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Provost Elizabeth Chilton
Vice Provost, Laura Griner Hill
Vice Provost, Craig Parks
Vice Provost, Mary Wack
Dean Dori Borjesson
Dean Lisa Gloss
Dean Chip Hunter
Dean Matthew Jockers
Dean Mary Koithan
Dean Mark Leid
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Dean John Tomkowiak
Dean Michael Trevisan
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The Global Pandemic of COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated the already substantial gender and racial inequities of US society across a wide range of occupations and workplaces.¹ Scholars and journalists who are tracking conditions draw on decades of research on gender, race, labor, and care work to help understand the current crisis and to make recommendations for addressing challenges in equitable and just ways.² WSU faculty, including several Affiliate Faculty members in the Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), have made influential contributions to this body of important research and teach undergraduate and graduate classes on gender, race, labor, and care work.³ As Gender Studies scholars and scholars concerned with equity at Washington State University, we add to this dialogue both a brief local analysis of how COVID-19 has magnified existing inequities and a set of recommendations for supporting the women faculty who are disproportionately managing the often invisible labor of increased parenting and other caregiving responsibilities (at home and at work). We send these

¹ The [Pew Research Center](#) reported in early June 2020 that, unlike the Great Recession, more women than men lost jobs from February to May 2020 and Hispanic women and immigrants suffered especially disproportionate losses. The [CDC](#) reports that the racism, stigma and limited access to healthcare undermine prevention efforts for black, Hispanic, and Indigenous people.

² Influential early research includes Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, and Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking, 1989.

³ Among others, see Zhang, Hong, Julie A. Kmec, and Tori Byington. "Gendered Career Decisions in the Academy: Job Refusal and Job Departure Intentions among Academic Dual-Career Couples." [Review of Higher Education](#), 2019. See Bahiyyah M. Muhammad and Melanie-Angela Neuilly, *Mothering From the Field: the Impact of Motherhood on Site-Based Research*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019. See also, Kelly Ward, *Academic Motherhood: How Faculty Manage Work and Family*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

recommendations to you, as WSU administrators involved in decision making concerning educators who are deemed essential workers, gender issues, the pandemic, and the University's plans for the fall semester. At times in this letter we refer specifically to unique aspects of the various WSU campuses and we recognize that each campus and extension offices around the state have their own local plans for the fall. Additionally, the letter largely focuses on faculty, but the circumstances we describe apply to staff as well. We believe that the WSU system is positioned to take a leading role with respect to how higher education and other agencies might address increased burdens of invisible labor and workplace inequities now magnified by COVID-19. WSU will benefit from participation across the system for a comprehensive and nimble response.

Inequities in Care Work & Invisible Academic Labor

The burden of care during this pandemic is decidedly gendered, both in the US and globally, as observers and researchers have begun to evidence.⁴ A widely circulating article from *The New York Times*, supported by initial data, details both the uneven responsibilities for care and the uneven perception of who is fulfilling those responsibilities.⁵ Other research, published just before the outbreak, confirms a very persistent pattern in the gendered division of labor in US families.⁶

Much like women perform the lion's share of "care work" in the home, women faculty disproportionately shoulder service and mentoring in the US academy, work that is largely invisible and/or undervalued.⁷ This includes supporting all students by writing letters of recommendation and other professional mentoring of students, as well as accommodation and guidance with personal problems and mental and physical health issues for students, something only exacerbated by the pandemic. As alluded to in Vice Provost Hill's 22 May 2020 letter to faculty, it is not a surprise that the onset of COVID-19 has reduced scholarly productivity as faculty had to quickly shift instruction to distance learning, public schools and daycares closed, and many caregivers became responsible for managing children's schooling or the needs of family members of various ages. Given that at WSU more women than men teach in instructor and clinical track positions (<https://ir.wsu.edu/instructional-faculty/>; note the conversion to career track is not yet reflected in IR data) with heavier teaching loads than tenure-track faculty, the burden of shifting to online teaching is greater. It is also likely, given their primarily roles as instructors, career-track faculty may be called upon (and feel obligated or pressured given less

4 See K. Power, "The Covid-19 Pandemic Has Increased the Care Burden of Women and Families" in *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy*, 2020. See also [E.Rivero](#) for the Pulte Institute for Global Development 5/21/20. See also, [L.Grose](#), "They Go to Mommy First." *New York Times*, 7/15/20

5 See [C.Cain Miller](#), "Nearly Half of Men Say They Do Most of the Home Schooling. 3 Percent of Women Agree." *New York Times*, 5/6/2020.

