

To: College of Fine Arts Faculty Members

From: Dean Douglas Dempster



Copy: Interim Provost Dan Jaffe

Subj: Compassionate faculty review during the COVID-19 pandemic

Date: September 28, 2020

College of Fine Arts Faculty Members,

The COVID-19 pandemic has and likely will, for some time yet to come, negatively affect the research and creative productivity of many of our faculty members. Some of us have found in the bleak isolation of the pandemic a silver lining of productivity. For others, however, productivity has ground to a near halt. All are facing unexpected and unwelcome challenges in teaching. This is especially true of those fallen ill or those who have had to revert to fulltime parenting or caregiving. Some of our faculty work in forms and fields that have been entirely shuttered and darkened by the pandemic.

Normally, in our annual faculty reviews, promotion reviews, and post-tenure reviews, our peer review culture holds faculty to best-practice standards of research, teaching and service. This is not a normal year. For the short term, we should endeavor instead to set reasonable expectations that are tailored to the extraordinary—and variably consequential—circumstances of our time.

The university has already acknowledged this in its [general guidelines for promotion and tenure](#), in which executive committees and budget councils are directed to:

- when assessing teaching, include consideration that the COVID-19 pandemic led to all teaching faculty needing to handle the challenge of moving instruction online;
- when assessing research, if relevant, include in its statement a description of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the candidate's research/scholarly/creative productivity.

As we enter into this year's season of annual faculty evaluation, promotion and tenure, and comprehensive periodic review, I ask that the following three principles of compassionate faculty review be applied by executive committees, budget councils, department chairs, school directors, and deans whenever a faculty member is evaluated for any semester that was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Ask whether and how the faculty member's productivity was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Be compassionate. Adjust expectations to what is reasonable for each faculty member's circumstances during this pandemic, not to what was reasonable to expect of them prior to the pandemic.
3. While evaluations should be compassionate, there is room still for judgments of excellence, mediocrity, and disappointment. Did a faculty member rise creatively to the challenges of teaching during the pandemic, within the limitations of their circumstance? Did a faculty member make the best of the constraints on their scholarly and creative ambitions? Did they pitch in to the best of their abilities and constraints?

The negative effects of COVID-19 on faculty research productivity will last beyond the widespread deployment of a vaccine or effective therapeutics. We will need to apply these guiding principles generously.