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Assessing Reported COVID-19 Impacts in Annual Performance Evaluation (APE)

A training session for Deans, Chairs, Directors and members of APE Committees offered jointly by
The Office of Faculty Relations (OFR) and
The University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (UWOFA)
November 2021

Outline of the Information Session

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Why this session? Background

- COVID-19 brought significant changes to the work and working conditions of Members:
 - changes impacted Members' performance
 - impact experienced differently across Units, individual Members, and areas of workload
 - may have exacerbated existing inequities in the academic system (e.g., for women, Indigenous peoples, members of racialized groups, etc.)
- Recognizing our achievements:
 - “It’s impressive how we have pulled together as a community, continuing to fulfill Western’s teaching and research mission despite everything the pandemic has thrown our way. I hope you are proud of what we have accomplished collectively.” (Alan Shepard, March 12, 2021)
- APE assessments approached differently this year:
 - careful consideration to impacts of COVID-19 on performance

Why this session? Purpose – Part 1

- To advise the Deans, Chairs, Directors and APE Committee Members on assessing the reported impacts from Faculty Members, recognizing that:
 - The APE report of each Faculty Member should be considered as holistically and as sensitively as possible
 - Consideration should be given to diverse metrics and process-oriented activities, going beyond quantitative and outcome-oriented measures
 - Increased caregiving responsibilities and illness (physical or mental) and/or heightened mental anxiety/stress should not negatively impact evaluations
 - COVID-related circumstances (such as illness, physical or mental, increased caregiving responsibilities, homeschooling, etc.) should not negatively impact Member evaluations

Checklists have been developed to help provide greater context for assessments

Why this session? Purpose – Part 2

To provide an opportunity to “anchor the standards of evaluation” through discussion (“**before** any files are reviewed”) of:

- “The differential range of impacts and experiences of Members in both the short- and long-term due to changes in working conditions during the pandemic, paying particular attention to issues of equity”
- “how to interpret and use any documentation provided by Members”

Brief overview of the APE process - Part 1

Purpose of the process (APE, Clause 2)

- a) provide an annual assessment of performance that allows recognition of a Member's achievements and identifies areas for development in the Member's Teaching, Research, Scholarship Activities and/or Service activities, as appropriate to the Member's Academic Responsibilities and Workload;
- b) provide for formative support and mentoring;
- c) provide a basis for salary increments linked to performance for Full-Time Members

Brief overview of the APE process - Part 2

The Annual Report

- Annual Report format is the same as in previous years, with the addition of checklists for reporting COVID impacts
- Deadline for submission of the Annual Report with an updated CV remains November 15
- APE assessments not conducted in 2020-21; three-year reporting window for this cycle is July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2021, including 16 months of a pandemic that is still ongoing
- While Members are normally required to include sufficient detail to allow for their performance to be assessed (Clause 9.4), please note that checklists are all that is required for reporting COVID impacts; Members do not have to add more explanation or documentation, but they may do so if they wish

Brief overview of the APE process - Part 3

Assessment process

- Assessment as in previous years: by APE Committee, by Chair/Director/Dean, according to Unit vote
- Key change: evaluators (APE Committee members, Chairs, Directors, Deans) required to complete training
- “Deans, Chairs, Directors and APE Committees should be instructed that during the COVID-19 pandemic the work and working conditions of faculty members has departed markedly from established academic patterns and that the impacts have been differentially felt by faculty members. They should be instructed to take exceptional care to apply the evaluative criteria of APE with sufficient flexibility.” (APE Joint Working Group report)

Brief overview of the APE process – Part 4

- Rating scales used by evaluators
 - Evaluators assign ratings for each of Teaching, Research and Service according to the scale in effect since the current Collective Agreement came into effect:
 - Exceptional
 - Very Good
 - Good
 - Acceptable; or
 - Below the Acceptable level
- Rating distributions not applied
 - In Clause 10.5, expected proportions for each rating are prescribed (e.g., “Exceptional” normally not assigned to more than 10% of Members in a Unit);
 - These distributions have not yet been implemented; the Administration and the Association have agreed that the provisions will NOT apply in the current APE cycle

