DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON SCHOLARS AT TEXAS A&M: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE ADVANCE COVID-19 STUDY

Cynthia Werner
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● How has COVID-19 affected our work lives and work-life balance?

● Have the impacts of COVID-19 affected some groups of scholars more than others?

● How do scholars at Texas A&M feel about the way that the university has handled the pandemic? And, what do they want to see when “things return to normal”?

● What strategies can be implemented to minimize the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on categories of scholars who have been most impacted?
Outline

- Underpinnings of the Study
- COVID-19 as the “Perfect Storm” to Exacerbate Existing Inequities
- Research Context
- Methodology
- Preliminary Findings from Our Interviews
- Preliminary Recommendations Based on Our Interviews & National Reports
Today’s Presenters

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UNDERPINNINGS OF THIS STUDY: HOW WILL COVID-19 EXACERBATE EXISTING CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIA?
(1) Overproduction of PhD graduates in some disciplines relative to relevant jobs in academia and industry.
(2) There has been a significant increase in the proportion of faculty positions that are non-tenure track.
(3) Achieving work-life balance has always been challenging in academia.

• There is always pressure to do more.
• There seem to be limitless demands with teaching, research and service.
• Work is viewed as a “passion.”
• “Flexibility in hours is a double-edged sword.”
• “Being busy” is normalized as an acceptable state of being.
(4) There has been a “leaky pipeline” for women in STEM fields.

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*Results are based on the Survival Analysis of the Survey of Doctorate Recipients (a national biennial longitudinal data set funded by the National Science Foundation and others, 1979 to 1996). Percentages take into account disciplinary age, ethnicity, PhD calendar year, time-to-PhD degree, and National Research Council's academic reputation rankings of PhD program effects. For each event (PhD to TT, post-TT, tenure, 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.*
(5) There is also a leaky pipeline for faculty of color who continue to be underrepresented at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). They are less likely to experience a welcoming and inclusive climate compared to white colleagues.
Academia before COVID

These issues can be found at all universities, including TAMU, as evidenced by:

- The 2020 State of Diversity Report
- The 2021 Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Report
- Campus Climate Surveys

Artwork by Michelle Castro, Texas A&M Student
Source: Texas A&M University’s 2021 CDEI Report
COVID-19 AS THE “PERFECT STORM” TO EXACERBATE EXISTING INEQUITIES
“Leaky” Pipeline Meets the Perfect Storm?


Arrman Kyaw (December 16, 2020) “Study: Female Faculty and Caretakers Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*

Emma Pettit (January 25, 2021) “COVID-19 has robbed faculty parents of time for research. Especially mothers.”

Cuit et al. (2020) “Gender Inequality in Research Productivity During the COVID-19 Pandemic” *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*. 
Faculty of color - particularly women faculty of color - have been impacted in multiple ways due to the health disparities of COVID-19, added emotional labor of teaching during intense national protests for greater social justice regarding race, and additional service related to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts

“Leaky” Pipeline Meets the Perfect Storm?

Will COVID-19 Undo the Slow, Albeit Steady, Progress that Has Been Made to Diversify Academia?
“I heard that we are *in the same boat*. 
But it’s not that. 
**We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.** 
Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine might not be. 
Or vice versa. 
For some, quarantine in optimal: a moment of reflection, or reconnection. 
Easy, in flip flops, with a whiskey or tea. 
For others, this is a desperate crisis. 
For others, it is facing loneliness. 
For some, peace, rest time, vacation. 
Yet for others, Torture: How am I going to pay my bills?”

- Selection from “We Are Not in the Same Boat” by unknown author
67% of graduate students surveyed have feelings of low well-being; 35% have moderate or high levels of depression.
According to an analysis of job advertisements on the Science Careers job board, faculty job openings at U.S. institutions were down by 70% in the 2020-21 academic job cycle.