6 See [C.Cain Miller](#), "Young Men Embrace Gender Equality but They Still Don't Vacuum." *New York Times*, 2/11/20.

7 See the 2017 article by the Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Group, "The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments," in the *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*. On the invisible labor burden that women and particularly BIPOC face in navigating historically white and male institutions, see T. Melaku, *You Don't Look Like a Lawyer: Black Women and Systemic Gendered Racism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2019); C. Guarnio and V. Borden, "Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?" *Research in Higher Education* 58 (2017): 672-94; D. Harley, "Maids of Academe: African American Women Faculty at Predominately White Institutions," *Journal of African American Studies* 12 (2008): 19-36.

secure employment) to step in should another faculty member fall ill. As more data is available, we need to recognize that these are again gendered patterns, even if there are exceptions to them.⁸

Local Conditions

In light of the changing nature of this pandemic, decisions are difficult to make. WSU is already making important strides in its handling of COVID-19. For example, the swift and necessary decision to move instruction online after spring break in March 2020 helped keep students who had been living on campus, WSU employees, and the Pullman community relatively protected from the first wave of COVID-19. The frequent town hall meetings have kept the community updated on academic and other plans. We also understand that the decision to move to distance delivery in the fall semester 2020 is designed with health and safety in mind.

We also commend WSU for the steps it has already taken to recognize the effects of the unprecedented crisis of COVID 19 on faculty, particularly non-tenured faculty. Course evaluations of teaching, with possible dips, likely associated with the sudden switch to online modalities in spring 2020, will not be factored into annual reviews. We appreciate that WSU gave non-tenured faculty an option to delay Intensive Progress Toward Tenure Review as well as an extension of the tenure clock by one year. The administration conducted a survey of faculty at the end of the spring 2020 term to learn about the ways in which COVID-19 affected teaching and workload and to inform decision making. WSU has arranged for incorporation of new fields into Activity Insight to document the ways in which labor has been affected by COVID-19. We are heartened by administrative efforts to ensure that the campuses are healthy (in all dimensions of the word) and safe work environments. To that end, WSU has included faculty with expertise in epidemiology, infectious diseases, and statistical modeling on COVID-19 decision-making committees.

Even as the provisions WSU has instituted acknowledge many of the challenges of significantly altered conditions and additional burdens brought on by COVID-19, the university and worldwide situation has created a new set of expectations for many instructors and tenure- and career-track faculty members. These new expectations are apparent in the increased workload placed on faculty, beginning in the spring of 2020 but particularly over the summer of 2020, when most faculty contracts are not in effect and they are not paid. Meetings about safety, scheduling, and logistics of returning to campus, trainings, and a new on-line instruction mastery certificate are technically optional or voluntary but missing them puts faculty invested in providing an exceptional learning experience at a great disadvantage moving into the fall semester. Further, various and at times uncoordinated efforts are contributing to rather than alleviating increased expectations, and our concern is that this is setting an unsustainable pattern for the next academic year and beyond. While the current situation demands more from everyone, invitations and expectations for meetings with faculty concerning the academic year, at times with less than a week's notice, are the norm this summer. What is more, these demands follow an academically and personally challenging spring, from which many have not yet had a chance to recuperate. It is also important to recognize that the larger context for these

⁸ The documentation and concern about this pattern has appeared in various [publications](#). See also D. Matthews, "Pandemic Lockdown Holding Back Female Academics, Data Show," in [Times Higher Education](#) 6/25/2020 .

requests or “opportunities” is not neutral and include administrative discussions of budget reductions, layoffs, and furloughs, with which faculty at all levels and in all units are understandably very anxious. With each request comes likely additional stress. Crucially, these efforts are also reducing the time faculty spend carrying out their research and creative activities in the summer which, despite not all being on contract, are widely understood to be necessary to achieve productivity standards.

