

STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL AY 2020-2021
Report and Recommendations Concerning Immediate and Long-Term Gendered Impacts
of the COVID-19 Pandemic at UMass-Amherst (Submitted 4/1/21)

This year the Status of Women Council (SOWC) has sought to address the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our campus community. We have heard from women faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate student representatives through listening sessions and anonymous written responses. We have also had the opportunity to meet with administrators and campus union representatives. In this report we identify areas of need and endorse policy options for addressing COVID-related challenges and their ongoing impacts in the years to come.

Overview of Current Concerns

To date, over 550,000 Americans have died from COVID-19. The pandemic has intensified economic inequality, food and housing insecurity, domestic violence, and social isolation; it has also coincided with increased racial, xenophobic and gendered violence and political division. It has broken childcare, shuttering daycares and schools and leaving exhausted faculty, student and staff parents to juggle the impossible. It has caused furloughed employees to face food insecurity and in some cases lose their homes. Those fortunate to still be employed face extensive overwork. It has thrown graduate student timelines and on-campus housing into disarray, and has fractured the ability of undergraduate and graduate students alike to focus on their studies in the midst of more than a year of crushing isolation. Combined, these factors have created overwhelming challenges. Women in particular have responded in extraordinary ways, often at great cost to their own professional trajectories, educational goals, health, and mental health.

As an institution, UMass Amherst has articulated a strategic vision for implementing myriad policies supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, but ongoing additional institutional efforts are needed in the face of the asteroid-like disruption that is COVID-19. Impacts of the pandemic have both immediate and ongoing negative consequences; mitigation should therefore address both short and long term needs over time. If UMass wishes to continue to recruit, retain and support the success of the highest quality faculty, staff, and students, the university must commit to addressing systemic gendered inequalities and impacts across campus, with the knowledge that not all women are impacted equally. Specifically, race, sexuality, socio-economic status, immigration status, ability, and caregiving responsibilities intersect with and magnify the gendered impacts of the pandemic.

In terms of faculty, UMass, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP), has enacted a number of policies that have mitigated or at least acknowledged the devastating effects of the pandemic on the workload of faculty members with caregiving responsibilities. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Giving credit toward sabbatical leave or promotion for faculty and lecturers who have converted in-person to online courses;
- Offering provost's discretionary funds to faculty to pay for child and elder care;

- Refraining from forcing faculty to sign promises not to care for children, elders, or those who are ill during work hours, as have a few other institutions;
- Suspending student-driven course evaluations;
- Inviting faculty to document competing demands on their time to explain “low” productivity during the pandemic;
- And allowing tenure delays without need for any explanation beyond the fact of the pandemic.

We commend these practices as the building blocks of best practices for how colleges, departments, administration, student support, and all other units, at UMass and other institutions, can ease burdens on faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate student populations.

While COVID-19 did not create gendered inequalities at UMass, it has severely exacerbated pre-existing ones. The pandemic thus presents an opportunity for UMass to implement bold, timely, proactive policies and practices in order to realize the institution’s strategic vision of a community committed to “the success and wellbeing of every individual regardless of group identity.” Based on our work this year, and the sober knowledge that the current situation will demand urgent, ongoing action, we offer the following recommendations.

I. UNIVERSITY-WIDE CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Economic insecurity:** The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women’s financial security, creating an overall climate of precarity and crisis management.
 - a. Commit to expanding and publicizing resources such as emergency funds, financial aid, infrastructure support, and job security to provide support both during the period of remote learning at UMass and in the aftermath of immediate COVID-19 impacts; further commit to auditing resources to support economic security for each of the constituent groups (students, staff, faculty) to identify emerging needs in light of the transition back to campus.
 - b. Help alleviate food insecurity in the university community by:
 - i. Committing to funding and implementing the recommendations of the Food Security Working Group, including the establishment of a campus food pantry;
 - ii. Providing discounted, family-friendly grab & go options at UMass dining facilities.
 - c. Reduce barriers to existing sources of support, such as child/elder-care and technology funds, by reviewing politics, criteria, and best practices.
 - d. Provide free menstrual hygiene products within public restrooms on campus.

