

English Department COVID-19 Amendment to Evaluation Criteria

Guidelines

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on English faculty, including on our personal lives, in ways that inevitably affect our work as teacher-scholars. We note, especially, the impact of the pandemic on colleagues who face(d) their own illness or health challenges and those whose children were or continue to be confined to home, pursuing remote learning, and/or subject to school and daycare closures and disruptions. Others have needed to care for family suffering from COVID or for those whose ailments and care were disrupted or made more challenging because of travel, hospital, and other restrictions. In assessing colleagues, we affirm the importance of recognizing the whole individual and acknowledging with sensitivity the unique challenges each member of our program has faced in recent years. We further acknowledge the very real and documented social inequities that have exacerbated the pandemic's impact on colleagues along axes of race and gender. We recognize as well that many of the challenges outlined here are ongoing, especially for those with health concerns or with young, ill, or immuno-compromised family members, and that colleagues still find it necessary to make frequent and often last-minute changes to courses based on their health, the health of their families, and the situations of their students.

We affirm the creativity, stamina, and extraordinary efforts that members of our department have made to support our students and to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic upon their learning and wellbeing. We recognize that recent events have been beyond our control and that their effects are impossible to quantify fully. We support our evaluatees in addressing in their evaluation materials the unique challenges and impacts the ongoing pandemic has had on them, and recognize that exceptional demands in any one of the areas below may affect other areas under review. Finally, we wish to stress that this document cannot be exhaustive in its attempt to delineate the complications and challenges posed by the pandemic; we invite individual evaluatees to convey their own experiences and the effects of those experiences on their work in their review materials.

Teaching

We note that the teaching landscape has changed dramatically in the era of COVID, and that it continues to change in ways that demand ongoing adaptation. In our evaluations, we will be particularly attentive to the larger context of teaching through a pandemic, to the multiple adaptations an evaluatee has made to syllabi and assignments, and to other evidence of their pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness as provided. The shift in Spring 2020 to online

learning demanded that faculty immediately adopt, adapt to, and support their students in the use of new technologies and tools. For example, the discussion-based learning environment—so essential to all our classes—is very hard to replicate effectively over screens. Even after returning to the classroom, the teaching challenges we face have often intensified, requiring continuing adjustments to our material and pedagogy. We note the following patterns and recognize that individual faculty may experience other impacts on their teaching:

- Students continue to struggle to return fully to in-person learning, as is evident in increased attendance problems and late or missing assignments
- Students who experienced several years of online learning and/or P/F grading may have forgotten or missed out on essential classroom skills which must be (re)taught. Addressing these realities requires that faculty revise and restructure assignments—often at the last minute--by adjusting readings, changing assignment parameters, managing extensions, etc.
- Student anxiety and mental health crises are frequent and substantial and often result in requests for extensions and additional support
- Some students must quarantine; others have become accustomed to expecting on-line options and request to attend remotely. Such hybrid set-ups significantly impact course delivery and classroom dynamics and create additional burdens for the instructor.
- Masking changes class dynamics, making it much harder for the professor to “read the room”; that is, to ascertain whether students are confused, bored, anxious, etc.

We take the opportunity provided by this amendment to acknowledge the ongoing work to address the inequities and inadequacies of student evaluations of teaching (SETs). We appreciate that the university is taking steps to mitigate the worst impacts of such flawed and biased mechanisms; at the same time, we recognize that the new student feedback forms may continue to reflect bias. We recognize as well the roles that student anxiety, exhaustion, frustration, and disengagement may play in student feedback on their learning experience during an ongoing pandemic.

Professional Growth

In our evaluations, we will be particularly attentive to the pandemic-related challenges that may have altered, delayed, or inhibited professional growth, such as prohibitions on travel, the closure of archives and libraries, the lack of access to interlibrary loan and the corresponding limits of SUMMIT to meet our research needs, the requirements of social distancing and the mandate against public events, and the cancellation of conferences and invited talks. In addition, publication timelines have slowed considerably and in some cases projects may have been substantially altered or even abandoned. Cancellations among conferences and delays in publication may mean that work was completed that has not yet

been made public, such as conference papers that were completed but not delivered, or articles that remain under consideration or await peer review. We acknowledge, too, that the kind of creative and analytical work we do often requires periods of focus and reflection, and is therefore particularly vulnerable to the kinds of psychological and emotional stress experienced during the pandemic. In addition to the increased demands in other areas of our positions, especially teaching and supporting students, many colleagues experienced disruptions to family life (such as having children at home all day) that impacted their ability to carve out space and time for concentrated scholarship or creative work. We encourage evaluatees to include work produced that could not be delivered and in-process projects that may have been negatively affected, and to explain both the disruptions and the progress they were able to make in relation to our stated guidelines.

Advising

Even prior to the pandemic, our work as advisors had grown both to include greater attention to mentoring as well as significant attention to students' needs outside their intellectual development. The pandemic has increased exponentially the challenges, both academic and personal, faced by our students, and has therefore demanded significantly more support and effort from us as we attempt to provide emotional and psychological support to students in grave distress. As we return to in-person learning, students also need increased coaching and support with the practical demands of university life: time management, absences, late and missing work, student accommodations, petitions. Students have more needs and more pressing needs, and thus require considerably more labor on our part, including emotional labor. We acknowledge that our advising takes place in this increasingly demanding climate.

University Service

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on university service, beginning with but not limited to the many emergency consultations and decisions that have attended every phase of the pandemic. Many committees have had to find new ways of doing their work, slowing progress while also demanding increased time from faculty. Invisible labor has increased as students wrestle with mental health issues, concerns about their own safety and that of others, their own illnesses or those of family members, financial worries, the impacts of white supremacy and their own engagement with the processes of racial reckoning, and more.

In addition, the numerous “crises” the university faces—in enrollment and retention, student wellbeing, staff vacancies, salary and benefits reductions, among others—have made increasing demands on colleagues who have been expected to contribute more time and labor, informally or in the form of ad hoc committees, subcommittees, etc., to help the university address these issues. Put simply, COVID has demanded still more time for our university service and often more emotional energy. At the same time, the university has been engaged in work on the strategic plan and has undertaken a large-scale program review, both of which

make additional demands on faculty members who continue to deal with the pandemic and its fallout.

We continue to participate in and value university service, but acknowledge the additional stresses it has placed on our department members. Our evaluations will be attentive to, and evaluatees are invited to outline, the ways that service commitments have been affected by the pandemic, particularly in terms of greater demands of faculty time and energy in relation to the pressures noted above, and in terms of how pressures to be responsive through service (in ways to support urgent matters of enrollment, retention, less staff support, and budgetary restrictions) have impinged on the time and energy once spent on meeting other responsibilities.

Community Service

There have been limited if any opportunities for community service due to closures, social distancing, prohibitions on travel and other factors. We continue to value community service, but we do not expect that colleagues will have engaged in community service during the pandemic.

Note on Streamlined Evaluations

In the midst of the pandemic, it has become common practice to ask those at the rank of Full Professor to have their reviews conducted at the beginning of the fall, cutting by a semester the amount of time between their evaluations. We will take this into account, recognizing that it may affect colleagues' productivity in some areas of evaluation, in particular Professional Development and University and Community Service.