**What issues did
you face during
the COVID-19
pandemic?**

Impacts of COVID on performance

- Members' lives have been disrupted in many ways by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these disruptions have had an effect on their performance.
- Working conditions may be poor due to available facilities for working from home
- Members may have additional caregiving and/or homeschooling responsibilities due to closure of daycares and schools, elder care
- Members may have suffered physical or mental illness, heightened mental anxiety, a sense of loss, a real loss of a loved one

Reminder for Assessment of formal workload adjustments, or employer approved leaves and accommodations

- Deans, Chairs, Directors and members of APE Committees should keep in mind that some Members will have Alternative Workloads, Reduced Workloads or other adapted workloads in response to the impacts of COVID-19.
- In addition to adapted workloads, some members were provided with Compassionate Leave throughout the pandemic or accommodations based on Human Rights grounds.
- Deans, Chairs, Directors and members of APE Committees should not be aware of the reason for the adjusted workloads, leaves or accommodation, and knowing the reason is not relevant to the assessment of the Member's performance.
- Where workload adjustments, leaves or accommodations are employer approved performance should be assessed against the agreed upon weightings and clauses 11.3 to 11.9 of the *Annual Performance Evaluation* article.

Reporting COVID impacts

Faculty Members have been encouraged to report in their Annual Report the nature of any impacts to their work as a result of the pandemic **in a manner that does not create an undue burden, does not increase the potential for stereotyping or bias nor require the disclosure of sensitive information.**

- Information sessions for Faculty Members were held during the week of September 27th, 2021, on how to report COVID-19 impacts in their APE reports.
- Faculty Members were also provided with the *Report of the Joint Working Group on the APE Process for UWOFA Members* and fillable versions of the *Checklists for COVID-19 Impact: Research, Teaching, Service and Overall*
- Members were encouraged to complete four checklists as cover sheets to their APE report to alleviate the need for extensive reporting and given the option of simply ticking the applicable impacts or, if they choose to do so, provide additional information or documentation

Not all Members may wish to report health or caregiving impacts, and there is no requirement to do so.

Be flexible

- The Annual Report submitted by the Member should be considered in the context of every individual's conditions and as holistically and sensitively as possible.
- Some Members have been significantly impacted by a number of factors such as childcare, stress/anxiety, unfamiliarity with technology, their own health or the health of their family members, etc., and their outputs decreased
- All scenarios should be considered in each individual context and special consideration should be given especially to those who identify as women, Indigenous peoples, or members of racialized groups as these groups have been identified as being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Unconscious Bias

“An implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation, or assumption that can occur without one’s knowledge, control, or intention. Unconscious bias is a result of our life experiences and affects all types of people.”

- SSHRC Equity Training module

Discussion

How might unconscious bias influence the evaluation of Faculty Members' Annual Reports, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Unconscious bias: How to mitigate unconscious bias

Important steps to take to mitigate unconscious biases:

- Recognizing the biases that you have
- Identifying what those biases are
- Taking steps to mitigate biases in your thought process

Once you recognize that unconscious biases exist, you can use various tools to change your thought processes. Some examples are:

- Stereotype replacement
- Positive counterstereotype imaging
- Perspective taking
- Individuation

Unconscious bias: Additional Tips

Some additional tips for minimizing the influence of bias and assumptions:

- Spend sufficient time evaluating each individual
- Apply criteria consistently across Members
- Evaluate each Member's Annual Report in its entirety.

Privacy Expectations

It is important for Members to document the impact COVID-19 has had on their performance to allow for an objective evaluation of their performance. This should not create an undue burden on Members, increase the potential for stereotyping or bias, or require the disclosure of sensitive information.

- Personal information shall not be used or disclosed for purposes other than those for which it has been collected
- Information must be maintained securely such that confidential information and personal information can only be accessed in accordance with Western's *Guidelines on Access to Information and Protection of Privacy* (MAPP 1.23.)
- The document must be properly labelled with the correct name of the Member

Considerations when assessing Teaching

Evaluation of Teaching should include careful consideration of the following:

- Clause 9.3 d) iv) of the *Annual Performance Evaluation* article which stipulates that “*curriculum development, course design, or course re-design, of whatever format, undertaken by the Member*” is a component of Teaching.
- Emergency remote teaching has required and continues to require extraordinary effort for most Members, while in-person teaching in 2020-21 also required extraordinary efforts.
- Provision of additional resources to support the transition to emergency remote teaching (e.g. instructional design assistance) or the delivery of such teaching (e.g. teaching assistants, markers, changes to class size) should not be levied against Members in the assessment of effort or performance or raise the bar of expected performance.
- Transition to emergency remote teaching may have been moderated by previous experience with technology and online teaching. Such experience should not be levied against Members or used as a comparator for Members without such experience.

