



## A Call to Higher Education Administrators to Support Caregivers During COVID-19

In spring of 2020, the American Sociological Association joined with more than 50 scholarly societies to offer [calls to higher education administrators regarding faculty review and reappointment processes](#) and [student educational progress during COVID-19](#). In those calls, we recognized the unprecedented circumstances facing leaders in higher education and the hard work those leaders were doing to ensure the professional well-being of their constituents. We also provided some tangible approaches for administrators to consider in this regard.

Almost a year into the pandemic, we have learned much more about its impact, and potential future impact, on higher education. We continue to applaud college and university leaders for their commitments to safety, justice, and professional support in their respective communities during this very difficult period. We also recognize that this challenging period demands an even more comprehensive approach than we anticipated last spring, and we reach out again in the spirit of offering ideas for consideration.

One impact of the pandemic that has been documented by researchers is the detrimental impact on the [careers of women scholars](#), owing in large part to the disproportionate care work that women (especially women of color) are doing for their [families](#) and for their [universities](#). Sociologists have found that employed mothers are taking on a [disproportionate share](#) of pandemic caregiving responsibilities and that this work is having a detrimental and [disproportionate](#) impact on working mothers' [mental health](#) and [relationships](#).

Given these challenges, some departments and universities have taken steps to provide support for scholars with pandemic caregiving responsibilities. Yet, as a [recent report](#) in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences suggests: standard solutions like tenure clock extensions “may be good for first-year faculty and can be a significant source of stress relief for many other faculty members. However, the tenure clock extension has significant negative impacts on women. These extensions can exclude faculty members from positions of power that require tenure... prevent them from applying for large research center grants that require the primary investigator to be tenured... make the faculty member out of sync with funding mechanisms with time restrictions, such as years after PhD earned... [and] decrease long-term earning potential, especially if faculty have taken more than one extension.” Given these limitations, additional steps will likely be necessary to avoid exacerbating gender disparities.

We recognize that not all institutions of higher education have the same resources, infrastructure, and culture, so responses to this problem are not one-size-fits-all. Coalitions of scholars at universities across the US (including [Indiana University](#), [Notre Dame](#), the [University of Oregon](#), and [UCLA](#)) have released statements outlining recommendations that might be viable

on your campus, and we encourage you to consider adopting one or more of these approaches, or others, that would be meaningful on your campus. These recommended steps include:

- **Workload reductions** (e.g., waiving non-essential service such as curriculum reform, but exempting new initiatives addressing race inequality, violence, and inclusion of scholarship and perspectives by marginalized groups; eliminating letters of recommendation for most applications, especially at early stages of consideration; shortening semester lengths; reducing course loads; eliminating new course preps)
- **Workload redistributions** (e.g., ensuring that committee work is equitably distributed; facilitating the hiring of graduate students as hourly workers to support faculty work; reducing course sizes and increasing teaching support for instructors with heavier care responsibilities)
- **Compensation for unpaid labor** (e.g., work on committees supporting university diversity missions; informal mentoring of students and colleagues)
- **Post-pandemic sabbaticals** (especially if coupled with small research grants)
- **Adjusted criteria for tenure and promotion**
  - Expanded definitions of research (e.g., including [public scholarship](#), committee work, and outreach related to one's formal research)
  - Decreased expectations for research productivity and impact (e.g., instead of requiring that a scholar be "recognized as an expert in the field," requiring that a scholar "demonstrate a high likelihood of future recognition as an expert in the field").

Adjustments like this have the potential to provide the support that scholars (especially scholars with disproportionate care responsibilities) need to weather this pandemic and remain on track in their careers. We also encourage recognition and support of work by part-time and contingent faculty. Such adjustments are most likely to be effective at achieving their goals if there is coordination across departments and across universities. This problem affects faculty across disciplines and across institutions. We hope you will engage in conversation across the campus and with peer institutions, particularly regarding the standards to be used in evaluating applications for awards, fellowships, tenure, and promotion.

[Endorsements can be found here.](#)