

Q&A. Writing Covid-19 Impact Statements

The University of Delaware has adopted several policies related to P&T and faculty review in light of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Faculty Handbook, section 4.4.18](#)). One of these policies requires all faculty to include a COVID-19 impact statement in their dossiers for P&T and peer reviews. For more information, see the item #3 in the [Faculty Handbook section 4.4.18](#) and Recommendation #3 in UD's "[Report of the Taskforce on Equity in Faculty Evaluation](#)."

On June 9, 2021, UD ADVANCE and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Faculty Senate co-hosted a virtual panel on writing COVID-19 Impact Statements. Over 150 UD faculty and administrators attended the event. Panelists were Estella Atekwana (Dean, CEOE), Toby Driscoll (Professor of Mathematical Sciences), Kami Silk (Chair, Department of Communication), and Bert Tanner (Professor of Mechanical Engineering). Panelists were selected for their roles and broad experience with UD's P&T process. Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Matt Kinservik, gave an introduction and overview of the new policy.

This document summarizes questions and answers from the panel discussion. Where appropriate, we have consolidated or generalized questions and answers, while keeping true to the spirit of the discussion. It is important to keep in mind that COVID-19 impact statements are new, the answers are not always cut and dried. This document is a descriptive account of the conversation rather than a prescriptive listing of practices.

Q&As

1. *What is a COVID-19 impact statement and what is its purpose?*

A COVID-19 impact statement is a brief statement that explains how the candidate's work and productivity have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because different faculty have been impacted differently, many universities and funding agencies are using them to promote equitable review practices. The underlying idea is that professional achievements should be judged relative to opportunity. Many universities and funding agencies are now allowing or requiring such statements. Requiring them of all candidates is considered best practice for ensuring equitable review.

2. *Will I need a COVID-19 statement for my 2-year review, 4-year review, and for P&T? If so, can I use the same statement for all?*

Yes, you will need a statement for each of these reviews. They will likely change from review to review. It is a good idea to write an impact statement now while the details are fresh in your mind and to continue to update it over time as positive or negative impacts become clearer. For example, an impact that you aren't aware of now may arise with time in the wake of the pandemic -- or an impact that you're worried about now may turn out not to be a big deal by the time of your P&T review.

3. *How long should a COVID-19 impact statement be?*

A COVID-19 impact statement should be brief and to the point. Length will likely depend on individual circumstances and one's departmental/disciplinary culture – but no more than 1-1.5 pages. You might use your research, teaching, and service statements to develop points that you raised in your COVID-19 impact statement.

4. *What types of impacts should one focus on?*

Questions you might consider while writing your COVID-19 impact statement can be found in the [Report of UD's Task Force on Equity in Faculty Evaluation](#) referenced above and in "[Documenting Pandemic Impacts: Best Practices](#)" by U-Mass ADVANCE.

5. *Does one need to supply evidence, and of what sort, to support claims of impact?*

The COVID-19 impact statement is meant to focus more on documenting the effects of the pandemic disruptions than the causes. Candidates are not expected to reveal personal information (medical or otherwise) that they wish to keep private. Past practice has generally been that P&T committees will take people at their word on impacts on personal lives without seeing a lot of details.

6. *What should I avoid doing or saying in a COVID-19 impact statement – to avoid hurting my case or priming bias?*

Keep your statement professional and matter of fact. An effective statement does not need to spell out the details of the struggles. A well-implemented statement will say these are the challenges and then focus on the mitigation and the positive aspects of how you've been able to confront the situation.

Resist the temptation to "throw in the kitchen sink" —try to report only on things that have direct or measurable effect on performance and productivity. To describe impacts to research, you might look at your usual productivity and document how it has changed due to the pandemic. With respect to teaching, what did your teaching look like before and during/after the pandemic? Some impacts may be amorphous or personal and difficult to quantify. In these cases, focus on the impact on productivity rather than what the impact is on you, personally. In all cases, be sure to keep your statement professional and matter of fact rather than emotional.

7. *What would a good COVID-19 impact statement look like?*

A good COVID-19 impact statement will be brief, factual, and to the point. It will help you make an affirmative case for promotion and/or tenure by outlining impacts (negative or positive), mitigation strategies, and a positive overall trajectory. When possible, focus more on solutions than on the problems you faced.

When writing your statement, place more emphasis on creative problem solving than on the details of the problems themselves. Outline lessons learned or new projects that will lead to future professional success. Link your COVID-19 impact statement to your research/teaching/service statements, where you can provide more details about the work that you accomplished.

8. *How will I know if my statement is effective?*

The panelists provided two suggestions. The first is to seek feedback on your statement from colleagues in your department or discipline. The second is to “put on your teacher’s hat” when writing and revising your statement. That is, think about how an outside observer might perceive the story that you are telling about the impacts of COVID-19 and your creative resilience during a difficult time.

9. *Will chairs and P&T committee members get training on how to interpret and use COVID-19 impact statements?*

Matt Kinservik indicated that there will be ongoing discussions about COVID-19 impact statements, both with P&T candidates and with evaluators.

10. *Should external reviewers receive the COVID-19 Impact Statement?*

Although it is not required, it is recommended that external reviewers receive COVID-19 impact statements (FHB). Candidates should not directly contact potential letter writers but should provide the COVID-19 impact statement with the other materials being sent to external reviewers.