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The persistence of neoliberal logics in faculty evaluations amidst Covid-19: Recalibrating toward equity

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Abstract

In this paper, we theorize the intersectional gendered impacts of COVID-19 on faculty labor, with a particular focus on how institutions of higher education in the United States evaluate faculty labor amidst the COVID-19 transition and beyond. The pandemic has disrupted faculty research, teaching, and service in differential ways, having larger impacts on women faculty, faculty of color, and caregiving faculty in ways that further reflect the intersections of these groups. Universities have had to reconsider how evaluation occurs, given the impact of these disruptions on faculty careers. Through a case study of university pandemic responses in the United States, we summarize key components of how colleges and universities shifted evaluations of faculty labor in response to COVID-19, including suspending teaching evaluations, implementing tenure delays, and allowing for impact statements in faculty reviews. While most institutional responses recenter neoliberal principles of the ideal academic worker that is both gendered and racialized, a few universities have taken more innovative approaches to better attend to equity concerns. We conclude by suggesting a *recalibration* of the faculty evaluation system – one that maintains systematic faculty reviews and allows for academic freedom, but requires universities to take a more contextualized approach to evaluation in ways that center equity and inclusion for women faculty and faculty of color for the long term.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has unleashed substantial disruption on the work lives of all faculty members, affecting research, teaching, and service, while also having larger impacts on women faculty, faculty of color, and caregiving faculty, exacerbated for those at the intersections of these groups. As a result, universities must reconsider faculty evaluation, to recognize the impact of these disruptions on faculty careers. In this paper, we theorize the intersectional gendered impacts of COVID-19 on faculty labor, with a particular focus on how institutions of higher education in the United States evaluate faculty labor amidst COVID-19 and beyond.

Higher education is not immune to neoliberal capitalism, the dominant political-economic ideology of our time, which centers the efficacy of the free market above all else (Harvey, 2005). For faculty, the neoliberal turn of the academy means they must submit to an "audit culture" (Shore & Wright, 2000) requiring repeated, quantifiable measures of productivity and teaching (Lynch, 2014; Spooner, 2020). Universities have become "greedy institutions" demanding total commitment of faculty to maximize profit (Coser, 1974; Misra et al., 2012).

At the same time, colleges and universities are gendered and racialized organizations, with assumptions about gender and race embedded within the logic of organizations to favor men and white faculty (J. Acker, 1990, 2006; Ray, 2019; Wooten & Couloute, 2017). Despite increasing numbers of women entering faculty ranks, the "ideal academic" remains masculine, a fully devoted researcher with few outside obligations (Bailyn, 2003). These pressures are prevalent for tenure-line faculty working at research-intensive universities, but also exist for non-tenure line faculty and for faculty at baccalaureate colleges and other teaching-oriented institutions (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2016; Stefanucci, 2019). Despite claims of commitment to diversity and inclusion, the "ideal academic" remains white and middle class and able to submit to intense work demands that leave little room for care and family obligations (Kanchaf et al., 2015). This expectation creates work-life challenges for most faculty, particularly for women and people of color with care responsibilities, including to extended family and community members (Kanchaf et al., 2015; Torres & Torres, 2020). Job expectations reproduce gendered racialized status hierarchies within universities, with those who do not "fit" expectations – white women and women of color – disadvantaged and marginalized (Moore, 2017; Turner et al., 2011).

Needless to say, COVID-19 has made meeting the ideal academic demands even more difficult to achieve, as the pandemic abruptly halted research activities for many faculty members. Disruptions to productivity include a variety of research constraints, such as labs, archives, and performance venues being closed, the inability to conduct human subjects research, and travel limitations (Gonzalez & Griffin, 2020; NASEM, 2021). Other aspects of faculty work simultaneously intensified, including efforts to restructure courses for online learning, online mentoring of students undergoing multiple pandemic challenges, and the administrative work needed to address pandemic effects on the university, adding to the pressures on faculty who are primarily judged on teaching and advising, while leaving less time and energy for research for faculty whose positions require research productivity (AERA, 2021). Evidence suggests that the pandemic disproportionately has been impeding the productivity of women, people of color, and caregivers (Collins et al., 2021; Erete et al., 2021; Krukowski et al., 2021; Pirtle & Wright, 2021).

Many institutions have recognized the need to adjust faculty evaluations in response to the pandemic's impact on academic work, but institutional response has been uneven in terms of addressing equity. Through a case study of university pandemic responses, we summarize key components of how colleges and universities in the United States shifted evaluations of faculty labor amidst the COVID-19 transition and beyond. We place faculty evaluation into larger context, by engaging with research that considers universities as neoliberal gender and racialized organizations. Calls to adjust faculty evaluation policies are not new, and we situate our discussion against the backdrop of previous

reform movements, such as the implementation of tenure clock extensions and parental leaves, as well as post-tenure reviews and equity charges (Lundquist et al., 2012; Manchester et al., 2013; Miller, 1999; Wood & Johnsrud, 2005). We first discuss some broad approaches universities have taken in response to the pandemic, which include suspending teaching evaluations, delaying reviews, and implementing pandemic impact statements, and we then point to the innovative approaches of a handful of universities that go further to rethink evaluation. While much has changed due to the pandemic, we argue that the neoliberal higher education system remains intact, as institutions cling to old evaluation models that center research productivity yet reproduce intersectional inequalities in the academy.

Building on feminist critiques of faculty evaluation systems, we suggest that the rapid shifts in faculty work resulting from COVID-19 represent a unique opportunity for institutional transformation toward equity. This opportunity includes the potential to destabilize metric-driven approaches to faculty evaluation, which do not consider important differences among institutions and faculty members. It also moves us toward approaches to evaluation that recognize the differential opportunities and biases faculty members face. We conclude by suggesting a *recalibration* of the faculty evaluation system – adjusting the standards by which faculty are evaluated such that universities and disciplines take a more contextualized approach to center equity and inclusion for women faculty and faculty of color.