Note: This is a recreation of a data chart presented in Langin 2020 (Science).
Women faculty (and working women in general) are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
  ○ Increased caregiving 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.
● United States
● State of Texas
● Texas A&M
**CDC/WHO**
- **January 9** — WHO Announces Mysterious Coronavirus-Related Pneumonia in Wuhan, China
- **January 21** - CDC Confirms 1st COVID case
- **January 31** — WHO Issues Global Health Emergency
- **March 11** - WHO Declares COVID-19 a Pandemic
- **March 26** — Senate Passes CARES Act
- **May 28** - US COVID-19 Deaths Pass the 100,000 Mark
- **June 10** — US COVID-19 Cases Reach 2 Million
- **July 9** - The WHO announces that COVID-19 may be airborne

**TAMU**
- **March 9** - TAMU cancels university-sponsored travel outside of the U.S
- **March 10** - Spring Break extended through 03/18
- **March 12** - TAMU cancels in-person classes for the remainder of the spring semester and Spring Break is extended an extra week
- **March 19** - 1st TAMU student tests positive for COVID-19
- **May 29** - TAMU Announcement of hybrid classes & fall semester start date
- **June 9** - TAMU creates mask mandate

**Local/National**
- **February 3** - US Declares Public Health Emergency
- **March 4** - 1st presumptive case of COVID-19 in TX
- **March 13** - Gov. Abbott declares state disaster; Trump Declares COVID-19 a National Emergency
- **March 16** - 1st COVID-related death reported in TX
- **March 17** - 1st positive case is confirmed in Brazos County
- **March 19** - Gov. Abbott issues statewide mandates
- **March 23** - BCS mayors issue a shelter in place ordinance
- **July 2** - TX mask mandate imposed
**CDC/WHO**

- **August 25** — CDC changes testing guidance, but later reverses itself
- **September 1** — US rejects WHO global COVID-19 vaccine effort
- **September 28** — Global COVID-19 deaths surpass 1 million
- **December 11 & 18** - The FDA authorizes 1st COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use
- **February 27** - The FDA authorizes emergency use of the third vaccine

**TAMU**

- **August 19** - TAMU fall semester begins
- **October 8** - Spring break reduced to one day
- **March 24** - Vaccine becomes available at TAMU to students and employees
- **May 5** - TAMU announces that occupancy levels will increase to 100 percent on campus on June 1st; Staff expected to return to campus full time
- **May 18** - TAMU ends campus mask mandate

**Local/National**

- **September 17** - TX business capacity expansion announced
- **October 14** - Bars allowed to reopen
- **August 17** — COVID-19 now the 3rd leading cause of death in the US
- **November 13** - TX surpasses 1 million confirmed cases
- **December 14** - First vaccines administered in Texas.
- **March 2** - Texas announces end of mask mandate
METHODOLOGY
Overview of 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
Qualitative interviews can provide a “holistic” approach to understanding individual experiences.

By holism, we mean that we are looking at the dynamic interrelationship of multiple aspects of human experience.
We can present some simple statistics, but... the sample size and sampling methods do NOT allow us to offer a statistical analysis of how different variables intersect.
Research Team

- 7 graduate students, with 3 additional students coordinating interviews and coding
- Transcription service used during round 2 interviews
- 7 undergraduate students have been assisting with the coding of interview data

- This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board
Interview Guide Structure

- Conducted via Zoom
- Round 1 interviews: 1 hour in length
- Round 2 interviews: 1 ½ to 2 hours in length
  - Round 2 interviews are ongoing
- Interview guides were approximately 10 pages in length, and contained about 20 core questions
Topics Covered in 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
- Experiences with COVID-19 as a Public Health Crisis/ Personal Risk Tolerance
- Opinions about Texas A&M’s Response to COVID-19
Recruitment of Sample

- Convenience sampling
- Social Media/Emails
- 5 Categories of Scholars:
  - PHD Students
  - Post Doctoral Scholars
  - APT Faculty
  - Tenure Track Faculty
  - Tenured Faculty
We interviewed 100 participants in 5 categories:

Our sample includes 60 faculty members and 40 scholars who are in the pipeline to become future faculty members.
We purposively selected a sample that included differences by gender:
- 65 Women
- 32 Men
- 1 Non-Binary Person
- 2 Unknown

Forty-four percent (42%) of our participants are in caregiving roles.
We selected participants from different racial/ethnic groups. The proportion of people of color within our sample is slightly higher than the university population.

