



Writing and Evaluating COVID-19 Impact Statements for P&T

Background: In 2020 a task force was charged with drafting a report to recommend potential policy changes to account for COVID-19 related impacts on faculty careers. The recommendations were reviewed by the provost and passed by the faculty senate. The policies can be found in the Faculty Handbook section 4.4.18. The policies serve a single purpose, to help reviewers provide a fair and contextual evaluation of candidate's work. A key principle guiding these policies and related faculty evaluation is to consider the candidate's achievement relative to their opportunity. If the pandemic impacted a faculty member's opportunity to achieve, they can explain this in their COVID impact statement. This impact statement is required rather than optional, to ensure there is no barrier to providing the information reviewers need.

The following Q&As were compiled from separate ADVANCE panels on writing and evaluating COVID-19 impact statements.

Q&A on Writing COVID-19 Impact Statements

Q: *What is the purpose of the COVID impact statement?*

A: The COVID impact statement helps reviewers understand how your career trajectory has been affected by the pandemic. The broad goal is to ensure your professional achievements will be judged relative to opportunity.

Q: *What format should this statement take?*

A: The specifics of how you format the document and what you include is up to you to decide. That being said, here are suggestions from our panelists:

- Keep your impact statement relatively brief (1-2 pages) and focus on key impacts that affected your career trajectory, rather than exhaustively documenting everything. You may also reference impacts in your research, teaching, or service statements. For example, in your impact statement you could briefly explain pandemic constraints that led you to shift research focus and develop a new research program, and then go into more detail about the new projects in your research statement.
- As best you can, document where your productivity was impacted and why. For example: shifted/compressed work hours due to childcare demands, lack of access to field work or lab space, publishing delays due to slowdowns at journals/presses, increased teaching loads, new course prep or online/hybrid course development, ad-hoc student advising above and beyond your normal load.
- One narrative strategy is explaining how you mitigated the professional impacts you experienced. You might take the negative impacts explain how you pivoted to creatively addressed these challenges.
- No matter the format, structure the impact statement around your trajectory and your achievement relative to opportunity. Demonstrate that despite pandemic impacts, you



are productive and contributing to your department. Ensure reviewers can see that your professional trajectory will continue upward, even if it slowed due to the pandemic.

- If you're feeling unsure about your statement or having trouble with how to write about your experiences, you can share a draft with trusted colleagues and get feedback.

Q: *Do you have tips for how to clearly communicate impacts, keep the statement easy to read, or otherwise organize information?*

A: Be sure to write for a general audience and avoid discipline-specific jargon or overly technical details. That way members of the college and university P&T committees will not miss the key takeaways of your statement. Using a combination of paragraphs and bullet points can keep the statement easy to read. Tables are also useful to convey information. For example, you might use a table to show your actual workload during the pandemic as compared to your official or standard workload.

Q: *My research productivity has been affected, but I'm unsure how (or if) to write about it. Will an impact statement hurt how evaluators views my dossier?*

A: One strategy is to think about the overall story you tell in your impact statement. You want to be sure your statement isn't simply a list of impacts, but communicates how you're still meeting departmental expectations, perhaps with a slowed trajectory. This will be useful for addressing concerns from colleagues whose own work may not have been similarly affected. You might talk about positives/wins since the pandemic that demonstrate that your trajectory is recovering.

Q: *What kinds of research impacts are appropriate to include?*

A: The Task Force report lists potential impacts. Delayed or missed opportunities for research productivity are important to capture. These might include conferences you couldn't attend, grants that you were unable to submit, or extended peer review timelines that delayed publications. Some faculty experienced impacts when it came to opportunities for international collaborations and international graduate students. For other faculty, impacts will be very long lasting or their research program has changed permanently.

Q: *Do I need to share personal details as part of my impact statement?*

A: You do not need to include extensive personal information. You will be believed and don't need to prove your experiences, particularly as related to trauma, health, family situations, etc. You are free to share these details or choose not to.

Q: *Is it necessary to provide evidence to document impacts? How do I do this?*

A: Again, you will be believed. You will want to include specific examples to illustrate impacts and how you adjusted, but you don't need to prove impacts. One related strategy that some faculty have used is to ask their chair or director to write a letter to add to their packet that lays out specific constraints they faced.



