

Introduction

COVID-19 Special Issue

Rebecca Warner¹, Sarina Saturn², Kali Furman³, Susan M. Shaw⁴

¹ Oregon State University

² University of Portland

³ Oregon State University

⁴ Oregon State University

Introduction

In December of 2020, we published the first set of essays in our COVID-19 Special Issue of the *ADVANCE Journal*. In these essays we learned about the early impact of the pandemic on women in the academy, especially women in STEM disciplines, and heard concerns about the lasting effects of the pandemic on their lives. The essays in our first Special Issue highlighted the multiple burdens faced by Black women faculty members working through the pandemic and the renewed institutional focus on systemic racism due to the Black Lives Matter uprisings in the summer of 2020. Authors offered personal insights on the effects of the pandemic for both faculty and graduate students' research agendas and set forth recommendations and examples of how to promote institutional transformation in service of greater equity in the academy. In this issue, we include another set of essays that continue these conversations, paying particular attention to the intersectional dynamics of pandemic impacts. These essays attend to the ways that conceptualization of impact, as well as the responses to it, reveal weaknesses in systems that have particularly harsh effects on those who are the most vulnerable. Many of these essays also begin the process of taking what we've learned over the past year to guide us *not* back to normal, but toward rebuilding and shaping an alternative future that is more equitable and just.

We begin this issue with a piece by Dingel et al., "Service, Self-Care, and Sacrifice: A Qualitative Exploration of the Pandemic University as a Greedy Institution," that reminds us universities are "greedy institutions" that expect us to respond quickly to change, very often without any support or recognition. Faculty and students were expected to move quickly to online classes, and researchers had to alter protocols to follow COVID restrictions. The simultaneous pandemic of structural racism, however, placed the heaviest workloads on faculty of color and those with teaching/research expertise in structural inequalities. These faculty and

staff are asked to help our communities heal by revising curriculum to address the injustices that we are seeing and feeling. Universities' calls for self-care can "seem cruel and mocking" for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) faculty.

Several pieces included in this issue reinforce the fact that the pandemic accentuates many pre-existing disparities in institutions of higher education. Faculty with young children have always faced challenges in juggling academic teaching and research schedules alongside the care and schooling of children. Lack of available, reliable, and affordable childcare amplifies these challenges. Studies are now documenting significant reductions in parents' research productivity as seen in the piece, "'I Have No Time for Anything': Differences in Research Productivity During the COVID-19 Pandemic," by Carpenter et al. Mothers in particular worry about the longer-term implications associated with these interruptions. Windsor and Crawford draw on their recent work on academic parents and provide policy-oriented solutions/ideas for institutions to address pandemic-induced productivity gaps in "The Differential Effects of Pandemic Parenting." The final piece included on the topic of parenting, "Caregiving, Disability and Gender in Academia," is a powerful testimonial from a community of academic women (Schneider et al.) who parent children with disabilities, for whom the pandemic has been considerably more disruptive. Survival for this community relies on the development of carefully built support networks that COVID restrictions dismantled. Families experienced the loss of respite care and activities that required people with specialized credentials to oversee. Calls for faculty to return to work will necessitate universities' consideration as some parents will need extra support to reconstruct their networks of care.

The attention given to parents' struggles in the pandemic are valid. We must not, however, fall into a trap of thinking about all women's struggles as emanating from their status

as mothers. People without children or partners have been faced with another insidious impact of the pandemic: loneliness. As Bates notes in her essay, “Gender, Relationship Status, and COVID-19,” research finds that acute loneliness is as stressful as a physical attack. What happens when a person living alone gets sick during the pandemic? Who will they call for help? Bates asks us to be more inclusive in our discussions as we begin post-pandemic campus engagement so we might expose the effects of singlism and make work-life balance about all faculty. In “Who Is Okay? The Harm of One-Dimensional Appraisals of Women Scholars during COVID-19 & Beyond,” Gómez tells us that one strategy she has used to cope with isolation and loneliness has been increased productivity. She, however, feels shame in sharing this productivity with others—“shame that, by being productive, I am making others feel ashamed when they are not as industrious during this time.” But work productivity is not synonymous with well-being. Publishing more cannot erase the fact that as a Black woman she is dealing with the dual burdens of living through the pandemic and ongoing anti-Black racism. Productivity can’t erase the fact that she has not had physical contact with someone in a year. Homogenizing appraisals of women are harmful for our conceptualization of the problem as well as the solutions.