Layered Crises in Labor

We underscore that for many faculty, COVID-19 compounds and makes visible the conditions that have long rendered academic employment and productivity precarious, and this is especially true for women of color, untenured and career-track faculty, and instructors who identify as women. As cited above, empirical evidence from existing research on academic workload finds that the burden of invisible service labor on women is a major contributor to inequitable conditions. Immediately, the added labor associated with COVID-19—a proliferation of planning meetings, preparation for altered teaching modalities, caring for the safety and well-being of students, and other basic functions of the university—has compounded other more invisible work, such as the support and mentoring of staff and faculty, and especially of undergraduate and graduate students who may feel isolated and scared. Given the current surge in positive COVID-19 cases in most US states, including WA, the likelihood of a second wave of positive cases, we anticipate there will be even greater demands placed on faculty. For those in Spokane, many are also frontline healthcare workers who will be carrying higher clinical loads.

Complicating such expectations for increased labor at WSU, even in the best of times the Pullman area in particular has had a dearth of childcare options. Finding childcare is challenging all over the state; WSU –Vancouver has already closed its Child Development Program on the WSU Vancouver for the 2020-2021 academic year. While WSU has worked to address this problem, the social distancing and possible closing of options due to the pandemic have only compounded the problem, as it has throughout the US.⁹ Furthermore, and especially with the late July order by Governor Jay Inslee to again limit group gatherings to no more than ten people, it remains unclear what kind of schedule the various local school districts will return to in the fall, whether alternating days for different grades to decrease class size, or a combination of online and in person instruction, or fully online. Even as a plan develops, one thing that has become very clear over the past few months is that many aspects of our lives, including childcare and K-12 education, will remain highly unpredictable and will require faculty who are family caretakers to adapt, sometimes with little notice.

Recommendations

WSU must address these circumstances with support as well as flexibility. With respect to flexibility, it is important that meetings, trainings, and deadlines build in advance notice, provide more than one offering, and not assume a normative (9-5) workday schedule. Requirements for synchronous remote teaching, and numerous requests for time-specific participation can be especially challenging if partners also have inflexible job demands, children’s schooling needs occur during specific times of day, or shared internet bandwidth among household members needs to be coordinated. Moreover, while a number of decisions needed to be made quickly at

⁹ See [E. Sohn](#), “When Child Care Centers Close, Parents Scramble to Adapt” 6/10/20, *New York Times*.

the start of the pandemic, it is increasingly clear that no one knows the magnitude, course or duration of the virus's spread in our nation. As such, it is important that we create structures that will allow us as an institution to be responsive in an ongoing way. And in doing so we need to be mindful of the inequities outlined here and the challenges faculty are facing.

As a land-grant university, WSU has a particular role to play in contributing to a healthy society, and that role is surely even more important during a pandemic. The \$2 trillion CARES Act allocated only \$3.5 billion for childcare, but it recognized the need for additional support. Some have called for an even more comprehensive national public policy solution, or "Care Corps," to keep mothers in particular in the workforce, given indications as early as April 2020 of high levels of anxiety and burnout for women with combined responsibilities of employment and family care work.¹⁰ Short of new federal policy and funding, we believe that WSU should take steps to alleviate some of the invisible work burden in academia and the increasingly visible work burden for care work in the family which takes varied forms that may include elders and school-age children, as well as kin and vulnerable individuals in the household or at a distance. Indeed, WSU should follow Washington state in its responsible leadership in handling COVID-19 and serve as a model for other institutions with deliberate efforts to address the social, mental, and physical health of faculty.

1. Form a demographically representative faculty committee, with respect to faculty rank, stream, age, gender, and heritage, to create a comprehensive plan going forward and with particular attention to accommodations and greater overall flexibility until a safe vaccine is available. Affiliates of the Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) as well as members of the Association of Faculty Women (AFW), the President's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and the President's Commission on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (GIESO) could be key partners in populating this committee and the larger efforts outlined here.
2. Form a demographically representative committee of staff members to create a comprehensive plan going forward, given likely continued challenges. The university cannot run without its staff and yet they are the ones who will:
 - a. be most likely to perform work that cannot be done remotely,
 - b. have jobs such as cleaning the campus, serving food, and interacting with students that entail high risk of exposure to COVID-19,
 - c. have the fewest resources to help them with caretaking.
3. At the earliest possible time, craft a COVID-19 Health and Wellness Policy with enhanced or modified sick leave and work accommodations for COVID-19 personal illness/quarantine, family leave for employees' responsibilities for care of COVID-19 illness in the family, and family leave for accommodation of care responsibilities for children in altered school or childcare schedules due to COVID-19. Particular attention should be paid to support for employees with underlying conditions and also people who are pregnant as they might be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, according to the CDC. We suggest that the COVID-19 Health and Wellness Policy take as a guide the emergency expansion of the FMLA in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. These federal initiatives, for public employees and private employers with under 500 employees, cover up to 80 hours of sick leave (at their regular pay rate) if an

¹⁰ [Lean In Organization](#), May 2020

employee is not able to work because they are quarantined and up to 80 hours of sick leave (at two-thirds their regular pay rate) if they must care for another subject to quarantine or provide child caregiving disrupted by COVID-19. WSU should also inform employees of the new federal sick leave and family care leave options that are covered under this federal law until 31 December 2020.