SQCTs

- Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching (SQCT's) were not administered during the Winter Term of 2019 – 2020 and are therefore not available.
- The inclusion of results of SQCTs for courses taught in the 2020-2021 year is optional and at the Member's discretion. A decision not to include them should not lead to an unfavourable assessment of teaching performance.
- Where data from Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching are used, they shall be taken as information about the student experience in the classroom and allow for the possibility that Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching may be biased.
- Data contained in these Questionnaires shall not contain arithmetic averages.

Considerations when assessing Research

Evaluation of Research should include careful consideration of the following:

- disruptions to data collection due to COVID. e.g., travel disruptions, lab closures, lack of access to participants, etc.
- significantly less time available for preparing manuscripts or other scholarly work for submission which could be the result of other professional obligations, e.g., heavier teaching or service workload, etc.
- overall impacts affecting the Member's personal life, and therefore their working life, e.g., care-giving responsibilities, ill health
- delays or cancellations of conference presentations, grant applications, collaborations, sabbatical, or other factors preventing research efforts from achieving successful outcomes

Considerations when assessing Service

Evaluation of Service should include careful consideration of the following:

- Some service roles will have been exceptionally busy over the last year and a half (e.g., chair, grad chair, undergrad chair)
- Some service roles will have been less busy than usual (e.g., less routine departmental business).
- Some people will have performed more informal service work (e.g., supporting colleagues unfamiliar with online teaching)
- Some people will have performed novel/invisible/apparently unproductive service work (e.g., conferences cancelled, reduced or flipped to online; virtual/novel work for professional organizations; supporting unsuccessful grant applications in new formats);
- Efforts that didn't lead to anticipated outcomes need to be recognized

Possible Scenarios during this year's APE and recommended approaches

Scenario 1

You are the Chair of the APE Committee in your Unit. A Member includes checklists with their APE Annual Report reporting overall impacts, as well as impacts on research and teaching. In addition to checking applicable items, the Member describes in the text boxes specifics of challenges they faced while working remotely and parenting two pre-teen children. The quantity of research outputs reported would normally merit a rating of “acceptable” in the Unit. An APE committee member asks you the following questions during a committee meeting. How do you respond? 1) It looks like this colleague’s research output has definitely been impacted by COVID-related circumstances. How should I consider the checklist information in assigning a rating?; 2) How much extra weight should I give to the explanations this colleague added to the checklists?

Scenario 2

You are chair of the APE Committee in your Unit. Committee members point out to you their concerns for a colleague in your Unit who has submitted their Annual Report without appending checklists reporting COVID-19 impacts. Committee members are aware, from conversations with the Member, of a number of ways in which the Member's life and work were affected by the pandemic, and these committee members aren't sure how to assess the Member's performance because of that. What do you do?

Scenario 3

You are the Chair of the APE Committee in your Unit. A Member's Annual Report contains checklists reporting COVID impacts on their teaching: challenges with using technology while working from home while parenting small children. Their SQCTs for courses taught in 2018-19 and 2019-20 show mixed reviews, with the highest proportion of responses in the "5" range on the 7-point scale and a handful of "2" and "3" ratings. No SQCTs for 2020-21 were included in the Annual Report. A member of the APE Committee says during a meeting that they have heard from students that this colleague was really bad at conducting classes on Zoom. The committee member contends that the colleague is just making excuses for their poor teaching by reporting COVID impacts with the checklists, and that the absence of 2020-21 SQCT reports shows they must have something to hide. 1) What do you say to the committee about the evidence of teaching performance to which this committee member is referring?; 2) What do you say to the committee specifically in regards to unconscious bias?

Scenario 4

You are the Chair of the APE Committee in your Unit. A member of the committee says during the first meeting that their understanding is that they need to pay careful attention to reported COVID impacts, be flexible and unbiased in their assessments, and that it may well be appropriate to assign to a given performance a higher rating than in "normal" times if the information in the Annual Report justifies it. The committee member asks: "Am I on the right track in taking that approach?" Another committee member asks "but doesn't that unfairly disadvantage colleagues who didn't experience COVID impacts?" How do you respond?



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