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University Libraries Faculty Assembly Covid-19 Impact Statement

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To: Barbara Harvey, Chair, ULFA
CC: Emily Frigo (Designated Unit Head), Ashley Rosener (Incoming Chair, ULFA), Ed Aboufadel, and Patrick Roth (Chair of ULPPC)
From: Annie Bélanger, Dean of University Libraries
Subject: Dean's Response to ULFA COVID-19 Impact Statement
Date: April 26, 2021

I received your COVID-19 statement, which builds upon the one released by the university in the Fall as well as the letter from the Dean, which clarified its application to the Libraries. I greatly appreciate the work of the group in crafting this statement as well as the engagement with the faculty in gaining unanimous support for the statement. The statement makes clear the wish to show care and compassion as we move forward with contract renewal and tenure processes after the first year of the pandemic.

As professional effectiveness varies across faculty positions within the Libraries, there was no shared documented baseline across the faculty body. Early in the pandemic, I asked that we all ensure core work would occur, while special efforts should be paused as appropriate. This set a baseline for professional effectiveness. I want to correct the statement that there was no baseline expectation for professional effectiveness since anyone consistently not meeting core work needs would not remain in good standing.

Along with campus, the libraries' expectations for service and scholarship were lifted. I want to acknowledge that institutional need, particularly as we consider the high level of initiatives that the campus has undertaken, maintained a need for library faculty to be involved in institutional service.

Lastly, I wish to scope the inability to ask questions, during the personnel process, about the level of output. This should be applied from March 2020 until the start of the academic year 2022. This timeline may be extended at a later date based on the course of the pandemic. As the Appointing Officer, it is my duty to ensure that colleagues are supported towards success while maintaining the ability to ensure performance levels appropriate to the role of a library faculty. Lastly, I want to consider that this approach be applied intentionally in the years where faculty have had leaves of absence.

I approve it with the note that baseline professional effectiveness was defined as core work for each position description, which was to be arrived at in dialogue with the Department Head.

For those wishing to use the statement as part of their portfolio, I ask that this memo be included as it contains the statement unanimously recommended by the University Libraries Faculty Assembly as well as my approval and clarifications.

I want to thank the group for creating this statement,

Annie Bélanger

University Libraries Faculty Assembly Covid-19 Impact Statement

DATE: 3/11/21

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to profound and continuing adjustments to the work of Grand Valley State University Libraries' faculty, as well as highlighting ongoing structural inequities across society. This statement serves as documentation of changes that occurred across University Libraries and caused disparate, inequitable, impact to faculty throughout the pandemic, beginning in March 2020 and spanning into 2021. The document is necessarily limited in scope to assist faculty candidates in the tenure-track process and mitigate potential traumas as a result of the pandemic's impact on that process. The structure of the tenure-track process is imperfect in nature, and this statement takes a trauma-informed, person-first, approach to investigating how to best support candidates in making their case for contract renewal, tenure, and/or promotion (Buffalo Center for Social Research).

BACKGROUND

The pandemic has led to rapid changes in academia as a whole, at GVSU broadly, and within the Libraries specifically. Very clearly, the pandemic has been a collective trauma, though its impacts are not distributed equitably. The pandemic has emphasized privilege, forced shifts in workplaces, and increased caretaking and mental health demands. On a national level, the annual Women in the Workplace survey conducted by LealIn.org and McKinsey highlights that women - especially mothers, senior-level women, and Black women - have been most severely impacted by increased homeschooling, caretaking, and other health support needs (2020). In libraries, a field dominated by women, this example of inequitable impact is of particular note; it serves as one example of many of the disruption that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on personal and professional pursuits.

In response to the impact the pandemic has had on professional effectiveness, scholarship, and service to all faculty, the Provost accepted a recommendation from the University Academic Senate to automatically apply a pause of one-year to all probationary regular faculty, with an option for the faculty member to opt-out of that extension and to be considered at their normally scheduled time. This recommendation utilizes the "unforeseen and significant disruption" clause in the [personnel policies for regular faculty Board of Trustees policy 4.2.7.2](#), responding to the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the university recommended the reduction of service and scholarship for faculty and further, that 2020 Faculty Activity Reports be shortened, highlighting only major achievements.