Q: *How can I address changes in my trajectory due to faculty retirements in 2020, which led to an increased teaching load, new preps, etc.?*

A: This experience isn't uncommon. In some colleges the faculty had to step in to teach core classes due to many retirements. Think about how to clearly demonstrate impact, such as teaching overload, new preps, hybrid course delivery, or other time intensive activities. As best you can, quantify impacts. You might start by thinking about how many hours of work this entailed. To help reviewers understand, you might document this as a proportion of workload that is widely understood by colleagues (e.g. equivalent to courses, or standard service appointments in department). Be sure to explain how this shift in teaching took time away from other scholarly work. This is particularly important to do if your workload didn't officially change to take this into account.

Q: *Do you have ideas for how to document other ways in which teaching demands increased, such as converting labs to an online format, creating new lab protocols including PPE and safety (for those teaching in-person), or similar issues?*

A: It can be difficult to capture the time spent on things like this. You can start by making a list of activities and then translate these into time/workload to help put the work into perspective. Be sure to use language that is clear to an outside audience.

Q: *During the pandemic we were expected to accommodate student needs around illness and have more relaxed attendance policies. This has impacted our teaching, as students miss class, don't participate in class, submit late work at the end of the semester, request make up labs and exams, etc. Should I talk about this?*

A: Yes. You can document things like creating make up exams, recreating labs, helping students get caught up with material, etc. This can be hard to quantify, but you can say the demands of teaching are more intensive than they used to be and give one or two examples, rather than a laundry list. One model is to look at your departmental documents for P&T and for merit, to see how similar efforts might be captured. For example, some departments have merit metrics that reward extra effort in teaching, which includes activities that are above and beyond normal expectations. If you frame your impact statement this way, it fits the language that is already recognized in departmental documents.

Q&A on Evaluating COVID-19 Impact Statements:

Q: *What if a candidate does not include a COVID impact statement in their dossier?*

A: The Provost's office is checking for impact statements as faculty are uploading their dossiers and will remind individual faculty to submit an impact statement as needed.

Q: *Should standards be adjusted due to impacts of COVID-19? And if so, to what extent and in what ways? This may matter more for candidates "on the bubble" rather than clear cut cases. A:* Committees should look for evidence of a candidate's positive trajectory and positive steps taken to mitigate pandemic effects.



Standards are set, but we should allow for flexible interpretation of promotion criteria. Departmental committees can, and should, discuss flexibility before even looking at a dossier. There is a process in place within departments to develop P&T standards and they cannot be modified on an ad-hoc basis. The departmental committee is a key part of the P&T process, as this is where the interpretation of standards should be made. As a dossier moves up the chain, people will be less familiar with the candidate and their work. The interpretation of the departmental P&T standards should be clear in the evaluative letter from the department, as this will aid committees at the college and university level.

In interpreting promotion criteria flexibly, possible pandemic impacts need to be considered. The impact statement can help committees evaluate candidates in light of these impacts. Here are some examples:

- If a book is required for promotion, were there delays that were caused by the publisher? Or were there factors that caused the faculty member to delay completing the draft? Committees can consider using book contracts as acceptable as evidence of a book required for promotion.
- Also think about the journal review process and potential delays. Is the review process what caused the journal submissions to not be in print in time for promotion? Candidates may be able to provide correspondence to journal editors about timeliness of reviews.
- Perhaps a candidate's grant funding is less than expected given the financial impact of pandemic.

Use caution when calculating a publication rate metric. If you are looking at this measure, make sure the denominator doesn't include a COVID year.

Exercise caution and avoid limiting the discussion of a candidate to the pre-COVID part of their record. If a candidate has a 5-year plan and has a disruption in year three, you can't evaluate them based on only their first two years. Look at the whole dossier, rather than parsing it into pre-COVID and post-COVID.

Remember you are evaluating whether candidates meet the P&T standards, not comparing them to another candidate from this year or prior years, or to an "ideal" candidate.

Q: *To what extent should candidates be required to supply evidence of COVID impacts and how should committees respond if they don't see evidence?*

A: The COVID impact statement is an opportunity for candidates to describe pandemic effects on research, teaching, and service work, not an obligation to reveal causes. We expect everyone who is involved in the review process will take candidates at their word for when it comes to impacts; we will continue to train and educate the UD community about this expectation.