Recalibrating means that institutions align their standards to the relative resources and opportunities available to individual faculty members at a given time. Rather than assuming that all faculty have the same opportunities, such an approach evaluates each faculty member within the relevant context. Recalibrating may include recentering different types of knowledge like community engaged scholarship, as well as providing greater recognition for contributions to teaching, mentoring, and service. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty experienced increased workloads, including intense engagement in teaching, community and diversity work, while simultaneously facing limited research opportunities and resources. Recalibrating evaluations to emphasize these contributions offers an important step toward institutional equity. Recognizing fluctuations over the course of faculty careers is key to equitable evaluation, and we conclude with concrete suggestions for more equitable systems. Recalibration does not overhaul the existing system of faculty reviews, but allows institutions flexibility as they determine tangible steps forward.

2 | FACULTY WORK AND EVALUATIONS WITHIN GENDERED & RACIALIZATION ORGANIZATIONS

In the 1990s, higher education institutions increased rigor to faculty reappointment, promotion, and tenure processes amidst calls for greater accountability and equity through establishing more formalized and systematic processes (Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2008; Stewart & Valian, 2018). Formerly, professional status and standing for faculty was determined by colleagues evaluating the merit of one's work rather ambiguously with little transparency which, paired with vague and inconsistent tenure requirements, created contexts subject to biases and group stereotypes that privileged white and men faculty (Mitchneck et al., 2016; Rosser, 2007; Stewart & Valian, 2018). The university now operates via "market-based power" rooted in academic capitalism with academic advancement measured through "objective" metrics of production (Alemán, 2014; Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2008). Reliance on objective measures seems to level the playing field, as concrete evaluation criteria can mitigate prejudices and inequity, but these measures may still reflect gendered and racialized biases, and auditing faculty evaluation criteria for transparency and clarity remain key to achieving equity in these processes (McNair et al., 2020; O'Meara & Templeton, forthcoming).

The shift in faculty evaluation can further be attributed to various political and economic factors, including declining external funding, growing competition for tuition revenue, and the rise of market logic in non-economic areas (O'Meara, 2007; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). Today, faculty in the US are evaluated frequently, with formal evaluation processes typically occurring every 12 months, in addition to reviews for reappointment, or tenure and promotion reviews, with salary increases awarded on the basis of faculty merit or performance (Stewart & Valian, 2018). This has included the addition of post-tenure reviews, ensuring that faculty are evaluated regularly post-tenure, although

opinions differ on whether such approaches reward excellence or merely undermine faculty autonomy (Miller, 1999; O'Meara, 2004; Wood & Johnsrud, 2005).

Implementation of formalized processes also allows for more systematic evaluation of *all* faculty members, as previously, women and faculty of color received greater scrutiny (Martin, 2013; Valian, 1998). Yet, at the same time, bureaucratization added time and effort, as well as reliance on quantitative measures, such as citation counts, that also reflect gender and racial biases (Mas-Bleda & Thelwall, 2016; Mitchneck, 2020). Faculty are increasingly surveilled, with the regime of power and control underlying the corporate university associated with a particular form of managerial masculinity that is "inimical to feminist aims" (Alemán, 2014: 112; see also; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Deem, 2003). In the remainder of this section, we outline the neoliberal logics undergirding shifts in faculty evaluations, including the reliance on quantifiable metrics of excellence, a uniform timeline for diverse faculty, and assumptions of equal opportunities, and how these intensified evaluation processes create new inequities by gender and race.

2.1 | Quantifiable metrics of excellence

Faculty evaluation now requires an assessment of performance relative to some metric-based standard, but the standard of excellence is often ambiguous, with indicators varying widely both across and within institutions, as well as subject to leadership changes (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; O'Meara & Templeton, forthcoming). Neoliberal university pressures to boost international rankings have narrowed definitions of research output that "counts": typically, high-status publication benchmarks and grant funding (Bailyn, 2003; Spooner, 2020). The ideal worker in the contemporary academy engages in large-scale research projects with promise of economic payoff and prestige (S. Acker & Wagner, 2019; Lynch, 2014). The popular adage, "publish or perish," increasingly defines academic careers, with publication quantity, grant dollars, and visibility considered paramount to upward mobility, promotion, and earnings (Leahey, 2007; Spooner, 2020). The exponential increase in requirements for promotion and tenure are further example of the free market approach of universities, creating what has been called a "product-ification" of science valuing sheer output over quality research (Woolston, 2021). These trends are bolstered by the growth of private businesses, external auditing firms providing universities data on faculty outputs and quantifiable metrics of scholarly productivity, and revisioning faculty as units of profit in the higher education system (AAUP, 2016).

The very notion of academic "excellence," while presented as an objective standard, is a social construction that reflects gendered and racialized processes involved in its assessment (Nielsen, 2016; Stewart & Valian, 2018). First, the prioritization of large-scale research projects and quantifiable outputs disadvantages humanists and social scientists, disproportionately women, as well as researchers doing social justice or community engaged work that centers experiences of women, people of color, and other oppressed groups (S. Acker & Wagner, 2019). Research collaboration bolsters faculty output, with collaborative papers garnering better journal placements and higher citation counts (Frickel et al., 2017), but gendered and racialized network structures reinforce collaboration opportunities for white and Asian men, with women and faculty from underrepresented minority groups often excluded from high-status, homogeneous academic networks directly relevant to productivity (Gaughan et al., 2018).

Additionally, women engage in disproportionate shares of service, perceived to be "naturally" suited for feminized, "institutional housekeeping" work crucial to the functioning of universities but less valued in personnel decisions, while taking away time for research (Fitzgerald, 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017). Although time spent on teaching is more comparable between men and women, women spend more time on service, advising, and mentoring students (Misra et al., 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017). Time spent on research is particularly reduced for faculty mothers, though this is not true for faculty fathers (Misra et al., 2012). Workload disparities are exacerbated for women faculty of color, who often face intense mentoring workloads, especially supporting students of color and engaging in community and diversity work (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Turner et al., 2011). Women of color are

also more likely than white men to view that the university work that they see as most important in their workload is devalued in department reward systems (Misra et al., 2021).

