

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
University Senate

Sense of the Senate Resolution on Faculty Evaluation During the Pandemic

11-20/21-FAC — October 27, 2020

WHEREAS, The global pandemic has and will disrupt academic and personal lives in myriad ways that were not anticipated when policies related to faculty evaluations and RTP procedures were developed. Each individual's work and life has been differentially disrupted. Therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That the sense of the University Senate of Humboldt State University is that faculty evaluations should be conducted according to the principles outlined in the following memorandum.

This memorandum outlines how these disruptions should be considered in relation to RTP candidate evaluation and lecturer evaluation. Briefly, review committees should contextualize faculty achievements, maintain an empathetic understanding of life during the pandemic, and adjust expectations rather than simply apply criteria and standards that were developed for a pre-Covid-19 world.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic may affect some or all of the teaching, service, and research/scholarship/creative activity work of a faculty member. Effects may result from the closing of campus, a mandated shift to online instruction, the closure of research sites and performance outlets, the suspension of laboratory and analysis facilities for scientific research, the inability to travel, the cancellation of conferences and performances, unanticipated childcare and home schooling commitments, new caregiver responsibilities, and so on.

To fairly evaluate a faculty member, it will be essential to consider the candidate's achievements prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and specifically whether it is likely that the faculty member would have met the normal evaluation standards if a pandemic had not occurred. The effects of the pandemic will vary for individuals. The concerns outlined below will need to be taken into consideration by review committees for several years to come.

A. Teaching Related Considerations

1. Collegial evaluations of teaching should be the primary indicator of teaching quality. Direct peer observations should contextualize classes shifted to online learning, and give credit to

faculty who made significant changes in their teaching pedagogy. Different courses face different levels of challenges in online modes; laboratory and studio courses, courses with experiential components, and large enrollment classes all present different challenges to the faculty member (and students) suddenly required to shift online. Observers should consider the challenges of a particular course, and candidates should summarize the work undertaken to convert course pedagogies in their reports. Some courses are challenging to observe directly, for example a face-to-face course that has room occupancy limits to maintain social distancing, but we should expect faculty colleagues to do all they can to participate in collegial evaluations.

2. Carefully interpret student evaluations of teaching for courses forced online, and for all courses taught during the pandemic. Many faculty are teaching semester-long online courses for the first time. Some courses are extremely difficult to convert to an online modality and some students dislike online modalities. For some students, online learning is very difficult, and students may submit negative evaluations that have little to do with the quality of the instructor's efforts or the instructor's ability. Review committees must contextualize the differences that faculty may see in these student evaluations relative to other similar courses taught in different modalities.

Review committees should draw no negative inferences if faculty elect to exclude Spring 2020 Student Evaluations of Teaching. Faculty are allowed (by 23-19) to exclude the results of Student Evaluations conducted during Spring 2020 from their materials submitted for performance reviews such as WPAFs.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic is a paramount contextual factor when evaluating teaching. Nonetheless, teaching excellence is expected of our faculty, and faculty are expected to engage in professional development to improve their online teaching effectiveness. Faculty should detail their efforts to attain a level of excellence in teaching, including efforts to improve equity and inclusion in their courses.

B. Research/ Scholarship/ Creative Activities (RSCA) Related Considerations

1) Evaluators should evaluate a candidate's RSCA potential during a future career at HSU. This will require consideration of what a candidate's RSCA accomplishments would/will be apart from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This impact may differ depending on where in the evaluation cycle a faculty member is (e.g., a fifth-year faculty member putting together their RTP file for tenure and promotion vs. a second-year faculty member preparing a development plan). This may especially impact faculty that are very early in their probationary period, because their ability to initiate and develop RSCA programs has been significantly curtailed before it had a chance to be established.

For example, some review committees might include statements similar to: "Although the

candidate did not meet the specified requirements for Excellent in RSCA, we believe that they would have if the pandemic had not intervened, and therefore we are evaluating them as Excellent in RSCA.”

2) Faculty should clearly explain the impact of COVID-19 on their RSCA activities to help review committees contextualize their work. The faculty narrative statement should also explain the research/scholarship/creative program prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, current activities and outline expectations for activities following a return to “normalcy.”

3) Faculty are strongly encouraged to highlight personal challenges that have affected their productivity, and evaluators are expected to recognize these challenges and be supportive. While evaluators need to understand the impact of COVID-19 upon a candidate, they are NOT entitled to know all of the specific reasons for that impact, because such reasons could disclose sensitive personal and/or medical information.

C. Service Related Considerations

1) For some faculty, the COVID-19 pandemic created new and unexpected service loads, as they work(ed) to help the university, their departments and our students adjust. For other faculty, service opportunities may have been sharply curtailed and/or eliminated. For example, those faculty for whom face-to-face interaction in the community is an essential part of their service have been deeply affected. Such faculty must be given the same consideration as when contextualizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their professional lives. Faculty should describe their service activities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, what happened to this work during the pandemic, and plans for the future.

2) While evaluators need to understand the impact of COVID-19 upon a candidate, they are NOT entitled to know all of the specific reasons for that impact, because such reasons could disclose sensitive personal and/or medical information.