What are we learning about the impacts of COVID-19 on faculty: Early observations from an interview project

Dr. Cynthia Werner
Professor of Anthropology/
Director of ADVANCE

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WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON SCHOLARS AT TEXAS A&M?

- GENDER
- RACE/ETHNICITY
- CARE-GIVER STATUS
- RANK/CATEGORY OF SCHOLAR
- DISCIPLINE/TYPE OF RESEARCH
HOW CAN THIS PROJECT HELP INFORM ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES AND PRACTICES?

- ANNUAL EVALUATIONS
- PROMOTION EVALUATIONS
- FACULTY RECRUITMENT
- WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT
- ETC.
HOW WILL COVID-19 EXACERBATE EXISTING ISSUES IN ACADEMIA?
THE "LEAKY PIPELINE" MEETS THE "PERFECT STORM"?

Leaks in the Academic Pipeline for Women*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate School Entry</th>
<th>PhD Receipt</th>
<th>Assistant Professor (Tenure Track)</th>
<th>Associate Professor (Tenured)</th>
<th>Full Professor (Tenured)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women with Babies</td>
<td>Women, Married</td>
<td>Women, 27% less likely</td>
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<td>26% less likely than women without babies to enter a tenure-track position</td>
<td>21% less likely than single women to enter a tenure-track position</td>
<td>than men to become an Associate Professor</td>
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<td>Women 20% less likely than men to become a Full Professor within a maximum of 16 years</td>
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</table>

* Results are based on Survival Analysis of the Survey of Doctorate Recipients (a national biennial longitudinal data set funded by the National Science Foundation and others, 1979 to 1995). Percentages take into account disciplinary, age, ethnicity, PhD calendar year, time-to-PhD degree, and National Research Council academic reputation rankings of PhD program affects. For each event (PhD to TT job procurement, or Associate to Full Professor), data is limited to a maximum of 16 years. The waterline is an artistic rendering of the statistical effects of family and gender. Note: The use of NSF data does not imply NSF endorsement of research methods or conclusions contained in this paper.
WILL COVID-19 UNDO THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE TO DIVERSIFY ACADEMIA?
COVID-19 AS THE “THE PERFECT STORM”

- Disruptions to Research
- Switch to Remote Work
- New Modes of Course Delivery
- Changes to Care-Giving Responsibilities
- Nationwide Budget Cuts
- Nationwide Hiring Freezes
- Increased Anxiety & Uncertainty
PREMISE OF THIS PROJECT:
SAME STORM, DIFFERENT BOAT
EXISTING REPORTS AND STUDIES

- Women faculty (and women in general) are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
  - Increased care-giving responsibilities at home
  - Increased “nurturing” roles in the workplace (with students, mentees, etc.)
- Women in academia are submitting fewer grant proposals and journal manuscripts.
- There are disproportionate impacts on scholars of color.
RESEARCH CONTEXT

Texas A&M University

- Enrollments held steady
- Budget impacts are not too severe (relative to other colleges/universities)
- Campus re-opened for classes in the Fall and never closed
- Students could opt to learn remotely; some instructors did not have the choice to teach remotely

State of Texas

- One of 4 states within the U.S. that fully opened public schools in the fall (allowing parents the option of sending kids back to school)
- State policies are fairly risk-tolerant
- Average number of Covid-19 cases & deaths/population (relative to other states)
METHODS

RECRUITMENT SURVEY
~450 individuals responses across 5 categories

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS
Selected 100 Participants for 2 Rounds of Interviews

DATA ANALYSIS
Identified Themes and Patterns
INTERVIEW SAMPLE

By Category
- 26 PhD Students
- 14 Post-Doctoral Fellows
- 19 APT Faculty
- 20 Tenure-Track Faculty
- 21 Tenured Faculty

By Gender
- 32 Men
- 65 Women
- 1 Non-Binary
- 2 Prefer not to respond

By STEMM**
- 39 women in STEMM
- 24 men in STEMM
- 2 non-binary persons/PNR in STEMM

By Race/Ethnicity
- 15 Asian
- 5 Black
- 10 LatinX
- 1 Native American
- 57 White
- 7 More than One Race/Ethnicity
- 5 Other OR Prefer Not to respond

By Caregiver Status
- 39 With Dependent Children
- 6 With Dependent Adult(s)*
- 58 With No Dependents

By College
- Participants from 15 colleges at College Station campus
INTERVIEWS

• Greatest Impact of Covid-19
• Impact of Covid-19 on Research Productivity
• Experiences Teaching During the Pandemic
• Home Work Environment
• Changes to Work-Life Balance
• Changes to Workplace Climate
• Experiences with Covid-19 as a Public Health Crisis/Personal Risk Tolerance
• Opinions about Texas A&M’s Response to Covid-19
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS PROVIDE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