2.2 | Uniform review timeline

The tenure system also imposes a uniform timeline for all faculty, with assistant professors typically expected to meet tenure and promotion criteria within a set period of time. Yet faculty career trajectories differ for scholarly and personal reasons. For many women, the end of their fixed probationary period of five to 7 years conflicts with child-bearing years and subsequent years of intensive childcare, with women typically engaging in more care work than men (Antecol et al., 2018; Mason et al., 2013; Misra et al., 2012). As such, the gender gap in tenure rates is larger for those with children, and women academics are less likely than men to have children and more likely to delay having children until after tenure (Mason et al., 2013; Wolfinger et al., 2009).

Institutional reform policies to pause tenure clocks during parental leaves aim to level the playing field for women and caregivers but have unclear effects (Lundquist et al., 2012; Williams & Lee, 2016). Only some universities provide paid parental leave, since there is no federal paid parental leave policy in the U.S. In one study of top-50 economics departments, researchers found that gender neutral care leaves reduce women's tenure rates and long-term earning potential while increasing tenure rates of men, though there were no gender differences in who eventually earned tenure in the discipline (Antecol et al., 2018). Yet another study finds that economics faculty who pause tenure clocks for family reasons earn less than colleagues, but are more likely to be promoted (Manchester et al., 2013). While some research indicates that faculty men might take unfair advantage of parental leave to make progress on research projects (Antecol et al., 2018), other research finds that faculty fathers are unlikely to take leave unless their partner is back at work full-time given the stigma they face for caregiving (Lundquist et al., 2012). This research also suggests that both men and women faculty engage in research while on leave from teaching and service, allowing them to avoid falling as far behind as they would have without leave (Lundquist et al., 2012).

Universities are more likely to provide paid parental leave than paid leave options for faculty members who need to care for parents, partners, or other family members in need of support. Given that faculty members of color and first-generation faculty members are more likely to have care responsibilities to extended families and community members (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012), some institutions have implemented broader leaves covering diverse care responsibilities, similar to the unpaid U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows for care for other family members (Hollenshead et al., 2005). Without paid care leaves, faculty with more intensive care demands are disadvantaged in assessments of their productivity in much the same way that faculty who cannot access paid parental leave are disadvantaged.

2.3 | Assumption of equal opportunities

Finally, faculty work under structural, social, and cultural contexts that make their work portfolios distinct, and yet evaluation systems rarely acknowledge differences in faculty working contexts and conditions (O'Meara & Templeton, forthcoming). Faculty must take personal responsibility to navigate precarious employment conditions, often by giving in to managerialist norms of overwork (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Misra et al., 2012). To manage intense pressures to balance seemingly unattainable research, teaching, mentoring, and service workloads, faculty often work more than 50 or 60 hours per week, all while navigating increased job insecurity and reduced resources (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). Further, a bifurcation has emerged in the U.S. in recent decades between a shrinking number of tenure-stream academics and an ever-increasing "reserve army" of teaching faculty with contingent contracts (Cardozo, 2017; Ivancheva et al., 2019). Women and people of color are disproportionately represented in teaching positions and non-tenure-track roles at most institutions (Finkelstein et al., 2016), and women of color often enter

the professoriate through non-tenure-track ranks (Gonzalez & Griffin, 2020). While non-tenure-track faculty typically face different evaluation systems than their tenure-track colleagues, the labor of teaching faculty upholds the larger power structures of the academy. The amplification of faculty workloads is uneven, with systemic workload inequities disadvantaging white women and women faculty of color in ways that have consequences for faculty diversity and inclusion (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Hanasono et al., 2019; Misra et al., 2021; O'Meara et al., 2017).

The decentralized nature of faculty evaluation systems may further hinder women's careers. Most academic performance reviews are conducted by individuals who lack a clear understanding of the goals of the review process which, paired with vague and inconsistent tenure requirements, creates contexts subject to biases and group stereotypes (Mitchneck et al., 2016; Rosser, 2007; Stewart & Valian, 2018). Substantial evidence demonstrates that group-based stereotypes disadvantage women faculty and faculty of color in review processes including in crediting collaborative work (Heilman & Haynes, 2005; Sarsons, 2017), teaching evaluations (Laube et al., 2007), and in external review letters (Dutt et al., 2016). These patterns reinforce gender status beliefs depicting women as more communal but less agentic (Ridgeway, 2011) which, in a system valuing managerialism and accountability, creates barriers to leadership for women, while providing men with a bonus (Deem, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2018; Morley, 2013).

Because the neoliberal evaluation process requires individuals to demonstrate how their performance aligns with organizational goals associated with a white, masculine subject (Fitzgerald, 2012, 2018), the competence and contributions of white men tend to be consistently overestimated while those of women and people of color are underestimated and undervalued (Misra et al., 2021; Stewart & Valian, 2018). Gendered and racialized organizational mechanisms contribute to longstanding, systemic barriers to the academic careers of women, with women of color faculty being especially penalized; these barriers have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 | COVID-19 AND THE GENDERED-RACIALIZED IMPACTS ON FACULTY WORK

All faculty have had various aspects of their work impacted by COVID-19, with the "virtual invasion" of work into home creating a "never-ending shift" (Boncori, 2020). When U.S. universities shifted operations online, faculty maintained work responsibilities amidst an unprecedented level of insecurity, stress, grief, and mental health issues (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). At the same time, some institutions cut support for faculty, including wages, due to the economic impact of COVID-19 (Woitowich et al., 2020). Taken together, pandemic-related factors have negatively impacted the productivity of most academics (NASEM, 2021).

