

# The Need for Gender-Equitable Response Measures for Women at CWRU during COVID-19

By CWRU Women Faculty Senate Committee  
June 17, 2020

On Sunday, March 8, 2020, Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) faculty, staff, and students were notified that classes were to be taught remotely and, by March 15, that most campus facilities and classrooms would close to in-person use for the remainder of the Spring Semester due to the health risks imposed by the novel coronavirus. This led to a quick move to online learning for faculty and students, a virtual commencement, and the need for many caregivers in particular to rethink how their research, writing, and instruction would occur while working from home.

CWRU has been expeditious in its response to keeping all members of the campus community safe and supported during the Coronavirus shutdown. In particular, on March 24, 2020, Provost Ben Vinson III offered a one-year extension on the pre-tenure period to all pre-tenure faculty members who were not being reviewed during the 2019-20 academic year. By the May 8th, 2020, roughly 80% of all pre-tenure faculty (men and women) and, more specifically, 82% of eligible women faculty accepted this extension. This Committee both acknowledges and is grateful for the support of faculty thus far, but would like to continue to advocate for more gender-equitable responses and measures during this time which can ensure that pre-tenure and non-tenure-track women faculty aren't further impacted in disadvantaged ways as compared to their colleagues on campus whom are men.

Within the Academy, women, and those with intersecting marginalized identities, are experiencing the increased burden and strain of caregiving, the impacts of systematic sexism and racism, and the demands of keeping up with research, grant writing, service, and teaching. Women are being disproportionately and adversely affected during the Coronavirus shutdown as compared to their male colleagues,<sup>1</sup> including disproportionate responsibility for child and elder care; increases in daily household responsibilities; and less time and flexibility to dedicate to manuscript preparation journal submissions, grant applications, and tenure clock requirements.

Of concern, the impacts of COVID-19 may be further skewing a playing field in higher education that was never equitable in the first place. "We have to be very cautious that we are not privileging those who are able to use the coronavirus situation as time to race ahead of their peers, who are held back not by talent or aspiration but by the need to do homeschooling and put three meals a day on the table."<sup>2</sup> The financial impact on women faculty during the coronavirus shutdown is disproportionate to that of their colleagues. According to Inside HigherEd, **women made up 59% of unemployment claims** during the first weeks of the COVID19 shutdown.<sup>3</sup> A potential **\$1 Trillion could be lost from global growth** as women are being pushed out of the workforce during the shutdown.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fazackerley, A. (2020) (Dr. Elizabeth Hannon, deputy editor of the British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, reported that a "negligible number of submissions to the Journal from women occurred in [April 2020]."). See also Amano-Patiño N., et al., (2020) (There is a widening gender divide in article submission to economist journals).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* (quoting Prof James Wilsdon, Director of the new Research on Research Institute based at the Wellcome Trust). While men may also feel some impact due to working from home, Dr. Anneli Jefferson of Cardiff University argues that "women will probably be disadvantaged more strongly." *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, G. (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Curran, E. (2020).

“Last year, women made up the majority of the U.S. workforce for the first time in almost a decade. In March and April, they accounted for 55% of the job losses, and more than that in women-dominated sectors . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

For women graduate students and junior women faculty with overwhelming student debt, an already substantial gender pay gap, and nationwide hiring freezes, the current economic reality for most women in higher education is grim. “Because of known salary inequities for women faculty, especially women faculty of color, financial stressors are likely to be compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and recession—particularly for households headed by women or single women, and predominantly for those in contingent faculty positions. Furthermore, some institutions are eliminating contributions to retirement accounts, a major issue for women who have an already well-documented pay gap and thus receive less in employer contributions to retirement, thereby exacerbating disparities in lifetime earnings.”<sup>6</sup> Additional negative impact comes from one of the solutions: extending the tenure or promotions window. Delaying a salary increase by an extra year is financially detrimental in the long run, particularly where more women than men accept the extension.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, caregivers of color have experienced additional stresses as our awareness increases of about the systemic racial inequities and injustices that have been laid bare by the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

Again, while this Committee recognizes the effort the University has made to extend pre-tenure deadlines, this Committee is asking for additional protections for women faculty and staff at the University:

