly available scholarship. This should be considered favorably as flexible and socially responsible responses.

4 See the NAACP’s 2021 resolution on OER.
c. Eliminate comparisons
   i. In the widely divergent impacts of the pandemic, comparing candidates across institutions is even more problematic than usual. The committee suggests ways to mitigate this issue in soliciting and evaluating external letters for tenure or promotion.

   In requesting external letters, primary units should invite evaluators to consider the context of the pandemic and to reflect on the specific categories of productivity and evaluation which the discipline recognizes. Primary units should remind external reviewers not to make explicit comparisons between institutions when evaluating individual faculty records, as these have been shown to create false equivalences across scales and types of institutions, and therefore devalue novel forms of scholarship.

   In evaluating external letters, units should discourage including letters that invoke questions along the lines of, “Would the candidate earn tenure at your institution?”

   Institutional personnel committees should focus primarily on external letters that are in line with the department or unit’s stated promotion and tenure criteria, or consider offering lower weight to letters that ignore the specific evaluation criteria.

   See Appendix C for links to potential templates for requesting external letters.

2. Minimize long-term effects by implementing retroactive support for faculty whose timeline to tenure was impacted.

   The committee recognizes that there are differing opinions on the value of substantial delays to the tenure clock for early-career faculty. In mid-2020, most US universities and colleges automatically halted evaluations of reappointment and tenure by one year. Most universities are allowing a second-year extension by request. Some analyses suggest that a second year should be automatically granted, on the grounds that requiring faculty to extensively document their need for additional time is onerous and stigmatizing, and that faculty who are prepared to be reviewed can easily request review.
By contrast, other analyses suggest that the longer-term costs to individual faculty by delaying promotion or professional progress run the risk of sedimenting harm to the faculty member’s long-term earning potential and security. In particular, we note that there is substantial historical evidence showing that when both men and women are granted tenure clock extensions, women are penalized for lost productivity more than men and that gender-neutral policies on family leave tend to advance men’s careers. Further, male faculty are more likely to go up for tenure early, which is especially notable when compared to female colleagues who may have started in the same year and who may have comparable publication rates. These patterns then produce cumulative benefits for male faculty that are difficult to ameliorate over time, including increased salaries and retirement accruals, along with earlier access to less measurable but powerful rewards such as professional prestige or the capacity to vote on colleagues’ tenure cases.

The committee is concerned that these documented correlations of gender bias with reproductive labor, established prior to the pandemic, may multiply after the pandemic seems to fade, in effect reproducing the conditions in which male faculty advance over female faculty. The committee recognizes that male faculty members may also have taken on substantial reproductive labor during the pandemic and should be invited to provide supporting documentation of those roles.

While the committee does not formally hold an opinion on recommending automatic second year tenure-clock stoppages, it is clear that in spite of the range of perspectives on this question, there are identifiable solutions that can minimize these costs. We strongly endorse these.

a. Reinstate salary increases following a successful tenure review, retroactive to their original tenure review date.
   i. We note that even if some institutional administrators may elect not to implement this option, departmental communities should consider this one of the most important tools for redressing the inequities we have identified.

---

5 According to research conducted prior to the pandemic (Antecol et al. 2018), a male faculty member who took family leave increased his likelihood of earning tenure by 19%, while a female faculty member who took family leave decreased her odds by 22%.

6 The largest systematic survey of faculty productivity during the pandemic (Deruyugina, et al. 2021) assessed time for research among 30,000 respondents in the US and Europe. It found that although all respondents reported increased time spent on housework and childcare, and decreased time spent on commuting and research, female faculty reported nearly doubled increases in reproductive labor demands and concomitant decreases in time available for research. Two-thirds of the respondents were male, potentially reflecting decreased availability among female faculty for participating in such research.
ii. Given the well-documented salary inequities of male and female faculty, and white and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) faculty, the pandemic poses the serious risk of amplifying those inequities substantially.

b. Adjust sabbatical schedules to allow a faculty member to take leave for which they might have been eligible (typically granted after a positive tenure decision) before tenure.

c. Avoid language that suggests that the one or two years of tenure clock stoppage are elective. Rather than terms such as “extensions,” “an extra year,” or “additional time,” we recommend terms like stoppage or interruption in order to acknowledge that for most faculty, work was involuntarily and severely disrupted or stopped altogether.

d. For faculty whose employment is precarious, it may be beneficial to encourage them to pursue the security of tenure as soon as possible.

3. Invite and take seriously Covid-impact statements in evaluation dossiers.

The committee notes that such statements may focus on documenting the limitations on productivity the faculty member experienced or the additional teaching, research, and service. Departments and personnel committees should consider welcoming these, with an emphasis on concision. Statements may also narrate the ways in which faculty members may have shifted or refocused their efforts in line with those constraints. See Appendix D for examples on how faculty might best document these disruptions.

We also recognize that anthropologists were already employing expansive, creative methodological approaches prior to the pandemic. Some of these approaches have lent themselves to use and formalization over the past year. Techniques such as Patchwork Ethnography, Future Anthro Research, Different Forms of Covid Research, Digest of Different Approaches, are consistent with methodological discussions that anthropologists were already having about how research happens. We recommend that faculty and institutions recognize these approaches positively.