25% of our participants also identify as International Scholars.
We limited the study to participants affiliated with academic units in College Station.

Our participants work in 13 different colleges/schools.
Interview Sample

There are 39 women in STEMM fields in our sample, including 12 women of color.
Coding and Data Analysis

- Use of Dedoose, a web-based platform for mixed methods data analysis
- Two graduate students are coordinating a team of undergraduate students who assist in conducting thematic analysis of the data
- Two student system to ensure inter-rater reliability: each coder reviews the transcript independently and then they meet to discuss any discrepancies
Please use the Chat Box to let us know what you think our findings will look like based on your experiences.

SHORT PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS

Up Next:

- Interview Findings
- Recommendations
DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS ON SCHOLARS AT TAMU: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM OUR INTERVIEWS
Impacts on Mental Health

Approximately 44% of our participants reported experiencing mental health issues.

Among all of the scholar types, PhD students and APT faculty were most likely to report that the pandemic has had significant impacts on their mental health.

Percentage of People Who Indicated Mental Health Issues due to the Pandemic by Scholar Type

- PhD: 31.8%
- Tenure: 11.4%
- Tenure Track: 20.5%
- APT: 27.3%
- Post Doc: 9.1%
Impacts on Mental Health

Greatly exacerbating depression...that's, that's the biggest impact [the pandemic has had on me]. I had a lot of things scheduled over the summer, ... but there are many days I just couldn't make myself get out of bed until noon or one and going through the constant.... doom cycle of no matter where you look online, it's going to be doom, death, and destruction. And so definitely, definitely mental health aspects were the biggest impact.

Emma, PhD Student

I was still doing my work, right. I wasn't doing as much of it as I needed to. Like I just couldn't do the pace, I would like reach a point in the night where I'm saying "I'm worn out. I can't focus" and I definitely felt my productivity goes down from the depression.

Chuck, PhD Student

Personally, my ex-husband has mental illness and he had a total mental breakdown. He tried to commit suicide...because he lost his job because of the pandemic. So now, I am home with the kids, they don't know what's going on with their dad. They just don't see him anymore and honestly, I kind of spent the first two or three months of [the] pandemic waiting on a call that he had killed himself...He's doing better, but at the time it was a bit of a blur...thank God I didn't lose my job, ... but it was a rough time.

Mia, APT faculty member
Majority of our participants indicated that the pandemic has negatively impacted their research productivity.
Not surprisingly, our study finds that participants with caregiving responsibilities have experienced significant disruptions to their research productivity.

But, more surprisingly, the non-caregivers in our study report disruptions to research productivity at similar rates.

Possible explanations:

(1) Sample size bias
(2) Many of our caregivers sent children back to schools and daycare, and that might have reduced the impact slightly
(3) Other factors ARE having similar impacts on research productivity, such as:
   ● certain type of research
   ● impacts on mental health (especially of scholars living alone)

Further research is warranted, and that research must consider (1) research outcomes AND (2) the intersection of caregiver status and these other factors.
Although parents in Texas did have the option to send their children back to school and daycare, it is clear from our interviews that this was nothing close to a “return to normal.”

- Stress of worrying about exposure to COVID
- Learning environment was challenging
- Children were often sent home for periods of quarantine
- Going back to school did not fully alleviate anxiety & stress experienced by children
- Children had reduced social activities outside of school

At best, the return to schools allowed parents to shift some time to other responsibilities.
I want to also say that there were some sort of positives in terms of productivity for me, and that, you know, [the pandemic] sort of eliminated all unnecessary meetings and service commitments that I had. Especially as someone who doesn’t have a family, I think that the beginning of the quarantine was sort of a good time for me to sort of get work done without distractions, without even social distractions. Um, so there was that positive as well, that I just want to be honest about.

Lucas, Tenure Track Faculty

I would say the single greatest impact is that [the pandemic] has just made it a lot more difficult to do in person research. So things like dealing with my RAs, I had to cut them off. I could no longer get the assistance of my RAs to help me do certain tasks to, um, finish my research in a decent amount of time. So anything that needed to be done, I essentially had to then do it by myself. So I would say that it has made it harder and increase... harder to get things done and increase the amount of time it will usually take to do certain processes, um, to complete the thesis.