Two essays offer the opportunity to rethink what the pandemic has revealed in the college classroom. Bailey suggests the pandemic offers an important and relevant moment to explore issues of race and gender in science with students in the classroom in “Pedagogical Consciousness-Raising: Teaching Race, Gender, and Science in the Pandemic.” Centering dialog about the pandemic in her “Race, Gender, and Science” course raised students’ consciousness of both the promises and pitfalls of science, particularly for minoritized people. Faculty are not alone in needing new ways of establishing connections. Students have also been separated from

each other and from face-to-face interactions with faculty. Rodriguez' essay, "General Chemistry Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) Program at the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) for Fall 2020," suggests that peer-led learning in general chemistry can be empowering for Latinx students who have historically been marginalized in STEM disciplines. Students may be more likely to succeed when responses to disruptive changes, such as online learning, are led by members of their own community.

Our last set of essays consider ways to move forward. In "Recovering What was Stolen by Embracing the Process of Rebuilding," Lee recounts her personal journey as a woman of color working in higher education during the pandemic. Her narrative speaks to a kind of learning that should take place not only to recognize what has been lost, but also to build a more resilient future in which we are stronger advocates for ourselves and others. Working on personal strategies for setting, and sustaining, healthy boundaries is also a theme in Schuh's essay, "Forget Cleaning the House and Doing the Service, Keep Your Sanity." However, as a physiologist, Schuh reviews the impact of pandemic stress on the body and argues that more than personal efforts will be required. She suggests a variety of institutional policies and processes that will be necessary to support the long-term health of faculty as well as the academy itself.

In "Reclaiming, Recalibrating Political and Ideological Clarity in Our Praxis," Flores et al. argue that, because our institutions have failed us in so many ways, we must reject a call to return to normal. We need to take this pandemic "rupture" as an opportunity to "rethink our own complicity" in that system and demand more going forward—of ourselves as well as the institution. In "Maintaining Career Momentum: Women-Centered Strategies for Social Sciences Career Success in the Context of COVID-19," Cronley and Ravi provide several strategies that can be used to maintain personal career momentum and also to connect with others through

active mentoring and launching new research. Building stronger, more diverse communities can help lead to a collective call to action. In “Asking Big: Creating a Culture of Support for Academic Mothers’ Advocating in Times of Crisis” Bender and Elliot call on us to begin “Asking Big” when pursuing institutional changes. Developing a culture of asking can encourage those who have been hesitant to ask (and have experienced backlash when doing so) to have the support to do so.

We conclude this issue with an essay by women of color who are reimagining institutional spaces because of the pandemic to look for transformative possibilities. In “Women of Color Faculty Reimagining Institutional Spaces During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Duncan et al. suggest that holding virtual meetings has the potential to disrupt the hierarchy of a meeting room space. Those attending the meeting are in a grid; there is no clear “head” of the table. Can this physical reshuffling make for participation reshuffling? Having virtual meetings also can reduce the “physical spaces of trauma” for both faculty and students. Meeting rooms, classrooms and hallways are not always safe spaces for faculty and students of color. Their essay is an important reminder that we should look for opportunities to transform within as we are in the moment. As Kim Toevis of Multnomah County Health Department says regarding structural racism (when discussing the disparities in COVID impact): “. . . unless you carefully question it and dismantle it at every point, it just rebuilds itself even with progressively minded people” ([Davis & Friesen, 2021](#)).

The essays contained in this special issue call us to resist the language of a “return to normal” and invite us to consider carefully the underlying structural issues that were laid bare during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lasting impacts this pandemic will have for years to come as we take the opportunity to advocate for structural changes to advance equity in the

academy. These essays contribute to ongoing robust conversations and illuminate ways that we can move forward to address issues of inequity, injustice, and social and emotional harm in the academy which have been further illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *ADVANCE Journal* COVID-19 Special Issue, both parts one and two, called on many committed reviewers to provide very quick turnarounds in reading these essays. We want to thank them all for their thorough and insightful reviews: Amy Below, M. Leonor Cadena, Susan Conradsen, LeeRay Costa, Rachelle DeCostse, Jean Van Delinder, Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, Kryn Freehling-Burton, Tanushree Ghosh, Breanna Harris, Frances Henderson, Amber Kinser, Ashley Lanehurst, Elizabeth Lee, Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, Cari Maes, Sarah McCullough, Kateri McRae, Joya Misra, Andrea O'Reilly, Susan Parker, Phia Salter, Stephanie Sanders, Elizabeth Schroeder, Marwa Shalaby, Hala Schepmann, Jessi Smith, Kimberley Marion Suiseeya, Keyona Walker, Kim Weeden, and Emily Yates-Doerr.