While long-term pandemic impacts on faculty careers remain to be seen, there is early evidence of gendered and racialized disparities. Much attention has been paid to gender gaps in research productivity during COVID-19. While journal submissions overall have increased since the pandemic started, the proportion of submissions authored by women has decreased (Fazackerley, 2020; Fuchs-Schundeln, 2020). Additionally, women are much less likely than men to be working on research directly related to COVID-19, an indicator of the differential effects of the pandemic on new projects (Amano-Patiño et al., 2020; Andersen et al., 2020). Research on preprint databases similarly indicate that the pandemic is disproportionately impeding women's productivity across various disciplines (Cui et al., 2020; Viglione, 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020; Woitowich et al., 2020). One study analyzing 11 preprint repositories across disciplines finds evidence suggesting that the pandemic has hindered productivity of women in early career stages disproportionately (Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020). Disruptions to the careers of junior faculty will have compounding effects for years to come (Husby & Modinos, 2020).

Not all women academics have been equally constrained by the pandemic, and field, caregiving status and race have especially informed women's workloads and productivity. Faculty with children under five have completed fewer peer review assignments, attended fewer funding panel meetings, and submitted fewer first-authored articles during the pandemic than those with older children (Krukowski et al., 2021). Indeed, the strongest predictors of research dis-

ruptions during COVID-19 are being a woman and having young children (Myers et al., 2020). The closure of schools and daycare facilities have increased childcare responsibilities and household labor (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

For women faculty who already had greater care and household labor responsibilities than their men colleagues before the pandemic, work-family conflicts have only become heightened during the pandemic (Alon et al., 2019; Goodwin & Mitchneck, 2020; Malisch et al., 2020; Minello, 2020). The pandemic has taken tolls on single and child-free women navigating isolation and concern for family members living far away, creating work disruptions (Ut-oft, 2020). In two-parent, heterosexual households, fathers increased their time spent on domestic work, but mothers maintained primary responsibility for childcare and household labor in most families (Collins et al., 2021). Mothers with children under 12 have reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers (Collins et al., 2021). Daily routines of women academics are more likely to be disrupted (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

Care demands have also come in the form of intensified community engagement and care for extended families, particularly for Black faculty and faculty of color (Pirtle & Wright, 2021; Torres & Torres, 2020). COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black communities in the US, with higher mortality rates of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people compared to white people (Anyane-Yeboa et al., 2020; Erete et al., 2021; Pirtle & Wright, 2021). Care burdens are also greater for faculty of color, who often have more responsibility for their extended families than white faculty (Medden, 2021; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012). The combination of COVID-19 and a series of incidents of racial violence and police brutality against Black people created a "perfect storm" for Black and Brown communities, whose members joined together to protest systemic racism embedded in the US (Erete et al., 2021). Violence against Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in the US and the rise of xenophobia and anti-Asian racism have deeply impacted AAPI communities, creating heightened anxiety, fear of violence, and grief (Pai, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). As Sheena Erete, Yolanda Rankin, and Jakita Thomas write, "During these turbulent times, it is extremely difficult to focus on conducting research, analyzing data, writing manuscripts, or submitting papers for publications when our world is burning down around us, literally in some cases" (Erete et al., 2021: 2). Faculty of color continue to experience societal turmoil and grief, impacting their ability to work.

Structural gendered racism in the home, workplace, and health care system have created particular vulnerabilities for Black women and other women of color during the pandemic, including increased risk for the virus (Pirtle & Wright, 2021). Throughout this time, women faculty of color have supported their institutions through mentoring students and leading on issues of diversity and inclusion (Gonzalez & Griffin, 2020)— labor that is often invisible yet takes emotional, physical, and mental tolls (Erete et al., 2021; Pololi et al., 2010). The combination of additional service burdens, high vulnerability to the hardships posed by COVID-19, and disruptions to community engaged research is likely to have long-term negative impacts on the retention of faculty of color (Carr et al., 2021).

In the remainder of this paper, we summarize key components of institutional responses to faculty evaluation amidst the COVID-19 transition. While much has changed amidst COVID-19, the neoliberal higher education system remains firmly in place, as institutions cling to old evaluation models venerating research productivity as they fear compromising excellence. Feminist critiques of evaluation systems are not new, but we suggest that the rapid shifts in faculty work resulting from COVID-19 present a rare opportunity to change the higher education system, to address problematic assumptions in faculty evaluations and to initiate long-term institutional transformation toward equity.

Through the case of university evaluation systems during the pandemic, we theorize how universities have responded to the pandemic, and how these responses both reinforce and challenge existing logics – suggesting the potential for disrupting evaluation. Many universities have, of course, failed to take full advantage of this moment, clinging to neoliberal values and systems that only deepen preexisting inequalities in the academy. We conclude by suggesting a *recalibration* of the faculty evaluation system – one that recognizes the importance of contextualized assessment but centers equity for women faculty and faculty of color.

4 | CASE STUDY: COVID-19, RESEARCH U, AND FACULTY EVALUATION IN THE UNITED STATES

This paper is a case study of institutional responses to COVID-19 regarding faculty evaluation in the United States. The researchers are members of an interdisciplinary team at a large research-intensive, doctoral-granting public university in the Northeastern United States (Research U), part of a program funded by a U.S. National Science Foundation to implement systemic solutions to increase the participation and advancement of women and underrepresented minorities in science and engineering faculty. Key components of program efforts include social science research, evidence-based faculty workshops, collaborations with Deans and department chairs to develop best practices, and regular interactions with the faculty union and university offices, including the Provost's Office, to make policy and procedure recommendations. The first and third authors are junior scholars, white women, in non-tenure track roles, who joined Research U in the midst of the pandemic, while the second author, a woman of color, is a tenured faculty member and longtime university employee. Our varying positionalities in terms of career status, employment duration, and race allowed us to consider pandemic impacts on diverse faculty. Additionally, the second author's longstanding relationships with campus stakeholders provided access to key information, but also ensured the trust necessary to offer constructive feedback.

