

To: President Schapiro, Provost Hagerty, Associate Provost of Diversity & Inclusion Sekile M. Nzinga

From: Organization of Women Faculty

Date: September 21, 2020

CC: Dean of Weinberg College, Dean of Medill School of Journalism, Dean of the Kellogg School of Management, Dean of the Pritzker School of Law, Dean of the Bienen School of Music, Dean of the School of Communication, Dean of the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, Dean of the School of Education and Social Policy

Attached please find a [Call for Immediate Action to Protect Gender Equity in the Face of COVID-19](#) and the companion report on [Factoring in the Pandemic Experience to Protect Gender Equity](#). Both documents are based on a survey of our members, distributed July 20-August 7, 2020. We asked women faculty about how the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to remote working and teaching impacted their work as teachers, administrators and scholars. As far as we know ours is to date the most comprehensive, indeed perhaps the only, survey of the effect of the pandemic on Northwestern faculty.

A theme of our recommendations is that the goal of equity in a world where the coronavirus is distributing burdens inequitably requires differentiated responses. Too little attention has been given to ensuring equity in the longer term, and no effort has been made to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the least secure, most burdened, and least remunerated faculty. We are focused on faculty, but many of these suggestions may also apply to staff and graduate students.

This Call for Immediate Action includes an invitation to join a moderated conversation with OWF Faculty in October 2020, at a time of mutual convenience. We look forward to scheduling this conversation.

Sincerely,
The OWF Leadership

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Eleven Things Northwestern University Leadership Can Do Right Now to Protect Gender Equity in the Face of COVID-19

A Call for Immediate Action

The 2020 global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus has put the entire University community in turmoil. Broadly shared experience supported by early studies suggest the pandemic has increased gender and other inequities in academia,¹ particularly but not only with respect to inequalities flowing from disproportionate responsibilities for caregiving. Northwestern University's *Organization of Women Faculty* polled our members asking how the pandemic has affected their lives, and what might be done to help women faculty and others with caregiving responsibilities. As far as we know, ours is to date the most comprehensive, indeed perhaps the only, survey of the effect of the pandemic on Northwestern faculty.²

Many of the additional burdens created by the pandemic fall especially hard on women faculty, who are often already disadvantaged in terms of pay, and who have suffered from barriers to productivity and recognition that show up in the types of metrics the University relies on when rewarding faculty (e.g., publications, citation levels, grant awards, teaching evaluations, etc.). Women faculty are overrepresented in the teaching track and other relatively low-paid faculty positions, and in academic positions that lack job security. They often have heavier teaching, student advising and service responsibilities, alongside disproportionate caregiving and home responsibilities. Now these existing inequities are being exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, the social protests around police brutality in light of the Spring 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the finding that "essential workers" and COVID-19 related deaths are disproportionately concentrated in communities of color, have further heightened the sense that endemic racial inequities generate additional stress and burdens for people of color, including academics of color who operate in largely white contexts. In this context, there is a serious concern that Northwestern's efforts to hire, promote, and provide equitable compensation and treatment for women faculty will be irreversibly harmed by the pandemic and its fiscal fallout, with the harm falling disproportionately on junior faculty, faculty with significant caregiving responsibilities, non-tenure line faculty whose continued employment depends on teaching and service, and faculty with significant service roles at Northwestern and in the Academy more generally.

The survey inspires this Call for Immediate Action and can provide guidance for longer term plans to remedy the inequities. This Call for Immediate Action focuses on the immediate situation, encouraging the administration to put in place solutions that can help women faculty in the 2020-2021 academic

¹ J. L. Malisch et al., Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 117, 15378–15381 (2020); Viglione, Guiliana, "Are women publishing less during the pandemic? Here's what the data say," *Nature* (May 20, 2020) <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01294-9>; Brooke Peterson Gabster et al., "Challenges for the female academic during the COVID-19 pandemic," *The Lancet Correspondence* 395, 10242, P1968-1970; Ruomeng Cui et al., Gender Inequality in Research Productivity During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Harvard Business School Working Paper* 20-129.