- 2. Increased workload:** The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly multiplied the level and kind of work demands across the campus community. In addition to the technical aspects of on-line teaching, faculty, staff and graduate students have taken on new levels and forms of advising, mentoring and service. All are encountering new and heightened demands.

 - a. Commit to greater flexibility and equity in allocating work assignments and responsibilities, as well as working hours, and due dates (see specific sections below for recommendations).
 - b. Prioritize faculty and staff with inadequate home infrastructure and/or space for returning to work on campus; continue to provide infrastructure support for working from home, recognizing disparities such as access to the internet and computing technologies.
- 3. Caregiving responsibilities:** The demands of caregiving have been significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and have disproportionately fallen on women. This includes care for children, partners, parents, extended family, and community members, supervision of remote schooling, and other caregiving tasks. The national statistics about the negative impacts of these caregiving responsibilities on women's employment are staggering, and the written feedback we received from the UMass community documents the urgency of these issues on our own campus. See the appendix for a summary of written caregiver feedback on the UMass-Amherst campus.

 - a. Recognize that faculty, staff and students may be facing heightened caregiving demands, especially given that children under 16 are not expected to be vaccinated until 2022, and make significant efforts to accommodate their needs as much as possible.
 - b. Maintain the university's commitment to fund and staff the Center for Early Education and Care and to keep it open, within the parameters of current health guidelines. This should include maintaining the number of slots so additional children are not dropped from the program due to de-densification and making efforts to ensure continuity of care throughout the calendar year.
 - c. Recognize that on-campus child care does not have the capacity to meet all student, staff, and faculty child care needs; provide increased funding for child care subsidy programs to reimburse income eligible staff, faculty and students for appropriate off campus child care expenses.
 - d. Acknowledge the pandemic-driven changes in the childcare landscape and include reimbursement for non center-based 'Family, Friends, and Neighbors' care as an option in all university funded child care subsidy programs.
- 4. Stress and Mental Health Challenges:** Given the increased burdens cited above, stress in the community has increased significantly. COVID-19 related health insecurity and inequities, social isolation, limitations or lack of support networks, changes in work,

school and family relationships, and uncertainty about one's future all contribute negatively. Specific responses to the COVID-19 pandemic include but are not limited to increased anxiety, depression, increased substance use/misuse, increased incidence of domestic violence, and trauma and post-traumatic stress responses. Mental health challenges will continue to reverberate throughout the campus community even after cases of COVID-19 decrease.

- a. Commit to acknowledging mental health needs and provide messages of destigmatization in support of seeking mental health care.
- b. Offer flexibility in terms of respite for mental health days.
- c. Expand access to mental health wellness resources and services on campus and virtually.

II. CONSTITUENCY-SPECIFIC CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Faculty

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the gendered inequalities that tend to disadvantage women faculty, such as increased caregiving responsibilities at home, nurturing and support expectations from students, and service obligations including often unrecognized and unrewarded participation in outreach activities.

Recommendations to support faculty:

- a. **Evaluation and Promotion:** The increased workload associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted women faculty, reducing the amount of time they can devote to their research and scholarly activities.
 - i. Recognize both the necessity and potential negative repercussions associated with delaying promotion and tenure, and therefore consider framing tenure and promotion through a framework of “**achievement relative to opportunity**,” whereby quality standards are maintained, but quantity standards adjusted; such a framework has been promoted by Monash University in Australia and considered by other universities in the United States. In the same vein, direct tenure and promotion evaluators to consult candidates' pandemic impact statements in evaluating their work.
 - ii. For pre-tenure faculty, provide and encourage flexible options for delay of tenure decision year (TDY) for every year impacted by the pandemic; facilitate conversations at the college and departmental level.
 - iii. Extend the time frame for using start-up and other funding, allowing more flexibility in spending purposes and ease the online reimbursement procedures.

