



APSA Presidential Task Force Statement on COVID-19's Implications for Personnel & Career Matters

Executive Summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted political scientists' ability to address the core responsibilities of the profession: teaching, researching, and serving the campus and broader community. The following statement illustrates the unequal burdens of the changes and proposes solutions for institutions, departments, and the discipline should take to address the impact on political scientists' wellbeing and career trajectory.

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended every aspect of our lives, with profound implications for political scientists' ability to teach and advise students, conduct research, and engage in professional and public service. Here we delineate the negative impacts of the pandemic with regard to personnel and career matters, outline how these burdens are borne disproportionately in ways that replicate preexisting inequalities in our profession, and propose strategies that our departments, institutions, and the profession can undertake to mitigate these impacts and disparities.

Burdens

The negative impacts of the coronavirus on professional development and personnel matters are still unfolding and they will become clearer as the academic year begins. Based upon our experiences so far, the pandemic is increasing the burdens faced by political scientists in four broad categories:

- **Health.** Some of us have been diagnosed with COVID 19, and regrettably more of us are likely to be in the time to come. Others are putting off seeking medical care for routine health needs to avoid the risks of exposure encountered in doctors' offices and other facilities. The stressors, isolation, and anxieties caused by the pandemic have resulted in strains on many people's physical, mental, and emotional health.
- **Care.** As parents, as adult children, and as members of extended families and networks of loved ones, we are experiencing a dramatic increase in our responsibilities in caring for others. These responsibilities are exacerbated by closed schools and houses of worship, lack of child care, and restricted nursing homes and other eldercare facilities.

These burdens are felt even more heavily by those with limited means and job insecurity.

- **Finances.** The worldwide recession unleashed by the pandemic has been accompanied by layoffs, furloughs, and reductions of working hours. Some political scientists have been directly affected by job losses; many others are providing financial support to family members and loved ones who have become unemployed. All of us are experiencing uncertainty about the viability of higher education and some sense of precarity about our professional futures.
- **Time.** Academic work requires stretches of uninterrupted time to reflect, plan, read, write, and engage in other related activities necessary to the scholarly enterprise. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult—and for many, nearly impossible—to find the precious resource of time. Faculty, staff, and students have widely reported on the negative impacts on their attention span and other aspects of the “bandwidth” they have for getting work done.

Disparities

The pandemic’s burdens related to health, care, finances, and time fall unequally. Many of these inequalities are expected, others less so. An understanding of these disparities—and a commitment to ameliorate them—must inform how our profession considers the implications of COVID-19 for personnel and career matters. Political scientists who are bearing particularly heavy burdens include:

- **Health.** Those with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the coronavirus, those who have vulnerable family members, and those who are caring for dependent children, parents, or others—even if they do not share the same household—are all more subject to the debilitating professional effects of the coronavirus.
- **Employment Contracts.** Those who are in more precarious academic positions, especially adjunct and part-time faculty, are especially subject to the uncertainties that currently cloud the enterprise of higher education. Many have yet to be told what classes they are teaching, the format in which instruction will take place, and whether accommodations will be made for the health risks faced by themselves and their families.
- **Minority Communities.** Faculty, staff and students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are more subject to these debilitating effects as the coronavirus disproportionately ravages their communities. Concurrently, BIPOC political scientists are daily absorbing and grieving the news of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Aubrey, and other members of BIPOC communities, placing additional burdens on their health and time.

- **Gender.** Traditional gender divisions of labor are emerging and being reinforced as households reallocate time to child care, home schooling, and domestic tasks. As a result, women's professional productivity is more affected than men's.
- **Immigrants.** The vituperative and capricious policies of the current administration toward non-citizen workers in the U.S. has placed international faculty and students in even more precarious positions than usual regarding their authorization to work, their residency status, and their pathways to citizenship. They are experiencing new legal, resource and emotional burdens.
- **Access to Resources.** Access to tools and resources needed for academic work—including libraries and archives, laboratories, interactive situations required for certain kinds of research, and internet bandwidth—varies widely for faculty, staff and students with respect to institutional resources, geography, and the local severity of the pandemic.

Mitigation

It is in the interest of the profession, our institutions, and our departments and programs to mitigate the ill effects of the coronavirus on the professional development and careers of our colleagues in ways that ameliorate these disparities and are fair across the variety of our institutions and situations.

Working Conditions

- Elsewhere, this task force has recommended that remote instruction and work be the default and in-person teaching be a last resort. When faculty and staff are required to work on campus, institutions must ensure their health and safety, including taking every possible measure to ensure that these workers are not exposed to the coronavirus. Institutions must issue clear rules about the wearing of masks and other precautions by students that do not require enforcement by faculty. Institutions must provide free-of-charge access to timely testing for COVID and its antibodies as well as all necessary protective gear.
- COVID's massive disruption to institutions' operations and finances has upended the schedules upon which non-tenure track instructors and staff (including adjunct and part-time faculty, as well as graduate student teaching and research assistants) rely for planning their finances and their lives. Fairness and dignity require that institutions provide these workers with as much advance notice, flexibility, and job security as permitted by circumstances. We note that many of these scheduling and hiring decisions are made by—and thus these principles must be guiding for—tenured and tenure-track faculty in their roles as department chairs and other administrators.
- The vast majority of faculty and other teaching staff, including graduate students, made major adjustments to their teaching with almost no notice during the pandemic. Nearly all instructors will be required to do this extra work in Fall 2020 (and perhaps beyond

that) as most classes move to remote instruction. The added time needed to accomplish the same teaching load must be taken into account by institutions and departments.

