

To: West Chester University Faculty
From: Jeffery L. Osgood, Jr., Deputy Provost & Vice President for Academic Operations
Mark Rimple, President WCU-APSCUF
Re: Tenure & Promotion Updates/Impact of COVID-19 on the Faculty Experience
Date: September 9, 2020

We are pleased to announce that the Provost's website has been updated to reflect the recent changes in the Collective Bargaining Agreement relating to tenure, promotion, and evaluation, including the pages Faculty Personnel Items (<https://www.wcupa.edu/admin/provost/facultyPersonnel.aspx>) and Forms and Policies (<https://www.wcupa.edu/admin/provost/formsPolicies.aspx>).

These resources have been compiled to assist faculty and evaluators in meeting contractual deadlines and adapting to the changes in the newly approved and combined Tenure and Promotion policy (<https://www.wcupa.edu/admin/provost/documents/WCU%20Tenure%20and%20Promotion%20Policies%209.3.20.pdf>). A summary of the changes can be found in a document available at this link and on the Provost's website: <https://www.wcupa.edu/admin/provost/documents/Summary%20of%20changes%202020%20local%20tenure%20and%20promotion%20policy%209.03.2020.pdf>

A special note of thanks to Kristen Crossney and the local chapter of APSCUF in leading the update process and for ensuring we have clarity and currency across all of the related documents. From the Provost's Office, thanks also go to Cheryl Neale-McFall for working to update the above referenced websites.

As it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on the faculty experience, we first want to thank and commend each and every one of our amazing faculty in remaining agile, flexible, and nimble during this unprecedented time. We understand that the impact of COVID-19 goes far beyond the teaching that each of you do throughout the semester. Its impacts range from limiting your ability to present at conferences to completing service obligations in ways that you had not originally planned. It is because of this that we want to reaffirm for the fall 2020 semester a modified statement from Chancellor Dan Greenstein and former APSCUF President Ken Mash from the previous semester for use at West Chester University:

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty member X moved face-to face classes to an alternative modality over the summer break. Additionally, because of travel restrictions and other social distancing protocols in place across the globe, the faculty member was unable to travel to conferences to present already accepted paper(s), was not able to meet with certain committees/service groups due to meeting cancellations, and was not able to or fully carry out their service obligations in the ways originally planned. Reviewers are reminded to carefully consider these exceptional circumstances in the review of this faculty member's work.”

In the aforementioned joint statement, it was indicated that for the spring 2020 semester that it was the discretion of the faculty member whether or not to include student evaluation data as part of their performance review. Because our university did not generate any student evaluation results reports from this spring semester, no faculty should be in a situation where they feel compelled or required to include any student evaluation data from the spring 2020 semester.

As it relates to the fall 2020 semester, student evaluation data will be collected for all courses and results reports will only be provided directly to the faculty member. This means that if a faculty member is required (i.e. probationary faculty, those going through the promotion process, and/or the five-year evaluation cycle) to report student evaluation data from the fall 2020 semester, they will be responsible for providing those reports to their respective evaluators.

We want to strongly urge all evaluators to be mindful that data points collected in Fall 2020 are only one aspect of evaluating teaching effectiveness. It is in this spirit that we also offer the following as a strong statement of our joint philosophy on student data from this particular semester, which may be included in the narratives accompanying any faculty review conducted during the fall 2020 semester:

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty member X moved face-to-face classes to an alternative modality over the summer break. The shift in modality of a course is something that typically takes considerable time and includes various iterations, reflecting a faculty member’s commitment to continuous improvement. During the fall 2020 semester, the West Chester University faculty made this transition over the course of a short period of time in order to be able to continue providing instruction to the students of the Commonwealth and to protect the health and safety of our campus community. While the faculty rose to the challenge, the student evaluation data generated from the fall 2020 semester is likely a very small snapshot of the overall quality of the course, not a true reflection of the faculty member’s skill and effectiveness in the classroom.”

Now, more than ever, peer observations are a critical part of this process and a workgroup led by WCU-APSCUF is crafting a set of best practice guidelines on how to conduct peer observations during this period of alternative modalities. They are on track to release these guidelines around September 15th, and we look forward to providing this resource to the campus community. Please note that peer observations may happen before then, but we ask that evaluators review these recommendations and take them into consideration before finalizing faculty reviews.

In terms of scholarly activity and professional development, opportunities to complete research projects, perform, or do other kinds of work might have been impacted by the pandemic since the spring of 2020. While the aforementioned statewide communication from that semester should be used to explain those missed opportunities, it is understood that faculty may still be encountering some difficulties due to the pandemic slowing down or cancelling certain opportunities for research, creative work, or professional development. While some conferences, exhibitions, concert series, or libraries with special collections may have gone virtual, others may have been postponed, cancelled, or closed indefinitely, impacting many of our colleagues. In addition, the training and sheer amount of unplanned work needed to create an effective remote

experience for our students and aid in their retention through quality teaching and advising may have also taken significant time from a faculty member's scholarly or creative activity agenda. We would like to urge the use of a modified version of the spring 2020 language for this area in narratives that can accompany faculty review conducted during the fall 2020 semester. It is imperative that faculty find ways to document or explain these situations and how they have impacted their scholarly or creative activity agenda.

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty member X's plan of research or creative activity was impacted in the following ways: [insert explanation of specific barriers here]. Therefore, they were unable to achieve their original research or creative activity goals, which included: [insert original scholarly or creative activity goals here]. However, the faculty member sought to continue their work in this area by accomplishing the following outcomes despite the barriers encountered: [insert outcomes that were achieved during review period]. Reviewers are reminded to carefully consider these exceptional circumstances in the review of this faculty member's work.”

Again, we want to thank all of the faculty for their hard work and wish them all the best in realizing a successful fall semester.