- b. **Workload Accommodations:** In addition to the general workload accommodations offered to all faculty, recognize and address gendered teaching and service load differences (# of courses per semester, class sizes, mentoring of students with pressing emotional needs, and diversity activities).
 - i. Take into consideration heightened care work demands and student-oriented support when assigning and scheduling teaching and service.
 - ii. Recognize that pandemic-specific factors that have slowed research are especially impacting women, and consider appropriate adjustments in workload. For example, increased effort required of work with human subjects or lab animals under pandemic conditions are especially difficult for those with significant caregiving responsibilities.
 - iii. Consider that these gendered impacts could be remediated not only by a reduced teaching load, but also reduced service assignments in future semesters.

2. Staff

UMass staff, represented by the Professional Staff Union (PSU), the University Staff Association (USA), and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), are the backbone of the university, supporting the day-to-day functioning of our campus on myriad levels. They have undergone extreme hardship this pandemic year in addition to the challenges of extensive furloughs, overwork, and lack of flexibility to assist children learning remotely.. Staff report feeling physically, mentally and emotionally depleted; many have faced food insecurity, foreclosure and eviction, and/or have been forced to downsize their living spaces due to pandemic-induced financial hardship. Staff working on campus have been concerned for the safety of themselves and their families. While some staff have been reassigned to COVID-related tasks such as administration of the campus testing center, additional cleaning, and hall monitoring, many would like to further put their skills to use to reduce campus COVID transmission, especially in building maintenance (ventilation-related and otherwise). AFSCME is the most highly impacted union, with over 200 employees still out on furlough at the time of this writing, and many members for whom English is not their first language. All three staff unions have seen their membership decrease this year.

Recommendations to support staff:

- a. **COVID-related furloughs:** Alleviate hardship by returning all furloughed employees to their jobs.
- b. **Fill vacancies and admit graduate cohorts:** Fill vacant positions to reduce staff overwork and burnout; recognize that a reduction in the graduate student population hinders the work of staff who hire them and depend on their labor.

- c. **Scheduling Flexibility:** Encourage managers to allow scheduling flexibility for staff so that domestic caregiving responsibilities can be addressed, especially so long as schools remain closed, hybrid, and/or subject to closures given the possibility of an outbreak among unvaccinated students.
- d. **Reimbursements for working from home expenses:** Support staff in requesting reimbursement for electricity and utility costs while working from home.
- e. **Preparing the campus for the 21st century:** Proactively find innovative ways for staff to serve the UMass campus community so no worker is forced to sit idle on furlough, and so that our campus community is able to transition to carbon neutrality and otherwise thrive in a changing global climate.

3. Graduate Students

Graduate students play multiple, vital roles within the university as teachers (TOs, TAs), researchers, undergraduate and peer mentors, and support staff for undergraduates and other graduate students (ARDs, GAs). Mentorship / student support roles and service tasks are often disproportionately filled by women graduate students. Many graduate students also have families, and provide caretaking roles to elderly parents and other family members. COVID-19 impacts graduate students not just through their student status, but also through their status as University employees. COVID-19 and reduced University operations has impacted students in ways such as increasing time to milestone completion, reduced funding and professional development opportunities, reduced childcare support, barring or reduction in access to space and technological resources, among many others. Because graduate students serve in multiple roles, we recommend that colleges and departments provide holistic, “wrap around” support. The University’s success depends on the graduate student’s success, therefore graduate students must be supported across all of the roles that graduate students play as employees, students, and caregivers. COVID-19 has impacted graduate students’, especially female graduate students’, ability to make progress towards their degrees, reduced funding opportunities, and disproportionately impacted graduate students with families.

Recommendations to support graduate students:

- a. **Increase flexibility for graduate students’ time to milestones:** Milestone-based flexibility policies should impact graduate students across the entire University in an equitable way, with maximal student input and decision making so as to remedy the gendered effects of the pandemic.
- b. **Extend guaranteed or eligible funding periods for all graduate students for one academic year.** We also suggest that, when possible, all GA and graduate student positions that had been available before remote operations be kept and/or brought back and immediately become available to be filled. These

positions provide invaluable support to staff, faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students.