Resources

- Some institutions—and we assume, many more to come—have made cuts to salaries, retirement contributions, and other compensation to faculty and staff in order to mitigate the financial challenges they face due to the epidemic. While it is understandable that these reductions may be necessary, they should only be made as a last resort; they should be temporary with an explicit end date; and the burden should be distributed in ways that fall lightest on those who are already compensated the least. If taken, these cuts must also be made in concert with equivalent reductions in compensation to administrators and non-instructional staff. All changes to compensation—including the retirement incentive packages being offered some institutions to tenured faculty—must be transparent and fair.
- Remote working requires that faculty have at home the equipment, supplies and furnishings needed for their teaching, research, and service. In the rapid transition made this spring to remote work, many of the costs for these amenities were shifted from the institution to the individual. While it is not possible to duplicate all of the resources available in a professional office space, institutions should at the least provide faculty with the communications equipment and services (including internet connection and IT support) they need to do their work.
- Many institutions have reduced the research accounts of faculty or cut off access to them entirely. Institutions must recognize the impact of reduced funds on the productivity of faculty, particularly those whose methods of research—such as field work, original surveys, and intensive computing—are resource intensive.

Career Development of Junior Faculty

- For institutions operating largely remotely, it is even more important than usual for new faculty, especially junior faculty, to receive a welcoming, informative, and effective orientation that can substitute for the usual informal process of dropping by colleagues' offices to ask questions. New faculty must be helped to learn who is who, what staff and offices are at their disposal to help with their work, what are the expectations for the beginning of their new position, what are the processes for major functions during the year such as developing new courses and submitting proposals, etc. It is essential to build in some socializing to welcome new faculty members and help them integrate into the unit. There should be a vigorous mentoring and networking process that helps new faculty integrate into the institution.
- Part of the mentoring of junior faculty should include explicit discussions of the likely impact of the pandemic on this crucial early career stage.

- All pre-tenure reviews of junior faculty should take account of the impact of the coronavirus.
- For tenure-track faculty we should assume the burdens of the pandemic cost faculty at least a year of progress. One year should be automatically added to the tenure clock for all junior faculty. Tenure candidates should be given the option to be considered earlier at their discretion.
- Institutions should develop a transparent process and clear standards for additional extension of the tenure clock for reasons related to the coronavirus, much as they have processes for extensions based on health, child-bearing, and other exigencies.
- Institutions' tenure reviews should take account of the unequal burdens on faculty productivity as described above.

Faculty Recruitment

- Although we presume that hiring for new faculty positions will be heavily curtailed this year, departments that do engage in hiring should do so by explicitly taking into account the fact that candidates on the job market are affected by the full list of disparities described above. This includes taking inequalities of burdens and opportunities faced into account when judging the demonstrated promise of candidates.
- Departments should re-think their recruitment procedures to assure that the pandemic does not interfere with their ability to carry out faculty recruitment in a way that is fully inclusive and fair across the diversity of our discipline.
 - All interviews should be conducted remotely rather than in-person. This reduces the implicit disadvantage faced by those for whom on-campus visits would place an added burden because of the coronavirus. In any event, all interviews for a particular position should be conducted in the same manner (either online or in-person) to ensure fair treatment. Departments that face resistance to these policies from their institutions should explain and advocate for these principles of equal treatment.
 - For departments that shift from in-person to remote interviews, it is important to think carefully in advance about how to structure online "campus visits" in a manner that allows the same care, rigor, and breadth in assessing all candidates. How will any research presentations or teaching demonstrations be structured? How will individual interviews, if any, be structured? Is there an opportunity for the more social opportunities that meals usually provide? How do we make sure candidates have the same opportunity for breaks and rest in the course of the "visit?" Can opportunities be built in for candidates to "see the campus" virtually, or meet colleagues from other units?

- For departments that proceed with in-person visits and interviews, resources for travel to campus (and any additional resources needed to comply with personal and campus safety protocols related to the coronavirus) must be provided upfront rather than requiring reimbursement so as to prevent an even greater financial burden on graduate students on the job market.

Training

There are many kinds of optional training that many faculty might welcome to figure out how to deal with the effects of the coronavirus on their institutions and professional careers.

Among these are:

- **Technology.** Faculty are relying on online communication and software in a way they have not before. Institutions should especially emphasize training for older faculty that helps them adapt and learn to technological changes with which they are less likely to be familiar.
- **Student affairs.** Many faculty are not fully aware of the burdens many of their students have long faced and are now exacerbated by the coronavirus. Students may be food-insecure or homeless. They may come from homes in which there is no internet, or in which they face hostility and violence. Training that helps faculty recognize these challenges and familiarizes them with on- and off-campus resources to which to refer students may be crucial.

Other Personnel Matters

- Staff members are crucial parts of academic communities. Many have been unable to work remotely and thus have faced higher risk of exposure to the coronavirus. Institutions must ensure that staff are treated with the same respect and care as faculty.
- As noted above, the pandemic has created cognitive and psychological burdens on faculty, staff and graduate students. Departments should be sure they have access to services they might seek to deal with these challenges. Departments should be particularly proactive with regard to their Ph.D. students, who are already vulnerable to mental health challenges and are now faced with an unprecedented disruption of their professional trajectories.