

SEATTLEU

*Exploring the Gendered Impacts of
COVID-19 on Faculty*

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Equity and Higher Education:

- Higher education in the US is riddled with discrimination.
- Gendered and race-based patterns exist in institutional policies, professional and personal networks, interactions with colleagues and students, and faculty expectations.



Equity and Faculty Workloads:

- Women and faculty of color
 - Perform many of the activities that are integral to the functioning of a university
 - Are typically tasked with “taking care of the academic family”
- These activities are not rewarded within typical academic promotion structures.
- Women juggle more personal caregiving responsibilities.



COVID-19, Equity, and Faculty:

- Impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbating existing fault lines in faculty experiences, rewards, and workloads
 - Additional demands necessitated by the move to online platforms
 - Strains placed on research agendas as in-person contact has been curtailed.
 - Women are shouldering even more caregiving at home during the pandemic.
- The economic impacts of the pandemic on universities include budget shortfalls, hiring freezes, and staff furloughs.



Our Research Questions:

1. How has COVID-19 impacted faculty scholarship, teaching, and service responsibilities?
2. How do these impacts differ by gender, other demographic variables, and discipline?
3. How has COVID-19 impacted the resources that the university is able to provide faculty?



Our Research Methods:

- Research based at a single institution: Seattle University.
- 5 years of participant observation pre- and during the pandemic.
- 77 in-depth faculty interviews pre-pandemic.
- 2 focus groups with women faculty pre-pandemic.
- 27 written “reflection statements” from faculty during the pandemic.
- Faculty participants: from all schools and colleges at the university; NTT faculty, tenured and tenure-track faculty; 56 women interviewees, 21 men interviewees; 21 women, 6 men wrote reflections



Preliminary Findings: What Fresh Hell Is This?

- Primary data: analysis of fieldnotes and reflection statements.
- Contextualized by data gathered pre-pandemic.
- 5 themes emerged during analysis of the reflection statements and fieldnotes.



THEME 1: Faculty are balancing more caregiving at home

“Finding time to work productively is a struggle. My husband and I are both working from home and I am home schooling... As a result, childcare is a full time job for at least one parent. Currently, my husband is taking one sick day each week and I am the primary caretaker the other four days. However, even my once-weekly dedicated work days are fragmented. It is hard to maintain physical space in our house... I am struggling to get anything done professionally.”



THEME 2: Certain faculty are doing essential work in marginalized communities that they worry “won’t count.”

“I am worried about submitting a reflection because anything I say of value will be too identifying, especially of the communities where I work... None of that work is going to count on my tenure portfolio.”



THEME 3: Teaching and administrative service have overwhelmed research and writing time for most faculty.

“All the time I have to work, which is very limited due to having to provide childcare and education for a young child who had school and summer camps cancelled, is put towards teaching. Then service according only to approaching urgency due to deadlines. Research is not happening at all... My family is suffering and I am also suffering. This is not sustainable and I don't know how long it will be possible to continue.”



THEME 4: “The collapse of the professional into the personal” is disproportionately impacting certain faculty although all faculty are implicated.

“I feel like I am literally working or dreaming work around the clock. I feel like I am in a permanent soundless Zoom bubble... I’m facing the blur we all face with the collapse of private/professional space... Colleagues have all frequently and repeatedly raised the challenges of faculty dealing with childcare issues and I get that. I see how challenging it is. However there has been no verbal acknowledgement from leaders or colleagues that SOME of us don’t have children, and still face challenges in navigating work/life balances.”



THEME 5: Pervasive worry about student evals, external reviewers, tenure clock delays, promotion delays, expected levels of productivity, etc.

“I would much prefer an administrative message that said something like ‘this will probably be sub-par, and that’s ok’ rather than... [well-intended messages] about faculty ‘quickly crafting excellent remote learning courses’. Nothing about this has been excellent. I trust my department to remember that, but I worry that when I do come up for tenure, college and university leadership will be less accommodating.”



Thematic Patterns:

- Theme 1 (*Faculty are balancing more caregiving at home*) was particularly pronounced among women.
- Theme 2 (*Certain faculty are doing essential work in marginalized communities that they worry “won’t count”*) was particularly pronounced among Faculty of Color.
- Theme 3 (*Teaching and administrative service have overwhelmed research and writing time for most faculty*) was mentioned by everyone, except for one who self-identified as “an anomaly.”



Thematic Patterns:

- Theme 4 (*The collapse of the professional into the personal*) was particularly pronounced for faculty administrators without young children or comparable familial caregiving responsibilities.
- Theme 5 (*Pervasive worry about student evals, external reviewers, tenure clock delays, promotion delays, expected levels of productivity, etc.*) was particularly pronounced among pre-tenure faculty.



Concluding Comments:

- COVID-19 did not cause new inequalities and tensions for faculty; it has simply exposed existing inequalities and accelerated trends that have existed for some time.
- The crises following in the wake of COVID-19 are showing us that it is time to reimagine institutional processes through the lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion. These will strengthen our institutions as they face the challenges ahead.



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