4. In consultation with faculty leadership (chairs and directors) and faculty representatives from all ranks, create guidance for how instruction or other work will be covered when faculty fall ill such that it does not fall disproportionately to women and go uncompensated.
5. In the interest of maintaining research and creative activities agendas, revisit the rules surrounding sabbatical applications—some old, some new—requiring faculty to relocate (or otherwise travel extensively/prove they cannot perform their research without a sabbatical) and requiring extramural funding applications. A relocation requirement may not be possible for faculty with family in Pullman. To the second point, federal and private agencies are likely to reduce funding as they face budget shortfalls. Travel may continue to be restricted, and even as it becomes more possible it may be even more challenging than it has previously been for faculty to travel or relocate as lone caregivers or if spouses/partners are unable to accommodate this or carry the increased care work due to COVID-19 at home on their own. Funding agencies have shifted priorities in response to the pandemic and may also have restricted budgets that will make grant getting even more challenging in some areas of work.
6. Create a fund to help university employees pay for the additional dependent care they will need if schools do not reopen on the regular schedule. This fund could also help faculty recover cost of technology and internet use, which is increasing for most instructional faculty in the Pullman area and likely across the state.
7. Explore possibilities to allow faculty to repurpose university provided research funds for dependent care if schools do not reopen on the regular schedule.
8. Offer optional tenure-clock extensions beyond one year, at least until a safe vaccine is available.
9. Suspend normal expectations for employee productivity (including standards for tenure, promotion, reappointments, and basing future merit pay decisions on performance) until a safe vaccine is available. All people are affected by COVID-19 in some sense: living in the midst of a pandemic is extraordinarily stressful and under current conditions certain forms of work are taking longer or are impossible to complete. Our expectations for essential faculty and staff should be revised to take these challenges into account.
10. Offer temporary reductions to work schedules (e.g., temporary policies that enable voluntary short-term reductions in a faculty appointment with a commensurate pay reduction), modeled on provisions in FFCRA that allow for flexible use of family leave for childcare responsibilities, illness, and other conditions due to COVID-19.
11. Allow faculty to withdraw from all non-essential faculty service without penalty until there is a COVID-19 vaccine (such as UCORE renewal curriculum reform, peer teaching reviews, attendance at non-essential faculty meetings). Administration should provide specific messaging to chairs/directors in scaling back and minimizing non-essential service, with attention and tracking to the typical division of labor that pertains.
12. Allow all faculty to opt-out of face-to-face service due to caretaking responsibilities.

COVID-19 imposes enormous burdens on students, staff, faculty, and administrators at WSU. As faculty concerned with gender equity, we wish especially to draw your attention to the disproportionate burdens on faculty who are parents and caregivers and to those whose service for WSU, often caring labor, typically functions invisibly. These burdens will be cumulative and have differential impacts. This will be evident not just during the period before there is a vaccine but going forward in academic careers.

We do not see these recommendations as exhaustive and perhaps some are already being discussed. They are also not equally important nor easily implemented, underscoring the need for faculty and staff committees and existing organizations and scholars with expertise concerned with equity to be involved in discussions and decision making. We hope these recommendations may serve as a starting point or catalyst for other ideas and encourage colleagues across the WSU campuses to adapt what is useful to the local context and budget.

We want WSU to be a leader in the higher education community so ask you to consider how WSU can minimize these unevenly distributed burdens by creative policy-making, management of facilities, an equitable distribution of University resources, flexible standards, and evaluation metrics.¹¹ These are positive changes that can build an even better future for all genders in the university community.

Thank you for considering our suggestions and for your flexibility in these uncertain times.

Sincerely,

¹¹ For concrete ways to conceptualize responses, see [J. 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, June 17, 2020.