Tracey, PhD Student

I basically had to confront all of my research team because we collect field data. And, in the past, we only used to use one vehicle. And so, when COVID started, one of the first things [the CDC] said is, like, “...keep your distance like six feet.” Well then, one day, they were like, “Well, you’re going to go pick up samples for research.” And I said, “How are we going to, like, how are we going to do this? We can’t. This is not following CDC guidelines.” And so, [my supervisor is] like, “Well, it’s going to cost us a lot of money if we have to take two vehicles or three vehicles, and I’m more concerned [about] road safety than I am about COVID.”

Marla, Post Doctoral Scholar
Impacts on Teaching has been coded for this project using the following criteria:

- Disruptions to teaching, which include comments on COVID-related teaching changes interfering with research and that hindered teaching.
- Teaching changes, which include COVID-related teaching changes creating an increase in work/decrease in work
- Evaluative comments, on both positive and negative experiences, on teaching remote and teaching in-person/hyflex.
Some of the reported impacts on teaching include, but are not limited to, the following:

- More student emails and more emotional support from students
- Has become disheartening
- Less engagement with students, less student participation
- Worry about COVID transmission
- COVID as an excuse for poor student performance.
- Perceptions that Teaching is More Time-Consuming
  - increased preparation time for courses
  - more technology issues related to the move to canvas
  - general feeling of being asked to do more in less time.
Impacts on Teaching

● Certain courses are difficult to convert to an online platform
  ○ examples - clinical teaching; supervising student teaching/internships, teaching courses that require in person collaborative projects

● But there were some positives reported so far:
  ○ Zoom Office hours
  ○ More students signed up for courses
On Doing More: "I feel like I'm doing a lot more work, or more than I would have otherwise. And then, so I get less sleep, because I'm usually working in the evenings trying to catch up on whatever I didn't finish during the day, especially if my daughter's at home....."
- Stephanie, APT Faculty, Caregiver

On Doing More: "During the pandemic, students have needed a bit more emotional support. Sometimes, they load it up on you because you're a young woman…"
- Nia, APT Faculty

“Teaching has become disheartening”
-Gary, PHD Student
On increased workload: "....The students didn't sign up for online learning..... I mean, their lives are being turned topsy turvy the same way everybody else's were. And so, they weren't reading directions.... as someone..... so I've been teaching full time..... This is the beginning of my 21st year.... I know how to write directions. I know how to make things really clear. I know what I'm doing. And so, I would write out these really like (clear directions), “make sure you do this.” I keep it really small..... chunks of information. But they weren't reading. And so, all the time I was spending creating this like.... 'Okay, do this. OK. Now, go do this.' Because they were skipping it, I was getting..... and because we weren't in the class, so I could just answer it in one go...... I was spending hours answering the same question by email or sending them to the same thing over and over and over again. So, my workload, definitely increased."

-Latoya, APT Faculty
Changes to Work-Life Balance (WLB)

- Coded using the following criteria:
  - Features of home-work situation
  - Types of personal disruption
  - Change to WLB
- WLB appears to have worsened due to the pandemic. Gender, caregiver status, and category of scholar are key to understanding individual experiences
- Unique challenges for scholars related to WLB is based on quality of home work environment
  - difference by caregiving status
Not everything we learned about work-life balance was negative. Among other things, some of our participants shared information about the following things:

- Opportunity to try out new hobbies
- Improved relationships with household members
- More time to focus on completing publications
- Ability to attend online seminars and conferences
“But now when I was working from home...... even if I start early, because I take frequent breaks, I have to continue work, my work. It's..... it feels like you're working whole day but you're not really working the whole day....”

-Steve,

“I don't get enough sleep anymore. There aren't enough hours in the day! I have a toddler and having childcare that we can trust has been really.... Really tough.”