Amid the university's abrupt shift to online operations in March 2020, the Research U team pivoted its focus to faculty inclusion and equity in the context of COVID-19. The team simultaneously continued our social science research, conducting an institutional case study on the university's response to COVID-19, including first-hand experiences, observations, team meetings, and conversations with community members since March 2020, as well as official university memos and online communications, informational interviews, and information from relevant campus events and workshops (see Clark et al., 2020; Misra et al., 2020). Our aim has been to keep equity at the center of institutional responses to the pandemic, by facilitating communication between campus administrators and faculty, circulating best practices, and supporting faculty. The team collaborated with university leaders around a central faculty concern of documentation of pandemic impacts, and developed a best practice tool outlining how to document pandemic impacts and evaluate faculty equitably during the pandemic. In the Fall 2020 semester, the team organized workshops and trainings on equitable faculty evaluations on campus for leaders and members of faculty evaluation committees.

We expanded our work in the 2020–2021 academic year beyond our immediate university, to provide workshops and trainings across the United States, developing and presenting a model of institutional response to the pandemic to support faculty diversity and equity. We have led, participated in, and attended various workshops and panels on the topic of COVID-19 and faculty equity. At the time of writing, we have led 27 workshops presented to faculties at various universities and colleges; leadership councils; and professional associations, with the authors collaborating with institutions to review and evaluate their pandemic responses.[1] The authors reviewed institutional memos and formal communications, policy amendments, national reports, and relevant social science research. We have together further participated in eight workshops, and attended over 30 webinars and trainings across the United States, participating in a national conversation. Key to our work has been continued dialog with faculty, campus leaders, and change agents across a range of organizations about the constellation of institutional pandemic responses.

Throughout our discussion, we point to specific examples from institutions, but our examples are by no means exhaustive. Often, we reference institutions with which we have collaborated, and thus have reviewed their policies and engaged in direct conversations with change agents as they navigated the pandemic. Other times, we reference institutions with which we have not worked directly, but whose pandemic responses we have researched or learned about in workshops. The included institutions vary in terms of their pandemic responses; we include in our discussion universities with robust pandemic responses, as well as those that implemented more limited measures. We do not include institutions that made no changes to faculty evaluations in light of COVID-19, as our focus is on institutional shifts in response to the crisis.

TABLE 1 Faculty evaluation logics and recalibrating toward equity

Institutional logic of evaluation	Initial COVID-19 policy adjustments	Recalibrating steps toward equity
Quantifiable metrics of excellence	Suspend teaching evals	*Recognize faculty work holistically* • Expand definitions of teaching excellence • Emphasize quality over quantity *Recenter diverse knowledge* • Expand what counts for productivity • Include community engaged or public scholarship
Uniform timeline for all faculty	Tenure delays	*Rework timelines* • Flexibility in length of delay • Flexibility in timing of review • Backdated salary • Additional resources for faculty in need
Assumption of equal opportunities	Pandemic impact statements	*Recontextualize faculty work* • Consider workload and work conditions as well as variable opportunities for faculty • Allow faculty to identify specific contributions as well as challenges *Retrain evaluators* • Ensure evaluators recognize and avoid gender, racial, and caregiver biases in assessing faculty careers

This paper draws on these data to incorporate practices and lessons learned from engaging in this national dialog. We build upon our initial case of Research U to further outline common approaches to pandemic response in the United States, specifically focusing on adjustments to faculty evaluation procedures. We first discuss some immediate approaches, which include pausing student evaluations of teaching, delaying tenure reviews, and implementing pandemic impact statements.

As outlined in Table 1, most institutional responses to the pandemic attempt to adjust neoliberal logics of faculty evaluation, including quantifiable metrics of excellence, imposing a uniform review timeline, and assuming equal opportunities amongst diverse faculty. Many institutions make well-intentioned efforts to mediate inequality, but interventions rarely intercede in the gendered and racialized organization of academia. We close by pointing to the innovative approaches of a handful of universities that go further to address equity concerns, suggesting that recalibrating the faculty evaluation system can work, long-term, toward upending structures of inequality.

5 | SUMMARY OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES AND POLICY ADJUSTMENTS

Faculty work shifted enormously in March 2020, with over 4200 universities in the United States transferring to online operations, moving courses online, closing labs, and prohibiting all university-related travel for faculty (Alexander, 2021). Some universities made early adjustments to policy and procedure to attempt to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on faculty careers. The postsecondary education system in the US is diverse, with institutions varying widely in type, size, and resources. Pandemic responses reflect this institutional diversity, and policy shifts have been

uneven, with few colleges and universities prioritizing equity and inclusion while managing crisis. Nonetheless, institutional responses have coalesced around some approaches, and in this section, we present an overview of the most common shifts made to faculty evaluations, including the suspension of teaching evaluations, with the implementation of tenure delays and pandemic impact statements.

Perhaps the most common institutional response in the US higher education system has been the cessation of standardized teaching evaluations. Many universities moved to suspend teaching evaluations or to make sure that these evaluations could not be used in punitive ways, recognizing that the quick change to online classes might disadvantage faculty members. While there has long been clear evidence that standardized teaching evaluations reflect race and gender biases and do not correlate with student learning (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2021; Laube et al., 2007), most universities continue to use them. Recognizing that bias in student evaluations in teaching might be exacerbated during the pandemic, institutions including Research U, University of Southern California, and Virginia Tech suspended them, or allowed their inclusion in faculty reviews to be optional. Other universities, such as the University of California, Irvine, called for including additional measures of teaching effectiveness (Lederman, 2020). Humboldt State University maintained standardized evaluations but recommended careful interpretation of student evaluations for all courses taught during the pandemic, suggesting peer evaluations be the primary indicator of teaching quality. In a slightly different approach, Virginia Commonwealth University offered guidance for faculty to create teaching reflection plans that include self-assessment narratives about the emergency transition to remote teaching. While standardized teaching evaluations tend to be ubiquitous, many institutions exempted their use given the extreme circumstances facing nearly every instructor in the pandemic (Lederman, 2020).