- Protections for non-tenure track faculty, particularly those who are research faculty and grant funded
- Education of tenure and promotion committees across campus, specifically focusing on the ways the impact of the pandemic will disproportionately affect women and faculty of color
- Consideration of potential bias in tenure review if faculty took extensions
- Consideration of potential bias in course evaluations of women during this time
- Protection of Adjunct and other Special Faculty who are overwhelmingly women and are often the first cut during financial strains

---

<sup>5</sup> Banjo, S. (2020) (“Families make tough decisions when it comes to who’s going to care and provide for the family in the pandemic—and in many cases, maximizing household income means the woman stays home,” says C. Nicole Mason, Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. “Couple that with the disproportionate impact of job losses on women during this pandemic, and it could have a devastating economic impact on families, as well as women’s long-term earnings and career advancement. . . .” Mason says U.S. policymakers and companies now face a choice: Give up the hard-fought gains among working women, or use the pandemic to formalize policies that could help engender an equal recovery, including paid sick leave, flexible working arrangements, and child-care support.)

<sup>6</sup> Malisch, J., et al. (2020).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* (“[T]enure clock . . . extensions can exclude faculty members from positions of power that require tenure. It will prevent them from applying for large research center grants that require the primary investigator to be tenured. Tenure clock measures will also make the faculty member out of sync with funding mechanisms with time restrictions, such as years after PhD earned. More importantly, extensions decrease long-term earning potential . . . .”)

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* (“[I]nstructors must attend to students in a time of high stress, exacerbating known gender inequalities in mentoring. Faculty of color are also expected to sustain the inclusive community of students at their institution—a form of underappreciated labor that carries a heavy toll.”)

- Sensitivity to academic calendar changes for the 2020 fall semester that will make evening and weekend academic requirements inequitable for women given their childcare, family, and eldercare responsibilities
- Adoption of flexible working arrangements
- Increased subsidization of private and public childcare and elder care
- Analysis of policy and structural adjustments at the University and its Schools and Departments for gender impact and intersectionality
- Gathering of statistics related to the impact of COVID-19 on women at CWRU, and the University's efforts to support this sector of the work force
- Inclusion of women support staff who aid faculty, students, and postdocs in these considerations

## **References**

Amano-Patiño, N., Faraglia, E., Giannitsarou, C., & Hasna, Z. (2020) Who is doing new research in the time of COVID-19? Not the female economists. Retrieved June 25, 2020 from <https://voxeu.org/article/who-doing-new-research-time-covid-19-not-female-economists>

Anderson, G. (2020). New analysis says pandemic hits women graduates hardest. Retrieved on May 22, 2020 from <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/05/21/new-analysis-says-pandemic-hits-women-graduates-hardest#.XsaIP5dn8u4.link>

Banjo, S. (2020). A Decade's Worth of Progress for Working Women Evaporated Overnight. Retrieved June 3, 2020 from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-03/coronavirus-is-disproportionately-impacting-women>

Curran, E. (2020). Women's Job Cuts May Shave \$1 Trillion Off Global GDP, Citi Says. Retrieved May 22, 2020 from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-21/women-s-job-losses-could-shave-1-trillion-off-global-gdp>

Fazackerley, A. (2020). Women's research plummets during lockdown - but articles from men increase. Retrieved on May 22, 2020 from <https://amp.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/12/womens-research-plummets-during-lockdown-but-articles-from-men-increase>

Ferguson, D. (2020). 'I feel like a 1950s housewife': how lockdown has exposed gender divide. Retrieved on May 22, 2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/i-feel-like-a-1950s-housewife-how-lockdown-has-exposed-the-gender-divide>

Hinsliff, G. (2020) As the lockdown bites, it's women who are taking the strain. Retrieved on May 22, 2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/17/lockdown-women-working-mothers-coronavirus-home-working>

Malisch, J., Harris, B., Sherrer, S., Lewis, K., Shepherd, S., McCarthy, P., Spott, J., Karam, E., Moustaid-Moussa, N., McCrory Calarco, J., Ramalingam, L., Talley, A., Cañas-Carrell, J., Ardon-Dryer, K., Dana A. Weiser, D., Bernal, X. & Deitloff, J. (2020). Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity. Retrieved June 25 from <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2020/06/24/2010636117>