-Linda, APT Faculty, Caregiver
“I don't have work life balance. I've worked really hard. I'm a workaholic.”
-Sarah, APT Faculty, Caregiver

“When it comes to my personal life... since I have children,.....it's very defined to take care of and work at the same time. And, in every aspect, I'll say things are getting slower.”
-Max, Postdoctoral Scholar, Caregiver
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 with colleagues/PhD committee members that take place in hallways, or before & after in-person meetings

These disruptions are likely to have disproportionate impacts on individuals who are earlier in their careers.
"[My advisor was] a lot less available on social because they're not very good with technology... they were so swamped." (Chuck, PhD student)

"I had a list of conferences I wanted to go to for professional networking as well as developing research, putting my ideas out there and getting feedback in these kinds of spaces. Every conference was canceled, understandably." (Nia, APT faculty member with research responsibilities)

"....honestly, because these students have been online for a year, they don't know a lot of the faculty members. The ones they do know, they cling to for help. The few that they trust are carrying that burden of what's going on in their life." (Eva, Tenure-track faculty member)
Most, but not all, of our participants have continued to receive the same amount of income from TAMU as before.

However, multiple participants have experienced income loss:
- COVID-related loss of income from spouses/partners (including partners who had to take on increased caregiving)
- Loss of secondary income (especially PhD students)

A number of participants noted increased expenses due to COVID-19
- Out-of-pocket expenses to create suitable home work environments (equipment, furniture, internet upgrades)
- Increased utility expenses
Several participants also noted that they are allocating funds to extended family members in need.

At the same time, other participants acknowledged that they have been spending less during the pandemic, and this has some small but notable difference in their personal savings.

Financial impacts are disproportionately affecting scholars in vulnerable groups.
Concerns about Job Security

A significant portion of our participants are worried about current job security and/or future job security due to the impacts of the pandemic on funding for graduate positions and academic jobs.

- This is especially true for our PhD students, postdoctoral scholars and APT faculty.

Tenure-track/tenured faculty were also concerned about the job market, but usually in connection with graduate students.
I think that maybe one thing is that [the pandemic] kind of changed where I wanted to go professionally… I had been kind of on the fence about going into industry or going into academia. But seeing all of the different things that we've had to deal with during this time has kind of pushed me further away from academia, where I'm like, "oh gosh, being a professor sounds awful." Rather than I was kind of like, "well, I really enjoy teaching. Now, I don't." (PhD student in a STEMM field)

“... since I’m an international student here, graduating means to me that my visa status will be changed if I graduate, therefore I need to be extra cautious about when to graduate because if I graduate then I have 60 to 90 days before I need to leave the country…. I think the biggest concern for us is funding. The job market is not as secure as before. Our funding situation is also insecure right now, so if I have to stay another year here, I don’t know whether I can find funding for my next year.” (White man, PhD student)

These quotes illustrate ways that the pandemic is likely to decrease the diversity of the academic pipeline.
Thoughts about the Job Market

“I’m afraid I’ll lose my job… I kind’of felt compelled when they asked who would teach, so I was supposed to teach online in the fall.” (Carol, APT faculty member)

“This year is going to be brutal for our imminent graduates. We have three to four students who are about to graduate. I think we’ll be lucky if one of them gets a job in the field.” (Lorraine, tenured faculty member)
Each participant was asked to identify the “greatest impact of the pandemic - personally or professionally.”

Some participants provided two responses.

Responses were then coded into the categories shown on this graph.

Only 5 out of 100 participants identified something positive.
This slide captures responses to the same question during the second round of interviews.

Not all participants are represented here (as the second round of interviews is ongoing.) Some participants provided two responses.

New categories emerged:
- Pandemic fatigue
- Enjoys remote work
It is challenging to summarize the responses to this question given the complexity of the TAMU response over time and the diverse experiences our participants encountered with the TAMU administration at department, college, and university levels.
Opinions often varied on the same topic. Some participants, for example, felt that the university did a good job of communicating with the TAMU community, while others felt that there was not enough communication on certain topics, OR too much communication (via email).

Some participants felt that administrators did a good job handling a very challenging situation, while others felt that the administration was “reactive” and “following the lead of others.”

