The pressure of the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and people of color (POC), LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and other historically marginalized groups (Maas et al. 2020, Umucu and Lee 2020, Drabble and Eliason 2021, Fulweiler et al. 2021, Lee et al. 2021). Inequities exacerbated by the pandemic need to be addressed in higher education and at the School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences (SAFS). Given the University of Washington’s values of diversity, respect, integrity, collaboration, excellence, and innovation, the SAFS Equity & Inclusion committee believes that proactive and continued measures to mitigate Covid-19 impacts will help our School embody these values. This statement provides considerations, particularly considerations relevant to long-term impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic (Shillington et al. 2020; MPOWIR), for committees on admissions, scholarships/internships, hiring, promotion, tenure, and other forms of evaluations.

The pandemic is an extraordinary event causing “career shocks” due to factors outside of any individual’s control (Akkermans, Seibert and Mol, 2018). Over the course of the pandemic, POC, individuals with low-income backgrounds, and women (among other marginalized groups) have experienced greater impacts to their physical health and safety, mental wellbeing, and employment (Kantemneni 2020; Maas 2020). Marginalized groups in higher education and in the sciences are not immune to these effects (Woolston 2020).

As higher education experiences a great contraction (Gardner 2021) and declining admissions (Zahneis 2021), it is important to understand inequities experienced by marginalized groups in order for institutions to maintain diversity and provide equitable support for recruitment and retention. Women faculty, who already experience gender disparities, have experienced differential impacts from the pandemic (Oleschuk, 2020; Kramer 2020; Lee et al. 2021) because they are commonly responsible for unpaid domestic work (Donner 2020) such as caregiving (Amaro and Prados 2020; Kantemneni 2020; Kowal et al. 2020; Staniscuaski et al. 2020). Faculty and staff in marginalized groups, such as women and POC, regularly contribute volunteer service to recruit and retain individuals from marginalized groups (Guarino and Borden 2017; Lee et al. 2021) and they may be frequently sought out as student mentors. These additional service responsibilities can result in fewer submitted manuscripts and preprints (Viglione 2020).

Certain universities have already implemented policies to protect early-career faculty from the career shocks caused by the pandemic (e.g., pause on tenure clock in more than 250 colleges and universities [Butler 2021], including MSU, UCSB, UMASS, UW). However, the effects of the pandemic will continue and change over time, with different implications over the course of weeks, months and
years as well as at different life stages (Akkermans 2020). Thus, equitable support is not only important in recruitment, but also over the course of years for retention (see recommendations in Misra et al. 2020 and Gonzales and Griffin 2021).

Institutions in higher education must adapt assessment structures for faculty and other early career students and staff (Misra et al. 2020). For example, evaluation systems for faculty that only measure productivity using metrics based on the number of articles, citations, and grants, are incomplete because the aforementioned metrics do not take into account contributions in teaching, mentorship, and service. Furthermore, faculty members with tenure-delays should not be held to higher standards and compared with other faculty members experiencing different working conditions (UMASS ADVANCE 2021). Not all individuals are starting from the same playing field but rather each individual is navigating a unique life journey that can lead to different forms of research, learning, and innovation (Akkermans 2020).

Students have also had to navigate significant changes in their education when transitioning to entirely remote learning. These changes particularly impacted students that lacked access to computers and the internet (McMurtrie 2020). Remote learning may have also resulted in "theory-rich, practice-poor" types of education (NASEM 2020a). Many students, including first generation students, had to adapt to learning from home in shared spaces with family members that might not be aware of the requirements necessary to complete coursework and/or be expected to contribute significantly to household responsibilities (NASEM 2020b). Additional and potentially compounding impacts include reduced or cancelled support services such as those for student mental health and tutoring (Raaper and Brown 2020). As a result of these challenges, students will likely require additional support and training as they transition to undergraduate classrooms and workplaces.

It is important to make policy changes and embody practices that help ensure that early career individuals, including students (Brown 2020), have equitable access to SAFS and are seen in a more holistic manner in the context of socio-economic challenges and hardships during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. We thus recommend that reviewers on committees evaluate candidates using an equity-minded approach.

**Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations included in the SAFS Diversity Hiring Tool, we recommend that reviewers on admissions, hiring, and evaluation committees allow candidates and employees to provide an optional statement regarding if and how Covid-19 impacted their research, learning, publication output, teaching, grades, etc. This optional Covid-19 impact statement could be used when making decisions regarding admissions of graduate students, as well as hiring or evaluations of academic student employees, interns, postdoctoral scholars, research scientists, and faculty during and after the pandemic. Here is a suggested prompt for a Covid-19 impact statement:

*You may submit an optional statement that outlines how you have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Impacts can include: loss of field work or lab time, decreased hours due to childcare or family responsibilities, mental health issues, or funding gaps. You do not need to include details, such as reference to personal at-home situations, medical issues, etc. You can describe the impact this event has had on your ability to meet your professional obligations. You are also welcome to include information on what you did differently at work or lessons learned during this time.*
A candidate's Covid-19 impact statement might include the following topics and themes:

**Teaching, mentorship, and service**
- Candidate had to spend additional time to transition to online teaching or learning (including additional hours required for the transition, challenges such as access to internet service and software, and required training)
- Candidate had to provide additional mentorship to their students (including number of students and higher-level mentoring related to physical/mental health/trauma, economic and social consequences, and changes in course and degree requirements)
- Candidate had to provide additional service to their department(s), universities, professional societies, communities impacted by Covid-19, etc.

**Research, publications, and presentations/conferences**
- Candidate had work impacted by “essential” vs. “non-essential” worker status; lack of access to research subjects/samples; limited access to field/lab space and supplies; travel/visa restrictions; increased time for review of manuscripts
- Candidate produced materials (e.g., for K-12 and other communities) beyond the range of what is traditionally considered a publication, but that is still important for recruiting marginalized individuals affected by Covid-19 into STEM fields
- Candidate had fewer opportunities to present or had to spend more time organizing a conference that was changed to virtual format conferences and other speaking engagements

**Funding, opportunities, and support**
- Candidate dealt with changes in grants, fellowships, scholarships, and paid internships (including cancellations and delays)
- Candidate lost some funding because it was redirected for personnel, PPE, and research related to Covid-19 initiatives
- Candidate experienced reduced support due to cancelled services for mental health, tutoring, etc.

**Work time in context of work environment**
- Candidate accrued additional work responsibilities due to other faculty/staff leave of absences or retirements
- Candidate had to prioritize required tasks (at expense of other research and educational tasks), such as closing and re-opening labs, coordinating with the labs and other collaborators, adapting lab and field protocols to meet Covid-19-related regulations, completing required training, following practices of Covid-19 guidelines, etc.

**Work time in context of personal responsibilities, health and wellbeing**
- Candidate had work impacted by health issues, loss of loved ones, partnership with an essential worker, etc.
- Candidate experienced reduced work time and mental energy due to caregiving responsibilities, including loss of childcare (either intermittent or for an extended period of time), transition to online schooling for school-aged children, care for sick family members, and elder care.
- Candidate had work disrupted by short- or long-term effects of being ill with Covid-19, including the ongoing effects of the less-understood “long Covid”.

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Overall, we recommend that review committees take into account the impacts that Covid-19 may have on candidates and students, and consider alternative forms of evaluations. For example, allow candidates to list competencies instead of actual experiences, which may be accessible only to those with the means to access and participate in paid positions, paid/unpaid internships, volunteer opportunities, field work, etc. Another example is scaling the amount of work produced not over the course of calendar months and years but by actual time worked. Opportunities to conduct scholarly work may have been reduced due to caregiving responsibilities for children, parents and extended family, which can increase even more for those facing intersectional inequalities. For more information, please see Malisch et al. 2020 Suppl. Info. for a list of questions related to faculty merit, tenure and promotion evaluations: 1) Research and Scholarly Work; 2) Teaching; 3) Service; and 4) Additional Questions and Considerations. At the end of this document, there is also a section of "Additional Resources" with many more examples from other departments, universities and organizations that have existing or suggested programs in place to mitigate against further disparities experienced by marginalized groups. This Covid-19 impact statement is a starting point, and we recommend that some of these practices of evaluations through an equitable lens remain even beyond the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

References


Additional resources

Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), *Quality, Equity, and Inclusion during the COVID Crisis* (including free webinar series).

Purdue University [Navigating Careers in the Academy: Gender, Race, and Class](link)

Rochester Institute of Technology, [Pandemic Impact Statements: Suggestions for Faculty](link)

Stanford University, [Gendered COVID-19 Faculty Experiences](link)

University of Arizona, [Supporting Faculty During & After COVID-19 Don’t let go of equity](link)

University of Massachusetts Amherst ADVANCE, [Documenting Pandemic Impacts](link)

University of Washington, [Equity & Justice in Graduate Programs](link), (e.g., Summit on Equity in Graduate Education, April 14-15, 2021)

University of Washington, [COVID-19 Resources](link), including:
- COVID-19-related promotion and tenure clock extensions,
- Interfolio recruitments and COVID-19,
- Families First Coronavirus Response Act,
- Exception to 5-year limit for extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19, and
- International Scholar COVID-19 Related Updates.

University of Washington, [Designation of Classified and Professional Staff Employees Who Perform Essential Services](link)