² The survey was distributed via email to 725 full-time female faculty in August of 2020 (Feinberg School of Medicine has a separate women faculty organization, and Feinberg faculty were not surveyed); 196 women faculty responded.

year. A separate report memorializes the experiences of women faculty captured in the survey. While we appreciate the [alternative work arrangement policy](#) to help faculty and staff facing acute burdens and challenges, most of the policies are set to expire December 31, 2020. More fundamentally, too little attention has been given to ensuring equity in the longer term, and no effort has been made to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the least secure, most burdened, and least remunerated faculty. A theme of our recommendations is that the goal of equity in a world where the coronavirus is distributing burdens inequitably requires differentiated responses. We are focused on faculty, but many of these suggestions may also apply to staff and graduate students.

Enhancing gender equity in the face of COVID-19

1. ***Articulate a flexible teaching policy for the academic year, one that allows faculty to protect their health, allows caregivers to plan, and informs faculty of what we should do if we become sick.*** Faculty want to know that they will be able to teach remotely as long as the COVID health risk continues, and as long as daycares and schools are also at risk of suspending in-person teaching and daycare. At a minimum, the University should extend the option of online teaching until a safe vaccine or effective treatments are widely available. To provide both relief and back-up in case of faculty illness, a teaching policy might include co-teaching, teaching reductions, capped enrollments, resources for hiring interested advanced graduate students, and possibly creating post-doctoral teaching positions for recent Northwestern PhDs.
2. ***Provide teaching relief that can be used now or banked for a later time.*** In recognition of the extraordinary time that faculty have devoted to meetings, increased administrative burdens, learning how to teach remotely, counselling students, and more, we would encourage the administration to work actively to lessen the load. Set a ceiling on the maximum teaching load that will provide meaningful course relief to the most burdened faculty. Allow co-teaching, and let advanced graduate students become supervised course teachers. Provide course relief for faculty who step up to take on an exceptional load. Allow faculty to choose to lessen the load right now, or to go all-in now and catch up on research later. In other words, let the policy be flexibly implemented over the next three years.
3. ***Communicate an expectation that programs and schools reduce non-essential events and activities. Defer non-essential service, off-load administrative responsibilities, eliminate annual reviews, and extend contracts for as long as the pandemic persists.*** In recognition of the extraordinary work that faculty are doing to adjust to remote teaching and advising, set a numeric goal of cutting the number of events. Let faculty choose relief and cuts in responsibilities over extended due dates. Give committees and regular administrative tasks a year off. Off-load where possible the responsibilities of administrative roles, creating co-department chairs and a smaller menu of chair tasks. Put a moratorium on annual performance reviews and automatically extend teaching contracts by a year. Empower faculty and staff to help identify and request that certain tasks be relieved for the year.
4. ***Provide meaningful child-care supplements and back-up childcare options.*** Recently Northwestern's leadership repackaged existing childcare benefits as a resource for the current moment and added a modest supplemental childcare benefit (\$6 per hour or \$10 a day supplement for a total of ten days). The current policy, even with the modest supplement, is not likely to be enough to really help faculty with children who cannot attend daycare or school.

Especially since faculty with young children also tend to be paid less, we suggest quarterly lump sum supplements—back paid to the Spring 2020 quarter—for as long as daycare centers and schools remain closed. For faculty with older children, some faculty suggested that the Center for Talent Development or Northwestern work-study students might be able to provide help with older children engaged in remote learning.

