

**TO:** Deans and Chairs

**FROM:** Suzanne Austin, EVP and Provost

**DATE:** March 23, 2021

**RE:** Guidance re Annual Faculty Evaluations

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The COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health measures have disrupted nearly every aspect of faculty life, including the ways in which we evaluate faculty. Reiterating the April 3, 2020 communication from then Interim Provost Fran Welch, I recognize that in addition to lessened time for scholarship due to fully online instruction, there are other substantial and continuing interruptions to faculty research, scholarship and creative activities, and professional development programs, including but not limited to curtailing of travel and data collection with human subjects; closure or inaccessibility of laboratories, archives, and field sites; and significantly delayed review processes at some journals and presses.

Our annual evaluation and major review processes will need ongoing attention until the impacts of the pandemic and associated public health measures are behind us. That work began in early April 2020, with two communications from Dr. Welch, and continued with the 2020-2021 Joint Memo (issued originally on August 10, and subsequently with revisions on August 31). While there have been on-going conversations across our division regarding annual evaluations of faculty, this current memo is the first written divisional guidance on these evaluations, which serve a critical role in faculty development and major faculty reviews.

Based on conversations with deans and some key academic leaders, I share with you these guidelines, which recognize the challenges that faculty members faced in 2020, provide guidance as our junior faculty colleagues progress towards major reviews, and ensure some degree of consistency across campus. These guidelines encourage faculty members to explain how the pandemic has affected their work, describe how they responded, and lay out some plans for the future.

I recognize that the timing of this correspondence is not ideal but the conversations and concerns behind it are recent and on-going. I am requesting that deans work with department chairs in their schools: (1) to ensure that 2020 faculty annual evaluations honor these guidelines in principle, and (2) to communicate these guidelines to faculty colleagues in your schools.

*Teaching.* The pandemic forced many faculty members to adapt their course(s) in a variety of ways, most notably by converting them to a new modality. These adaptations involved a level of effort that was similar to what a new preparation would require. Accordingly, faculty colleagues should be encouraged to describe in detail the work they undertook to adapt their course(s), including work undertaken in the summer of 2020. Similarly, department chairs and deans should recognize that some aspects of a course might not have gone as intended. Faculty members should be encouraged to acknowledge these challenges and explain how they plan to address them in the future.

As usual, department chairs and deans are encouraged to use multiple means to evaluate teaching, with attention to the quality of course materials and engagement with students. Also, as a reminder, faculty members may choose whether to include the Spring 2020 full-term and Express II student course surveys in their evaluations. Furthermore, as Dr. Chris Korey and Dr. Kris De Welde have written, the College’s “‘pandemic pedagogy’ urge[d] faculty members to be available and responsive to students in a wide range of ways...and for concerns extending well beyond the course or curriculum.” As they suggest, faculty should be encouraged to describe these activities as well, and they should be evaluated as evidence of effective teaching.

*Research and Professional Development.* Some faculty colleagues were able to make progress on their research, whereas others faced impediments – minor, moderate, or serious. Regardless, faculty members undergoing annual evaluation should be given the opportunity to explain any pandemic disruptions<sup>i</sup> to their own research program or creative activity. Those disruptions should be taken into account in the text portion of the annual evaluation. In many cases, it may also be appropriate for the faculty member to forgo an assignment of a summary rating for research. The choice to be “exempted” from a summary rating of research in 2020 may not be held against the faculty member in any subsequent major reviews. In all cases, chairs should also encourage faculty members to lay out a plan for their future research program or creative activity. As with a sabbatical proposal, these plans can and will change; the goal is to encourage faculty to think about their next steps.

*Service.* In some cases, service obligations were greatly reduced or eliminated; in others, they substantially increased. In the latter case, faculty members should be encouraged to describe their service contributions rather than simply listing their formal service assignments. This approach will provide for a holistic review of service contributions, taking into account the different and less formal ways of contributing professional service during the pandemic.

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<sup>i</sup> If the reasons for disruption are personal (such as increased childcare responsibilities), the faculty member need only provide a brief description of the reason, much as they did on their pandemic accommodation requests.