



ACADEMIC SENATE, MERCED DIVISION  
COMMITTEE FOR DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

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**April 20, 2020**

**To: Department Chairs**

**From: Committee for Diversity and Equity (D&E)**

**Re: Equity Considerations during COVID-19 Emergency Period**

During these challenging times, the Committee on Diversity and Equity (D&E) finds it of great importance for the university to uphold its commitment to equity. While the current situation affects us all, there are those on whom a disproportionate burden fall, due to professional and/or personal circumstances. We are hearing of major difficulties faculty are experiencing in their daily life, for example (all from current UC Merced faculty, more are appended at the end of this memo):

*[...] I am the primary caretaker for two young kids under 6 years old, which means I am solo 8 – 5:30 and feeding 3 meals, 2 snacks, potty training, lining up screen time, and trying to sprinkle in some educational content. I lead a large research group that includes postdocs, grad students, undergrads, and a lab manager who looks to me for guidance, especially in this tumultuous time. [...] I feel crushed between the pressures of home and work without a global pandemic, so this new reality is overwhelming on every level.*

*[The University needs to understand] the situation that faculty with children in primary schools are going through. We are already stressed enough going to online instruction and all the preparation associated with that; add to this [the] changes to be made to the research program (finding alternate things for students to work on, discuss with funding agencies about moving milestones and deliverables while keeping graduate students funded). Now on top of all this, add to the pile entertaining and educating our kids and this is the perfect recipe for a breakdown! Something has to give- the question is what?*

*....It's taken me 20+ min to even compose this email because of constant distractions - my husband is on a zoom call for work, and my kids won't sit still and keep to the activities I thought I had strategically planned out for them at 2am, after putting out work-related fires.*

In light of these circumstances, D&E requests that Department Chairs communicate, or reiterate, to their members that they understand and will consider the difficulty that faculty are facing in upcoming reviews. In particular, we encourage you to communicate with your units the following equity considerations:

As much as possible, all members of the university leadership should refrain from sending messages that praise or encourage faculty for being/to be even more productive now with writing or publishing because we are working from home. Some members of our academic community are not able to have improved productivity while working from home.

As per the [announcement by VPF Teenie Matlock](#) on March 30, 2020: “faculty can opt to have their Spring 2020 evaluations excluded from future reviews. Faculty need not worry about being ‘dinged’ for lower than expected evaluations. They are also encouraged to explain challenges in teaching in their self-statements.”

D&E strongly encourages that this message be shared with department members, who may not have seen it due to the extremely high volume of emails.

In regards to challenges in teaching, as per the [Emergency Course Continuity Policy](#) which went into effect on March 6, 2020, faculty may explore alternative means of achieving the learning objectives for a course and may adjust contact hours without UGC and GC approvals. D&E realizes that the policy does not allow for *adjusting* course learning objectives and outcomes, and this poses significant challenges to courses with laboratory, fieldwork, or studio components. D&E would strongly encourage that department chairs discuss these challenges with members, to alleviate anxiety as much as possible, both for the sake of faculty and of students.

Third, to address potential equity issues related to research productivity, it may be helpful for Department Chairs to communicate their agreement with the [message from CAP on March 15](#), which urged departmental personnel committees, chairs, and deans “to take impacts of the required adjustments [due to COVID-19] into account when reviewing future personnel cases that include the activities of the Spring 2020 semester (or possibly beyond, depending upon the duration of significant virus-related disruptions).” To address anxieties about research funding, it may be helpful to refer to [the message from Vice Chancellor of Research Sam Traina on March 20, 2020](#): “The shutdown of on-campus research will create unanticipated delays, which can be cause for significant anxiety for many, and especially junior researchers. While there is no way to escape the loss of time, every effort is being made to assure that these actions will not damage careers or lead to excessive financial hardship.”

D&E thanks you for your extraordinary service to your department members during these extraordinary times.

cc: D&E Members  
Fatima Paul, Interim Executive Director, Senate Office  
Senate Office

-----Excerpts of UCM Faculty comments on the Impact of COVID-19-----

*“I have an 8 year old who now requires homeschooling, a 3 year old who needs constant attention, and an (untenured) husband who is teaching Spring Quarter, while we both run our research programs from home. For me, that involves managing our research live animal colony while helping multiple postdocs, grad students, and 11 undergraduates continue to progress in their research from their homes under these stressful circumstances.”*

*“Unfortunately, we know childcare duties significantly affect the upward mobility of moms over dads. Thus, how can we protect folks, especially those who are mostly young, women faculty, during the most sensitive time in their career (untenured)?”*

[I'm concerned about disproportionate effects on URM faculty.] “ *[There is a ] new, untenured faculty member with a young child and a partner who is unable to assist in childcare. She is having to do 100% of her child's care, keep her research program going - one that she just barely got up and running - AND prepare and teach a course online in a few days time? It's not possible - at least, it's not possible unless she takes a major mental health hit, which in turn will affect her child.* ”

“ ... we're all being asked to volunteer a lot of extra time for developing teaching online with almost no lead time.”

“*I don't know how one could "teach from home" with a house full of kids with real needs and real activities. The same goes for families who are taking in aging parents so they don't have to be locked in a room at care home.*”

“ ... some of us were already working at full capacity before the crisis, with lack of adequate sleep, and now with the crisis, extra other responsibilities have leapt into our lives, such as extra offspring homeschooling and childcare, elder and sick care, so there simply isn't extra time available, there's actually less time available! This is beyond stop the clock.”