A second institutional pandemic response has been the implementation of tenure delays in order to allow faculty members time to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 on their research, teaching, and service. Some institutions offered tenure delays over 2019-20 and/or 2020-21, with fewer considering further extending delays beyond the 2020–2021 academic year, including University of California, Irvine and Research U (for newly hired faculty). Some scholars suggest that tenure delays need to be constructed to reflect the actual time lost to the pandemic, exacerbated for those who have lost family and friends to COVID-19 (Weissman, 2020). Tenure delays have been implemented differently, with some universities making them automatic and others by request only. The benefit to automatic tenure delays is that faculty do not have to document their particular need for a delay. At universities where faculty must request a delay, even if they are consistently granted, faculty express fear that the documentation may reflect poorly on their record, in some cases, igniting gendered-racialized caregiver bias amongst evaluators. As the research on tenure delays for new children suggests, delays need to be carefully designed to ensure that caregiving faculty do not face bias as a result of taking a delay, or be expected to produce more, given the slightly longer evaluation window (Drago et al., 2005, 2006; Weissman, 2020). Both internal and external evaluators must be trained and directed to avoid evaluating these cases in biased ways.

The inclusion of pandemic impact statements in faculty evaluations has become another widely implemented practice as colleges and universities work to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Large, research-intensive universities including Research U, Florida State University, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Michigan State University, and the University of California Los Angeles have implemented pandemic impact statements, as well as private universities including the University of Denver, and small liberal arts colleges. While these statements differ in form and function by institution, the shared aim is for faculty to have the opportunity to document both constraints on their research, teaching, and service due to the pandemic, as well as new or unusual contributions made in response to the crisis. Statements are included in the annual evaluations of faculty, as part of personnel cases, or both, and provide documentation of how the pandemic impacted individual teaching, mentoring, research, and service.

Generally, we see these institutional shifts – rethinking standardized teaching evaluations, tenure delays, and pandemic impact statements – as important, initial responses, but not as strategies to shift universities away from neoliberal models of productivity. For example, tenure delays, in part, are necessary because universities refuse to consider changing standards for tenure, despite the enormously disruptive effect of the pandemic. Similarly, most universities have only moved to limit standardized teaching evaluations *during the pandemic*, rather than moving to

more holistic approaches altogether, despite the substantial existing evidence of bias. Pandemic impact statements allow faculty to identify the workload and the context in which they have carried out their work, with an aim to clarifying differences in faculty opportunities. Yet, faculty members have always worked in different contexts – such as when asked to teach more students or more courses or, for Black faculty, asked to engage in more service and mentoring, and expected to live with higher levels of workplace hostility. Faculty have not historically been given the opportunity to clarify *these* impacts. As such, many institutional pandemic responses miss the opportunity for recalibration and instead keep the neoliberal higher education system intact and reinforce the gendered and racialized organization of academia. A more transformative approach would require universities and disciplines to consistently take context into consideration in the evaluation of faculty, including well beyond the immediate moment of disruption and yet, as we describe below, few institutions have implemented such responses.

6 | RECALIBRATING STANDARDS TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND INCLUSION

In this final section, we describe how common approaches in the U.S. have failed to fully account for drastic changes in faculty working conditions – with pandemic responses further reinscribing the gendered and racialized ideal academic worker. We first highlight the innovative interventions of select universities, including retroactive back pay for faculty taking tenure delays, flexible review timelines, additional resources for faculty in need, and trainings for evaluators. Building on these examples, we suggest a *recalibration* of the faculty evaluation system as a step toward equity, which we also develop in Table 1. By recalibration, we mean an adjustment of the standards by which faculty are evaluated to account for the relative resources and opportunities available to them. Recalibrating includes centering different types of scholarship and work, as well as providing greater recognition for faculty contributions beyond teaching. We conclude by exploring why institutions refuse to systematically reconsider faculty evaluations, and outline approaches that more effectively center equity for women faculty and faculty of color.

Many university administrators and faculty members worry that readjusting evaluation, given the impact of the pandemic, might weaken standards of excellence. The tenure system, which helps safeguard academic freedom, has been under attack for some time (Hertzog, 2017; Law, 2021). Reconsidering evaluation might pose additional threats to the tenure system or compromise standards of rigor (Garofalo, 2021). In many ways, implementing tenure delays has allowed institutions to cling to standards of excellence under a façade of equity and flexibility. With tenure delays recognized and somewhat customary (albeit not uncomplicated) before the pandemic for new children or other care responsibilities, implementing 1-year or even 2-year delays to account for pandemic disruptions neatly fit into existing evaluation systems.

In the context of COVID-19, though, tenure delays might have unique negative impacts for those most impacted by the pandemic, often women and faculty of color (Malisch et al., 2020). If certain faculty – for example, caregiving women – are more likely to delay their tenure decision year, their salary will be disadvantaged relative those faculty who did not need to delay their decision year (Beilock, 2021; Oleschuk, 2020). Amongst a handful of exceptional universities offering delays, including Research U, University of Denver, and University of California Irvine, the pay and date of tenure is backdated to the original date; however, the majority of institutions offer a delay with no promise of backdated salary increases. Back-dating the tenure pay increase to the original tenure year, mitigate these long-term effects on pay (Malisch et al., 2020).[2]

Additionally, extra time before tenure review does little to address pandemic-related challenges, and can therefore exacerbate inequities. For faculty facing work interruptions due to heightened care responsibilities for children, older, or sick or disabled family members, tenure delays take pressure off the immediate context. Yet, tenure delays also may not be flexible enough for those faculty whose intensive care responsibilities will continue or whose research will remain upended by the pandemic for longer periods, included the community-based research faculty of color are more likely to do (Weissman, 2020).

One flexible adjustment to better address these inequities could be extending automatic delays beyond a single year, since it is impossible to determine individual promise without a more extended timeline. Yet, this adjustment operates within the flawed, existing system. A more radical reform would be a new tenure clock altogether, one that allows faculty to opt-in when they want to go up for review (Drago & Williams, 2000). Similarly, candidates could be select the best 6 years of their record, with evaluators only assessing the quality and impact of work from those years (Htun, 2020).