5. ***Create safe and productive workspaces for faculty on and off campus.*** Faculty working from home need help replicating the office resources that exist on campus, including printing and internet support. If a home office is not a good option, faculty should be provided a safe campus office even if the campus should shut down or phase backward again. While some Northwestern schools are already providing this help, equity requires that all Northwestern faculty and staff be supported. Create an equitable means for faculty to access needed workspace-related resources.
6. ***Improve communication about policies and actions.*** Right now, COVID-related responses and policies are scattered, hard to find, and constantly shifting, and both the policies and the communication can vary by department and school. Much of the messaging focuses more on *how* to return to campus rather than on the policies that will guide the year. More transparent communication of policies, actions and resources can improve equity. Some universities (for example [here](#)) have much more informative and comprehensive coronavirus-related communication, and one-stop-websites where coronavirus policies for faculty, students, and staff are easily accessed. To improve transparency, create clear, centrally located policies. Work with the Faculty Senate to have notice and comment discussions about these policies and work with ombudspersons (item #8) and units to ensure consistent dissemination of information and implementation of flexibility and support policies.
7. ***Faculty wellness needs to be a higher priority.*** Most of the University's messaging has been about the well-being of students, which clearly we support. We also believe that more effort needs to be expended on the well-being of faculty. Rather than waiting for faculty to ask for help, or asking department chairs to do more, create a chain of faculty who check in regarding faculty wellness, perhaps via the ombudsperson recommendation (item #8). In addition, invest in faculty wellness through concrete efforts that recognize the extra workload the pandemic has created, be it Zoom-free days, limiting events and tasks (item #3), closing the University for an afternoon each week or a day every so often with the encouragement to focus on self-care, and optional community fun events. Extend Northwestern's services to faculty to show your appreciation in this moment. Provide care-based services: coronavirus testing, remote exercise classes, cost-effective to-go family dinners, help for faculty facing family-related visa problems, and maybe streamed content from our music and theatre schools.
8. ***Create positions for ombudspersons to help affected faculty.*** Some chairs and administrators have proactively reached out to department members, creating individualized help and adjustments, but others are overwhelmed or insensitive. This unevenness contributes to inequality. Senior and even emeritus faculty might be tapped to become school, University, and department-level ombudspersons who reach out to faculty, troubleshoot and work around barriers, and protect the most vulnerable faculty from having to be self-advocates asking for exceptional accommodations.

9. ***Promise and start making a real plan to remedy the inequalities the coronavirus has revealed, created, or exacerbated.*** For faculty who teach, advise, lead, and engage in diverse forms of caregiving, it is an “all hands on deck” moment. For faculty with few caregiving, administrative and teaching responsibilities, the virus impact may be significantly less. The recovery plan must focus on past and present inequities. Our survey revealed that especially faculty who have lower salaries, or who are very close to retirement, are upset that everyone’s 403(b) employer contributions were cut at the same rate. Tenure clock delays are helpful, but it may also be necessary to realign tenure standards to reflect pandemic realities, and faculty want clear communication about how extenuating circumstances will be considered in promotion decisions. Additionally, faculty want to know how the administration will remedy pay inequities generated by more time spent at a lower rank and by events or achievements that in normal times would have led to raises. The OWF has long advocated for creative strategies to make up for pay inequities. The crisis created by the coronavirus offers a ready chance to deliver. Meanwhile a failure to address the pandemic’s inequities will compound pre-existing inequities. Work with the OWF, the Faculty Senate, and the Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion to create a post-COVID recovery plan, driven by the philosophy that equity requires that those most affected be remedied first and most. A National Academy of Sciences opinion article suggests a guide for this next stage of planning (available [here](#)).
10. ***Appoint a new Associate Provost for Faculty with the responsibility for faculty wellness, career recovery, and post-virus equity.*** In recent years, the Associate Provost for Faculty has been instrumental in developing new policies and procedures to support women faculty. This role is needed during these challenging times to help faculty navigate the challenges of the pandemic and to help implement the ideas above. This appointment should come with a charge to work with the Faculty Senate, Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion, and the OWF to formulate the recovery strategy (item #9).
11. ***Talk to faculty about this action plan.*** The OWF invites Provost Hagerty, President Shapiro, and whichever Deans are available to participate in a Zoom conversation on these points, to be held in October 2020 at a date of mutual convenience. We would like to hear how you plan to move forward on this Call for Immediate Action, and we will invite OWF faculty to participate in a moderated session regarding this Call for Immediate Action.