- c. **Flexibility and equity in graduate financial support:** In light of the additional caregiving responsibilities and other burdens that many female graduate students face, students should be provided adequate, equitable, and, when needed, flexibility in assignments as RAs, TAs, TOs, ARDs, and GAs.
- d. **Title IX education:** Title IX provides vital protections to women which prevent discrimination or denial of benefits on the basis of sex. This protection is especially relevant to women who may be at increased risk of workplace discrimination especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We recommend that colleges and departments circulate information via email about current Title IX rules and hold an optional training workshop for faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate students.
- e. **Increased access to technology and technology grants:** Reduced campus access and operations has provided a deep gap between graduate student needs and access to available resources (physical space, technology, and scholarly works housed on campus). We strongly suggest that the University provide technological support for graduate students through equipment grants and/or equipment (laptops, web cameras, etc.) that can be borrowed from the University for extended periods of time. These resources (grants, equipment loan services, etc.) should be advertised in an easily accessible location on the UMass website.
- f. **Rebuild community, especially among the newest admits:** Remote operations, decreases in academic support staff, limited professional development opportunities, asynchronously delivered courses, and decreased community building activities have negatively impacted and reduced opportunities for building professional relationships and networks. . These impacts are especially detrimental to newly admitted graduate students, particularly those who entered between January 2020 to present. We recommend that colleges, departments, and/or programs expand and develop new, student-centered activities to help build community amongst newly admitted graduate students.

4. Undergraduate students

Fifty-one percent of the undergraduate population is composed of students who identify as women. At the undergraduate level, women serve in different capacities as employees, mentors, caregivers, and researchers. COVID-19 has significantly impacted women across all class years both financially and mentally. In this vein, COVID-19 has also impacted the ability of women and people who menstruate to afford menstrual hygiene products.

A commitment to provide **complimentary menstrual products in campus bathrooms** would be both a symbolic and tangible step towards alleviating COVID-induced economic hardship. Ninety-three percent of the undergraduate student body who voted in the SGA Spring 2021 General Election endorsed such a referendum; we recommend that the Faculty Senate endorse it as well. The text of the referendum reads as follows:

“The University currently provides students with free toilet paper, which is a basic necessity. Therefore, the University should provide students with free menstrual hygiene products, which are also basic and unavoidable necessities. The inability to access menstrual products can affect a student’s freedom to study, be healthy, and participate in society with dignity. One in five people who menstruate struggle to afford menstrual products, or are not able to purchase them at all, and 72% of all UMass Amherst students have reported that they have experienced financial stress sometimes or often during the school year.”

5. Student Parents (Undergraduate and Graduate)

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the gendered inequalities that tend to disadvantage women pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees. It has especially impacted women who are parenting while pursuing their degrees. Nationally, at 4 year institutions similar to UMass, 12% of students are raising dependent children, with women, and disproportionately women of color, making up almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total student parent population. According to research from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, student parents were already more likely than their non-parenting peers to have lower incomes, carry higher debt loads and be at greater risk for leaving before degree completion despite earning higher grades than non-parenting peers. Women student parents are more likely to be single, have lower incomes, and have lower rates of degree completion when compared to student parents who are men. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women have disproportionately faced increased caregiving responsibilities at home, reductions in paid employment opportunities, and increased living expenses from higher utility bills and increased child care expenses. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student parents requires a long term, institution-wide commitment to supporting this population to keep them on track to degree completion and to help ensure that women have equal opportunity for success at UMass.

Recommendations to support student parents:

a. Institutional Culture

- i. Expand current inclusion-program efforts to include the student parent demographic.
- ii. Offer child care at campus events - such as transfer student orientation, first generation events, academic/career networking events, conferences.

b. Institutional Policies and Practices

i. Data Collection:

Collect institutional data and conduct needs-assessment to determine student parent demographics and evaluate how effectively the institution is serving this population.

ii. Academic Flexibility and Inclusion:

- i. Provide options for asynchronous learning beyond the pandemic.
- ii. Allow flexibility with timing for exams should they conflict with available child care.
- iii. Create family friendly course syllabi and classroom policies to help parenting students feel comfortable reaching out to faculty regarding childcare and parenting emergencies (see [here](#) and [here](#) for examples.)
- iv. Allow priority registration for classes to coordinate with available child care.