- Support from Department & College (BELONGING)
- Care-giving responsibilities (TIME FOR WORK)
- Disruptions to Research and Teaching (ABILITY TO PIVOT)
- Work-Life Balance & Health (PERSONAL WELL-BEING)
- Home work environment (ABILITY TO WORK REMOTELY)
- Social support (outside of work) (CONNECTIONS)
“...just having so many students and not being able to manage them... **having to rely solely on technology** was a huge hurdle.”
(Male TT faculty, single, no kids)

“having my **kids out of school** I suppose is the biggest impact on my day-to-day life”  (Male TT Faculty, married w/ kids)

“I **lost all motivation** to do anything that wasn’t coursework and ended up having to push my comprehensive exams back to August.” (Male PhD student, single, no kids)

“... the beginning was hard for me... it was **my first semester teaching**... I had like 70 students so it was a large class and after spring break it was all online. I had some problems with students because of the pandemic, and... it was hard for them too...”
(Male PhD Student, international student, single, no kids)

“...it has given that cover for people in positions of power to say that due to the pandemic, you know, **we don’t have anything for you**.... due to restructuring of our classes...” (Female APT faculty, married with a child)

“.... a **real spike in just anxiety and stress**, which in some senses might seem counter-intuitive because I’m personally, like, very insulated from a lot of its effects. My job hasn’t been affected. My husband’s job hasn’t been impacted... We aren’t struggling financially.... We don’t have any kids yet. (Female Post-doc, married with no kids)
LEVEL OF DISRUPTION ON RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY

Minimal

Samantha* is a female tenured full professor at Texas A&M. She and her husband (who is also a full professor) do not have any children. The pandemic disrupted her plans for personal and conference travel in the summer, yet the time saved from her daily commute and her cancelled summer travel plans allowed her to complete a major research and writing project months ahead of schedule.

Moderate

Henry* is a male tenure-track faculty member with three small children. His wife is self-employed and cut back on her work hours to care for children. He also cut back on research and writing time to help his wife take care of the kids until daycare reopened. He was able to conduct research and write from home, and managed to make progress on publications since the start of the pandemic. He has already opted for the tenure clock extension.

High

Lisa* is a tenure-track faculty member with a small child. She describes how there simply aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done. She and her husband have had a hard time finding childcare option that they can trust. She hasn’t been able to make as much progress on research as she would like.
EXPERIENCES WITH TEACHING

Frustrations & Challenges

- Time spent on adapting courses to remote
- Students testing positive
- Challenges of learning new technologies, including Canvas
- Less interaction with students
- Students are struggling with mental health issues

Silver Linings

- Most participants have been satisfied with resources to help them adapt their teaching (help desks, online tutorials, workshops, etc.)
- Most participants have adapted new technologies that they plan to use in the future.
IMPACTS ON MENTORING

Many participants have pointed out ways that they are missing out on informal mentoring and networking moments.

  Ex. Opportunities to meet with scholars at academic conferences
  Ex. Ability to ask and receive feedback on a project within the lab setting
  Ex. Informal conversations in the hallway with colleagues/PhD committee members
  Ex. Informal conversations with colleagues before & after in-person meetings

This will disproportionately affect individuals who are earlier in their careers.
ADDITIONAL ISSUES

■ Work-Life Balance and Single Mothers
  – Existing reports – demonstrate differential impacts on care-givers
  – Impacts on single mothers are particularly challenging because there may not be anybody else who is able to share child care duties.

■ Hidden Costs of Working Remotely During the Pandemic
  – Existing reports – demonstrate variety of issues & some perks of remote work
  – Working from home can bring new expenses that disproportionately affect APT faculty & PhD students on low incomes

■ Additional Impacts on International Scholars
  – Existing reports – demonstrate decline in international graduate enrollments
  – The pandemic has brought additional challenges to international scholars. For many, there is a greater sense of isolation due to delayed travel to visit family and friends in their home country. For PhD students, there are concerns about visas and future jobs. For some international scholars, there are linguistic challenges related to teaching remotely and having less social interaction.
WHAT WILL THE “NEW NORMAL” LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

• Most participants have been working remotely, though some have returned to working on campus at least part-time.

• Some participants can’t wait to get back to normal.

• Others like the flexibility of working from home, and hope to keep some of that flexibility in the future (i.e. 1-2 days a week at home).

• Several participants mentioned that they expect to continue using Zoom for meetings in the future.
As expected, “we are all in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat.”

PhD student experiences vary by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, discipline/type of research/source of funding, and care-giving status.

Disruptions to research are more “costly” for junior scholars who may not have enough “data” to work on other projects and who may have concerns about the job market, delays in securing a job, and limited data.

For a large proportion of participants, these costs are exacerbated by concerns about social isolation, inability to focus, anxiety, and depression.

Not all experiences have been negative.

More time with family. Improved work-life balance, new hobbies. Time to complete publication. Ability to attend online seminars and conferences.

The results of this study will be shared with the Texas A&M community, including administrative leaders, and will also be submitted for publication.
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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT:

COVID-19 PUBLIC FORUM
MAY 25, 2021
2:00-4:00 PM

INVITATION & LINK TO FOLLOW