For personal circumstances, such as caregiver responsibilities or medical circumstances, we are taking candidates at their word. Candidates do not have to provide personal details in their

impact statement, rather they can simply state that they had impacts to research, teaching, and/or service work.

For professional circumstances, such as lab closures or journal delays, the candidates should have conversations about this at the department level. Some journal editors communicate reasons for delays, while others do not. Committees may ask candidates to make an effort to document impacts, (such as date of manuscript submission, date of response, etc.). If faculty had a letter from their granting agency, or an update from the university documenting a lab closure, they should provide this information.

It is important to remember the pandemic has affected a wide range of faculty in many ways. Candidates may not want to be too detailed in their impact statement. Evaluators should be aware of commonalities in pandemic impacts, so that candidates can be concise rather than provide an exhaustive list of all known impacts. The Task Force report includes examples of research, teaching, and service impacts, as well as a timeline of pandemic related disruptions to university operations.

Q: *Given the wide range of potential impacts, how do I evaluate candidates fairly?*

A: Keep the review as contextual as possible and review candidates relative to the P&T standards. Committees should exercise flexibility in interpretation of standards. While we don't want candidates to be any less impressive than usual, the ways in which committees document excellence may be different.

One potential pitfall when reviewers move away from evaluating candidates per departmental P&T policies and instead invoke comparison to other people is in external review letters. Sometimes departments ask reviewers to do this, but often reviewers do it automatically. Internal reviewers should be mindful of this when interpreting external letters.

Q: *How do you evaluate dossiers where the external reviewers received COVID impact statement and those where the external reviewers did not?*

A: Faculty may perceive that external reviewers in their particular field will evaluate impact statements in a certain way. Some faculty—likely those who are most disparately impacted by things like COVID—are afraid of reviewers being insensitive to their circumstances.

Candidates made a personal choice to include or not include impact statements in the materials for external reviewers and ultimately this choice is not relevant to their research, teaching, and service performance. Keep in mind that a good external letter is not just an opinion, but also provides evidence for it. Committees can look at this evidence to see if external reviewers took COVID impacts into account. It is up to the departmental committee (and later chair and deans) to contextualize the pandemic impact if a candidate did not send an impact statement to external reviewers.



Q: *2020-2021 student course feedback was not required as part of P&T dossiers. However, annual faculty appraisals include this course feedback. What happens if material that does not appear in the dossier, per the candidate's choice, is then included in the letter from the chair?* **A:** The Faculty Senate P&T Committee has seen similar instances, where material that is not in the dossier is referenced in their chair's letter. The chair's letter is part of the dossier, but the information referenced in the chair's letter is not. The committee does not have access to this supplementary information and thus should not evaluate it.

Keep in mind appraisals and P&T are two different and distinct processes. If the chair brings this information into the letter, the next committee should pay no attention to it because it is not part of the dossier they are evaluating.

Q: *Faculty had to decide quickly whether to take their one-year extension or go up on a normal schedule. Should committees adjust standards if they perceive the candidate would benefit from one more year, but chose not to take it?*

A: It would be a mistake for committees to think about what might have been versus what is in front of them. Candidates have a choice to take the extension or not and committees should review the dossier as it stands.

Again, committees should not change standards, but may contextualize their assessment of a candidate's success given the circumstances and the candidate's opportunity to meet standards. For example, how do you judge scholarly impact when the rate of production has been affected by external factors? Committees should consider things like the rate of production at journals and university presses, invitations to speak or conference presentations that were cancelled. This is not changing standards but being aware of context.

Q: *Is there a plan to make it mandatory for committee members to attend this kind of COVID impact panel or workshop prior to reviewing dossiers?*

A: No, we have not required attendance at session like this for all reviewers. There is ongoing work to disseminate the policy and related expectation in other ways. Attendees from today's session should speak up in committee meetings and resources are available on the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs website.

At each level of review, the results are shared with candidates. There is an appeal process, so candidates have a voice if they think reviews are not taking into account COVID impacts.

Q: *Will the COVID statement be required for 2- and 4-year reviews?*

A: No, this policy is explicitly about P&T review. 2- and 4-year reviews are meant to be formative evaluation, or progress towards promotion reviews. Everyone doing these reviews will be going up for promotion while this policy is in effect, so people should still get into the habit of documenting pandemic impacts while things are fresh. Keep in mind pandemic effects may change, both positively and negatively, over time.