iii. Title IX:

- i. Train faculty and staff about strategies for supporting student parent success and the mandate of compliance with Title IX protections for pregnant and parenting students. (See [here](#) for suggested best practices.)
- ii. Communicate clearly that a student will not be penalized for taking medically necessary leave related to pregnancy, childbirth or a related condition, or to care for a sick child.
- iii. Include a non-discrimination and accommodation policy in syllabi (See [syllabi insert sample here.](#))
- iv. Educate students and update all university Title IX information to include and address protections for pregnant and parenting students.

iv. Emergency Aid:

- i. Increase funding for campus emergency grant programs, including Student Parent Programs Emergency Family Support Grant and DOSO mini-grant program.
- ii. Allow emergency aid grants to be forced through to student accounts via Bursar's Office if a student with an overdue balance has created a payment plan.

v. Funding for Child Care:

Increase funding or fundraising efforts to support student child care subsidy programs and subsidized spaces for on campus child care.

c. **Physical Space on Campus**

- vi. Lactation Rooms: Ensure that all lactation spaces are accessible to students, faculty and staff; are represented on all campus maps; and outfitted according to best practices.
- vii. Changing Stations/Family and Gender Inclusive Restrooms: Install changing stations in men's, women's, gender inclusive and family restrooms throughout campus and include on all campus maps.
- viii. Family Housing: Provide affordable on campus family housing for income eligible student parents, while maintaining the number previously available through the former North Village apartments.
- ix. Campus Child Care: Provide additional space and funding for affordable on campus child care options including full-time, part-time and drop-in options.
- x. Parking Spaces: Designate spaces for pregnant students, faculty, and staff and those with young children in key campus locations.

III. CALL TO ACTION

1. Formal Endorsement:

- a. The Status of Women Council requests that a resolution be passed by the Faculty Senate to formally endorse our **Report and Recommendations Concerning Immediate and Long-Term Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic at UMass Amherst**.
- b. We then ask that the report be forwarded to Student Government Association (SGA) and Graduate Student Senate (GSS) for their formal endorsement.

2. Task Force: The SOWC requests that the university designate a key administrator to convene and chair a task force charged with addressing and overseeing the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report, and that the SOWC be part of this task force.

3. Dissemination: The SOWC requests that the Faculty Senate and other key stakeholders post, publicize or otherwise promote this report and its recommendations to mitigate the immediate and long-term gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to administrators and the UMass community at large.

Appendix: Pandemic Impacts on UMass Women Caregivers

Countless articles have been written about the staggering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on female caregivers in the midst of nationwide school and daycare closures since March 2020. The UMass Center for Early Education and Care (CEEC), after closing for spring 2020, reopened in late summer, but due to necessary de-densification measures was only able to admit a fraction of contracted families, the majority of whom had waited years for admission. In the Amherst-Pelham district alone, as of the time of this writing, K-12 schools have effectively been shuttered for over twelve months. All in all, caregivers were forced to fend for themselves, each family cobbling together their own ad-hoc attempt at a solution to taking on the burdens of full time parenting and homemaking in addition to their full time employment and studies. Such solutions were at times dependent on having the means, the risk profile, and the luck to find and bring a private caregiver in the home despite social distance guidelines, at prices above and beyond pre-pandemic costs. For others, it was 'family, friends and neighbors' who helped lighten the load. Others were alone, completely isolated with their children and their work for the entire year and counting.

In providing a sample of comments received from UMass women caregivers across the twelve colleges and the libraries, we aim not to shed new light, per se, but rather to confirm that our workplace and scholarly community is not exempt from national trends.