4. Value novel ways of evaluating teaching during the pandemic.

Many US institutions opted to exclude student teaching evaluations for Spring 2020 but reinstated them for Fall 2020 on. We note that there is substantial evidence that student teaching evaluations consistently favor male over female instructors, and white over BIPOC instructors. Thus, female or BIPOC faculty
may have experienced both increased demands on their time from students during the pandemic, yet may have also faced lower student evaluations. In addition, faculty who invested considerable effort in revising their classes for remote teaching may have nonetheless received low student evaluations because of student preferences for in-person teaching.

We recommend that evaluation committees avoid language that reproduces these widely documented prejudices and instead find ways to acknowledge faculty efforts in teaching during stressful conditions. While positive evaluations should be valued and faculty investment in teaching should be rewarded, we recommend multiple modes of evaluation that capture the wide array of expertise and effort faculty have displayed in the crisis.

We recommend that departments adopt a method for recognizing and incentivizing support for students during the pandemic, and beyond. We also recommend that departments specifically acknowledge in tenure and promotion files that a faculty member has taken on an extra mentoring for students during the pandemic.

We suggest some remediations and questions to address these inequities.

a. If standardized student evaluations cannot be eliminated, we recommend simplifying them to focus on a small set of categories that reflect the institution’s stated values, such as creative learning opportunities or attention to student voices. This would allow for highlighting teaching achievements rather than inviting punitive language.

b. Restructure evaluations to measure the learning experience, rather than the individual instructor, so as to minimize the biases noted above.

c. Include multiple measures of teaching so as to minimize the biases noted above.

d. Consider engaging with reparative justice approaches to support the particular constraints and needs of BIPOC faculty.

e. Did the faculty member adopt novel ways of supporting student learning during the crisis?

f. Did the faculty member take on increased advising responsibilities during the review period?

g. Did the faculty member teach new courses during the review period?

h. Did the faculty member take on increased teaching responsibilities to help the department or institution during the crisis period?

i. Did the faculty member actively retool classes for online teaching?
j. Did the faculty member need to cultivate new mentoring or personal support opportunities to respond to student needs that were not being met elsewhere in the university?

For Visiting Scholars, International Scholars, Contingent Faculty, or Contract Employees

Contingent employees have played a central role in ensuring the continuity of academic offerings and the integrity of the student experience. Their very contingency still makes their employment, and these contributions, vulnerable to the vagaries of institutional budget shifts. The committee recognizes that these employment conditions may contribute to institutional demand for flexibility, but from the employee’s perspective these are experienced as precarity. We recommend the following steps to support these colleagues.

1. Ensure that paid sick leave and unemployment benefits are available for contract faculty. Establish sick-day banks or similar support mechanisms for all faculty. The informal nature of contingent contracts can elide the hidden disadvantages of relying on “hours” of work or other measures that then increase the faculty member’s precarity.
2. Extend multi-year or rolling contracts and grant renewals where possible. Additionally, assure in writing that renewal decisions will not be negatively affected by current disruptions.
3. Provide rehire or promotion processes for a year for any contingent faculty member.
4. Extend shared governance to contract faculty.
5. Include contingent faculty in efforts to protect academic freedom for all faculty.

For Graduate Students

Despite a growing need for social science research in the wake of the pandemic, many programs have constricted or cancelled PhD cohorts. Much as the costs of the pandemic risks narrowing the pool of faculty whose research and teaching informs our knowledge of the human condition, so too does the narrowing of opportunities for graduate students to begin or continue their training. This potentially threatens the array of perspectives that inform future scholarship in the field. We encourage departments, programs, and institutions to continue efforts aimed at mitigating these risks.

1. For currently enrolled students, we recommend extending plans for offering funding while their fieldwork or job prospects are on hold.
2. Pause or stop clocks regulating students’ time-to-degree.
3. Ensure continuity of visa status, funding, and mentoring for international graduate students.
4. Provide opportunities for near-peer mentoring for multiple career streams, including support for pursuing non-academic career paths.
5. Encourage and emphasize international employment opportunities, where the economic impact of the pandemic may have been less acute.
Acknowledgements
The committee thanks all contributors to these guidelines, including generous, anonymous conversations with approximately 15 early career anthropologists and ten administrators (primarily deans) across the country, in positions at an array of institutions, including large public or private research universities and small private colleges.

We also benefited from valuable input from colleagues from the following AAA sections: the Association of Black Anthropologists, the American Ethnological Society, the Association for Feminist Anthropology, the Society for Cultural Anthropology, and the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational Anthropology.
Appendices

Appendix A:
Innovation in Tenure and Standards

Purdue University: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/05/14/iupui-creates-path-promotion-and-tenure-based-dei-work

Appendix B:
Examples of Editor Reviewed Publications

American Ethnologist Features: https://americanethnologist.org/features
Cultural Anthropology Fieldsights: https://culanth.org/fieldsights
Sapiens: https://www.sapiens.org
Somatosphere: http://somatosphere.net
The Immanent Frame: https://tif.ssrc.org

Appendix C:
Template for Letters to External Reviewers


Appendix D:
Documenting Impact of Covid-19

References