Rather than offer resources in a "need-blind" way, policy adjustments could further target support to those faculty who were most impacted by the pandemic, including investing in faculty of color (Carr et al., 2021). Where funders or universities provide additional support, faculty may be more successful (Weissman, 2020). For example, universities might offer additional resources to support faculty affected by the pandemic, including but not limited to caregivers (University of Wisconsin), such as research funds (Research U), service releases (University of California Merced), funded graduate students (Stanford University), and work-study students to tutor children (Barnard College). More recently, the National Institutes of Health in the United States revised its policy for early-stage investigators, allowing more time to pandemic-related extensions or those due to other life events, with the deputy director noting that "life does not happen sequentially" (Flaherty, 2021).

Although more universities have adopted pandemic impact statements, fewer have supported faculty in writing and evaluating these statements through tools and workshops. As such, one concern is that only those faculty members who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic will complete statements, thereby risking increased visibility to the most vulnerable individuals. Research U provided pandemic writing workshops encouraging all faculty to write statements, including statements that identify pandemic-related contributions as well as challenges. Other institutions (Clemson, Ohio State) require all faculty to write statements, even if brief, to reduce bias in who reports impacts. By encouraging brief statements and minimizing the additional work for faculty, this intervention brings the campus closer to recording the true number of individuals impacted. Additionally, some departments at Research U created memos that were appended to every faculty member's annual review to record how the pandemic impacted the discipline broadly.

Some institutions have also provided trainings for evaluators and committees against bias in evaluating pandemic impact statements (Research U, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, Purdue University). Research University provided anti-bias trainings for both leaders (department Chairs and Deans) and for faculty members on evaluation committees. The University of Delaware conducted trainings for department chairs with an emphasis on strains for caregivers, particularly single-parent faculty and faculty of color. While in some ways pandemic impact statements fit into the neoliberal bureaucracy system, and reduce the rich, complex contributions of faculty work to a "box-ticking exercise" through "rubrics, metrics, and matrices," pandemic impact statements have allowed evaluators to consider work in context (Khalid & Snyder, 2021). Rather than expecting that faculty work looks like any other year, statements allow evaluators to consider the unusual work context for faculty members.

Another innovative approach is to recalibrate evaluations, considering whether the faculty case is different from previous cases simply due to the effect of the pandemic. The framework for this evaluation approach is described as "achievement relative to opportunity," assessing career progression over a period of time given the opportunities available to faculty (Monash University; Connecticut College; Feldman & Jafar, 2021; Monash University, 2020). Thus, someone in a field where, for example, journal response times have increased during the pandemic, might still earn tenure at the expected time, if their lower productivity appears to be directly connected to the pandemic. Similarly, if a colleague has a strong record of teaching, research, and service, but their research record reflects pandemic-related shutdowns, the case might not be delayed if colleagues feel confident that their colleague would have met the criteria if not for the pandemic. For faculty members who have already proven their "promise," requiring more time before earning tenure is problematic.

Institutions using this framework recalibrate evaluation standards to align with institutional resources or, in the case of the pandemic, the dramatic cuts to resources like research funds (Feldman & Jafar, 2021). This approach emphasizes overall quality and impact of achievements over the quantity or rate of achievement. Importantly this

framework does not expect lesser standards of performance, but instead assumes that it is possible to determine a person's promise as a researcher or faculty member based on a slightly different window of time.

Under this approach, universities could emphasize evaluating a faculty member based on their working conditions. During the pandemic, faculty members have had to contend with many changed working conditions, where and how their work is carried out (as e.g., when they teach online rather than in person), as well as changes to their workload (as, e.g., when students need more support and advising during the pandemic). While universities have been more likely to revise criteria in the area of teaching, for example, reconsidering teaching evaluations given the shift to online teaching, faculty working conditions for research have also changed, including lab and performance venue closures, but universities have been more hesitant to shift expectations for research and creative productivity.

Recognizing fluctuations in productivity over academic careers is crucial to equitable evaluation, including fluctuations related to the pandemic, as well as normal fluctuations related to career stage, shifting family responsibilities, or shifting academic interests (Feldman & Jafar, 2021; O'Meara & Templeton, forthcoming; Stewart & Valian, 2018). Thus, in the context of the pandemic, faculty could be judged holistically based on the context in which they work, rather than asked to meet guidelines based on pre-pandemic working conditions. At Connecticut College, for example, pre-pandemic standards of excellence already acknowledged the relationship between faculty research, teaching and service. This approach, emphasizing "balance and holistic assessment," has been better able to accommodate fluctuations in faculty work conditions due to COVID-19 (Feldman & Jafar, 2021). Such evaluation systems also recognize that in any faculty career, there are normal ebbs and flows; the goal is to determine whether the faculty member, on the whole, will continue to make contributions to the work that the university values, rather than focus on simplistic metrics.

Colleges and universities in the US often fail to rethink expectations for tenure, including re-centering different types of knowledge production (such as publicly engaged scholarship, or community engaged work), reconsidering how knowledge benefits society (Connelly, 2020; Gannon, 2021). Expanding what is defined as a publication to include broader scholarly works allows for innovation, and releases faculty from the "publish or perish" ethos (Ocampo, 2021). This approach, taken for example, by some departments at California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, has supported vulnerable faculty during the pandemic, as "revised tenure requirements didn't instill a fear that they'd lose their job if they got sick or had to become the primary caretaker for an aging parent" (Ocampo, 2021, para. 13).

Recalibrating might include attending more specifically to the contributions made in the classroom, and mentoring students, as central to the work of the university. Providing greater recognition of the important teaching, mentoring, and service work of faculty members, particularly given the substantial demands of this work during the pandemic, could help institutions realign evaluation with work expectations (di Bartolomeo & Loaeza, 2021; Gee, 2021; Misra et al., 2021). Some universities recognize the research, teaching and community contributions of in response to COVID-19 (Monash University, Research U, University of Delaware), including efforts to improve diversity, equity and inclusion through service or teaching (Humboldt State University). In the context of COVID-19, one-size-fits-all policies will fall short in terms of equity (Gannon, 2021). Creating flexible systems that recognize the most valuable work at the university could benefit universities; as long as these more flexible systems are not implemented in ways that disadvantage women and faculty of color (Carr et al., 2021; Connelly, 2020; Feldman & Jafar, 2021).