Within the UMass-Amherst Campus Community, pandemic-driven loss of childcare resulting from school and daycare closures, as well as from the necessity of adhering to social distancing safety requirements, thus severely limiting the ability of caregivers to lighten one another's responsibilities, has contributed to:

a. Unprecedented, unsustainable, and unceasing demands on time:

- i. "I am doing 2.5 full-time jobs. Every day is a full fire drill." - Associate Professor
- ii. "I literally don't have time to think during the day. I can maybe fit in 30 minutes of work, after I make/clean up dinner and the 2 year old is in bed." - Ph.D. Student
- iii. "It's a good thing I am already a full professor, since I had to stop all research. If I still had to do it, I would be in trouble. For the record, we paid for a caregiver for a while, which was a lot of money. Now we have no caregiver, and so I get to simultaneously teach / work (or barely work) and also try to keep up with my kids' assignments, special ed classes, extra tutoring, and emotional states. [...] It's not working very well." - Full Professor
- iv. "I feel like I am forced to beg, borrow, and steal time to work. I work in random bursts, blurring work/home boundaries that I had previously liked to protect." - Associate Professor

- v. “The uncertainty of the pandemic and the reduced childcare hours has made it very difficult to focus and write a dissertation.” - Ph.D. Candidate,
 - vi. “I have done very little writing since spring [2020], finding it difficult to create an environment where I can concentrate without distraction. [...] My son's frequent breaks from school mean that I'm being asked to make a snack/fix lunch/play/find an activity/help with whatever at least once an hour, if not more. The lack of after-school care (and, frankly, of the school bus commute to school) means that the work day begins at 8:45 and ends at 3, regardless of how much I need to get done.” - Associate Professor
 - vii. “I am caring for my 5-year old daughter. I need to assist her while she attends remote kindergarten classes 5 days/week from 8:15 am to 11:15 am, help her complete the homework through the SeeSaw app, prepare lunch, supervise her outside during playground activity, read multiple emails and communications that come from school regarding online learning, pick up materials outside the school every week, make sure my daughter logs in the correct Google Meet room to attend the formative assessment block. My work happens in blocks of 20-30 minutes with multiple interruptions throughout the day. [...] Pre-pandemic my daughter attended pre-school 5 days/week from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, when I would be working from my UMass office without interruptions.” - Assistant Professor
 - viii. “There are days where I legitimately feel like all I've gotten done is making snacks for kids and triaging emails from students. I feel like a stay at home mom doing a bad job at parenting, while also being employed full time at a job (that used to be rewarding on so many levels) that I don't have enough hours in the day--much less quality, uninterrupted hours--to do well.” - Assistant Professor
- b. **Need for for explicit, open conversations, especially given the disparity of impacts in comparison with non-caregiver faculty:**
- i. “I have seen my fellow junior faculty colleagues without children be incredibly productive during this time in ways that have been totally impossible for me.” - Assistant Professor
 - ii. “I think that more explicit instructions from the administration for a redistribution of service to support people who are caring for others would have made it more explicit and an expectation, instead of just relying on the kindness (or lack thereof) of colleagues who are able to do more during the pandemic. We haven't had any conversations in my department about the ways that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted the careers of those who are caring for young children, and

what might be done, concretely, to mediate this.” - Assistant Professor,

- iii. “What else can happen? There's a pandemic. We are really just doomed to struggle in this more than people who aren't caretakers, and it's been the most degrading, invisible burden. I need and want help with my kids but it's not possible.” - Ph.D. Candidate
- iv. “I don't see there being a solution to this problem except for having understanding from those with greater power and influence in what our situation is during this time.” - Graduate Student
- v. “More understanding from professors towards student parents [would be helpful]. The changing of the syllabus quotes such as, "For every missed day of homework, 5% of your assignment grade will be deducted." "Do not waste your time trying to explain." - Graduate student

c. Pleas for additional TDY delay / tenure expectation reassessment / stopping the graduate student clock:

- i. “It's preposterous to think that AY 2020-2021 should be considered as equal to previous, pre-GLOBAL CRISIS (not to mention the uniquely American ones also unfolding at the same time) in terms of productivity. Humane policy would be to extend TDY another year for pre-tenure faculty.” - Assistant Professor
- ii. “I have only 1 day per week of (relatively) uninterrupted work time, when my partner is home with my daughter. [...] This is my final year of guaranteed funding in my program, so without further funding from the university or an outside fellowship, I will need to find employment next year [further delaying time to degree completion].” - Ph.D. Candidate
- iii. “More generally, just lower expectations across the board, for not just this year, but several years in the future. This will have long-term ripple effects.” - Associate Professor