While this opportunity for tenure extension is important, it does not address all of the inequities that may impact individual faculty members during the pandemic (Gonzales and Griffin). Pausing a tenure clock may have ongoing ramifications that further extend the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our colleagues as related to both finances

and securing continued employment (Flaherty). In other cases, the pause of the tenure clock provides much needed time to mitigate the effects of decreased opportunities in scholarship and service to ensure a candidate can successfully meet tenure requirements. In response to these inequities, each faculty member was able to opt-out of the blanket tenure pause if it best suited their individual situation.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Within University Libraries, there is no set of consistent baseline expectations for professional effectiveness that is shared across all library faculty positions. Baseline is outlined within each position description. For the 2020 academic year, baseline professional effectiveness was defined as core work for each position description, which was to be arrived at in dialogue with the respective Department Head. Aligning with campus temporary policies, there was a paused in scholarship and service expectations during this time. All faculty members experienced adjustments in workload and capacity. Additionally, faculty grappled with ongoing challenges, such as restricted access to technology and workspaces, internet access problems, physical and emotional wellbeing, and additional caretaking responsibilities. Provided below is a short list of challenges that occurred during the pandemic; this is not designed to be a comprehensive list of activities, but rather a representative sample:

- Redesigned curriculum for online delivery
- Created remote work opportunities for student employees
- Shifted workplace from onsite to remote, including pausing onsite-specific work entirely
- Redefined boundaries between work and personal life
- Added responsibility and training to accommodate onsite service shifts
- Shifted responsibilities to support colleagues
- Provided additional check-in meetings, mentorship, and alternative opportunities for connection and emotional and mental support
- Increased demand for timely web content on library policies and services
- Adjusted scholarship and service loads. Increased opportunities resulted from conferences and events moving to an online format and/or from addressing emerging needs at the university level, while there were also reduced opportunities due to fewer calls for proposals and/or fewer opportunities for professional service.

A heavy thread of invisible, emotional labor connects all of these changes as faculty members supported one another, in addition to their friends and families, and was especially noticeable in roles that interact heavily with students and/or student employees.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

As stated in the [Board of Trustees' Policies, 4.2.9.1](#), "the burden of proof for performance that warrants the personnel action under consideration rests with the regular Library faculty member under review." However, it is incumbent on all faculty to

recognize that individual biases are inherent within any process of evaluation, both consciously and unconsciously. Each candidate for tenure, promotion or contract renewal will experience the review process in different ways, and biases can inevitably lead to a gap between how a candidate experiences and presents their work and how others interpret their work.

Recognizing the vast and varied impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on library operations and individual well-being, and to continue to work toward building equitable processes that seek to mitigate bias, library faculty can hold one another accountable to reflect and apply the following practices:

- In reviewing portfolios which include the time period during which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our work (specifically March 2020 and onward), baseline expectations **cannot** be uniformly applied in **any** of the areas under review - Professional Effectiveness, Scholarship, and Service.
- While some individuals may have underperformed based on standards set before the pandemic, some individuals may have overachieved. Acknowledging that everyone copes with trauma differently, candidate achievements *during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic* cannot be compared and neither a perceived underperformance nor a perceived overperformance should impact a candidate negatively. An exception exists for a faculty member not in good standing.
- Reviewers should be conscious of how comments or questions during a pandemic, or other crisis, can lead a candidate to relive trauma in order to provide justification for level of output. This is a structural issue inherent within the contract renewal and tenure and promotion process that this statement seeks to ameliorate, but not directly fix. A candidate's decision not to address such questions should not impact voting decisions if baseline is otherwise met over the course of the 6-year review period. Further, this practice should be used for anyone who has had a leave during the review period.
- Finally, as this is an ongoing situation, this is a living document that can change based on new information or a change in circumstances. At the closure of the pandemic, this document should be revisited and revised to reflect an updated record of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact.

Works Cited

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Document history

- Approved by Dean of University Libraries on April 26, 2021
- Approved by University Library Faculty Assembly on March 29, 2021
- ULFA Working Group, Winter 2021, Leigh Rupinski, Sheila García, Emily Frigo, Jeffrey Daniels (ex-officio)