Because universities refuse to move beyond existing neoliberal metrics of productivity, recalibrating evaluation represents one small step toward equity, rather than an overhaul of the existing system. Universities systematized and bureaucratized evaluation, in part to level the playing field for women and faculty of color, by implementing accountability for all faculty members (Martin, 2013; Stewart & Valian, 2018). However, this systematization has led to a cottage industry that tends to rely on simplistic metrics of productivity (at considerable price to universities), rather than more holistic evaluations of the contributions faculty make to the mission of their institutions.

This systematization is particularly problematic insofar that it tends to ignore much of the important work that faculty members carry out within institutions and in their communities that make the academy more diverse, inclusive, and equitable – work often carried out by women faculty and faculty of color (Misra et al., 2021). The *ideal*

worker remains identified by a faculty member's productivity, as measured in narrow ways by Academic Analytics (AAUP, 2016), with little recognition of biases in funding, publishing, and citations, privileging a particular kind of worker (Kaatz et al., 2016; Laube et al., 2007; Mas-Bleda & Thelwall, 2016). Putting greater emphasis on publicly engaged research, community-based research and teaching, effective mentoring and support for students, and diversity and inclusion work could go far toward addressing gender and racial/ethnic disparities in tenure and promotion (Cardel et al., 2020). As historian Kevin Gannon notes,

> Lack of consensus on how to evaluate faculty work during this unprecedented year, however, should not mean inaction. The challenge for institutions and their decision-makers is to discern varied and flexible solutions that benefit *individual* candidates for contract renewal, tenure, and promotion as well as *institutional* well-being. (2021, emphasis in original).

While there have been notable calls during the pandemic to reinvent what success looks like, universities appear to be resistant to taking more transformative measures (Cardel et al., 2020).

7 | CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has cast a light on the structural inequities related to tenure and promotion that exist for women faculty, caregivers, and faculty of color. The pandemic has heightened baseline inequities embedded in evaluation standards for academics, but these structural issues will persist long after the immediate crisis has passed (Feldman & Jafar, 2021). As Merin Oleschuk notes, "The COVID-19 pandemic serves as an opportunity and a provocation to rethink our established ways of evaluating academic success to acknowledge and ameliorate systemic differences in its enactment. Doing so can help pave a more equitable path forward." (Oleschuk, 2020, p. 2). And yet, we find that higher education institutions in the United States have failed to fully take advantage of this moment, instead recentering neoliberal values in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have drawn on an intense 18 months of collaboration with colleges and universities across the country on their pandemic responses, including leading workshops and trainings, consulting with administrators, and reviewing policy adjustments, national reports, and social science research, to outline the immediate, common approaches taken with regard to faculty evaluations. Despite the diversity of the US postsecondary education system, institutional responses have coalesced around the cessation of standardized teaching evaluations, and the implementation of tenure delays and pandemic impact statements. We see these institutional shifts as crucial, short-term adjustments to support faculty, and yet insufficient in shifting universities away from neoliberal models of productivity, or addressing the inequities deepened by the pandemic. Tenure clock extensions, for example, fit neatly into existing systems but might very well hinder the career progression and earning potential of women faculty and faculty of color (Malisch et al., 2020). And without training evaluators against bias, and instructions to consider faculty work in context, impact statements could become another neoliberal exercise adding to faculty workloads. Tenure delays and impact statements supplemented by targeted resources for faculty most impacted by the pandemic, including back pay increases to the original tenure year, better address rapid shifts in faculty working conditions and mitigate long-term pandemic effects.

A more transformative approach would require universities and disciplines to recalibrate by taking context into consideration when evaluating faculty, both shifting how faculty are evaluated and centering components of faculty work that have previously been undervalued or ignored. A few universities have taken more innovative approaches to better attend to equity concerns, while others had existing, holistic evaluation systems in place that could be flexibly adapted to account for shifts in faculty working conditions. Institutions that work toward assessing faculty achievement relative to their opportunity structure consider how evaluation standards align with institutional resources, emphasizing quality and impact of achievements over the quantity or rate. Colleges and universities in the US to date

have failed to redefine or revise tenure requirements, but nonetheless we have suggested that a recalibration of the faculty evaluation system can work toward long-term institutional transformations toward equity and inclusion for faculty.

Explicitly identifying commitments to and principles around equity informing pandemic responses has allowed some academic institutions and leaders to go further in addressing the gendered and racialized organization of higher education. Entrenched assumptions of gender and race/ethnicity continue to shape faculty evaluation structures, as the ideal academic worker remains a white, masculine researcher unencumbered by commitments outside of the university. As such, institutions must continue to collect data and evaluate the implementation of pandemic-related policies and adjustments, to identify and address any consequences that unintentionally magnify existing, intersectional disparities.

While we have focused here on the higher education system in the United States, our findings and discussion have broader implications, as colleges and universities across borders have grappled with how best to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and support their faculties. There are cross-national variations in faculty evaluation processes, including work expectations and standards of excellence, and how faculty have experienced the pandemic both personally and professionally has also varied from country to country. Most colleges and universities have inadequate resources or lack systematic programs aimed at diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty; and yet, the unique system of shared faculty governance in colleges and universities provide faculty with opportunities to explore strategies for institutional change within their localized context (Bird, 2011; Laube, 2021). Only policy shifts and adjustments that address underlying structures of inequality will address the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on faculty in both the short and long term.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

[1] To date, we have directly collaborated with 16 institutions. The extent of these collaborations varies, with us engaging with some universities through multi-day workshops with diverse stakeholders, and others through hourlong workshops. Still other collaborations involved informal conversations with faculty and campus leaders, often in our own networks.

[2] Research U also "compensates" faculty for their pandemic contributions by providing tenure-track faculty credit toward sabbatical or future course releases for each course taught during the pandemic, and teaching faculty credit toward reappointment.

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