Some of the variations in opinions is likely to be explained by the exact timing of an interview, relative to the rollout of new policies and procedures.
"I remember reading about all these other schools that announced they're going online over spring break, and A&M was kind of delayed, which means that it's hard for us to prepare...."
(Stephanie, APT faculty member)

"I think the university did a good job of trying to give the faculty members as many resources as they could, as quickly as they could, recognizing how difficult this was..."
(Carol, APT faculty member)

"I think that that bringing students back to campus is creating a public health crisis....it’s a failure of the university, a little bit, but really, it’s a failure of national, federal leadership.”
(Hubert, Tenure-track faculty member)

Regarding performance reviews: “There’s been nothing. No empathy. No expectations. no, like “yeah, you know, don’t worry about your review this year.” (Aaron, Tenured faculty member)
How did Texas A&M Handle the Pandemic?

- Although not all participants would agree with these statements, these comments were frequently observed in our interviews:

**Things that Were Handled Well:**
- Decision to switch to online course delivery after Spring Break
- Technical support and training for teaching online
- Efforts to make classrooms as safe as possible during a pandemic
- Decision to require masks on campus (until recently!)
- Free testing on campus, plus random testing in the spring
- Availability of vaccines on campus

**Things that Received More Criticism:**
- Guidance for PhD students
- Decision to bring students back to campus for the Fall 2020 semester
- Rigid insistence on 50% of classes being in person (i.e. hybrid) for Fall 2020 semester
- Limited enforcement of safety protocols
- Allowing spectators to attend football games
- Not requiring vaccines for Fall 2021
Key Takeaways

● Impacts on any given scholar are very nuanced, and vary depending on the intersection of identities \textit{AND} other factors that have shaped a person’s experiences with the pandemic.

● Some pressure points are disproportionately impacting some groups of scholars more than others.
  ○ Ex. Ability to Do Work Remotely (varies by discipline & area of specialty)
  ○ Ex. Time for Work (caregivers vs. non-caregivers)
  ○ Ex. Home Work Environment (income-dependent)
The total impact of the pandemic on any given individual cannot be reduced to items that come up on a survey, and cannot easily be separated from other aspects of an individual’s life.

"[J]ust because we’re a Texas university doesn’t mean that we all have the same experiences like..... that can’t be true for the pandemic and for the race issue and for the international students.... there seems to be this idea that “oh we're Texas. We're all the same.” And we're not all the same. There are folks who may have been scared to come back to their home country, the administration will never know what that feels like. The kids who go home and fear being beat and being denied services because they're not white, like our administration will never know what that feels like. And I feel like we got this word ‘We're Aggies, We’re one…” This pandemic is showing that not only is that not true, but the administration is not capable of handling the sheer diversity of experiences that we all go through. I feel like they come up with like cookie cutter answer for what they think an Aggie looks like. and they’re missing anyone who's different in any way, shape or form."

(LaToya, APT faculty member)
The impacts of the pandemic are likely to have long-lasting effects.

“....as long as everybody in the world remembers that there were delays because of COVID, I think it's fine. The biggest question is the people who were not really impacted sort of move on very quickly and may not remember that, for some of us, this was a really significant event or process....it wasn't a one off event. It's something that we're still dealing with.”  
(Ava, Tenure-track assistant professor)

“We need to recover from this trauma.”  (Gary, PhD student)

“I just fear for the future of research in general. I don’t know if money will be cut, if funds will no longer be available, how many grant certain places will allow to fund in the coming year. I mean it’s all just unknown.... I’m afraid of it. There’s no security.”  
(Clara, Postdoctoral scholar in a STEM discipline)
“I think the people who are going to get the tenure-track positions are the ones who are going to cling to whatever they can hold onto. I think that the people who are often best situated to do that are white people who are from a well-off background and either they have a spouse who is willing to move with them and support them, or they’re single and they don’t have children. They’re not as worried about maybe moving away from family or they have family wealth, generational wealth that can help support them during times of greater precarity.”

(Eleanor, White postdoctoral scholar in a STEMM discipline)
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY
Thinking about Next Steps….

Nothing about COVID-19 has been simple and straightforward. These are complicated issues, and unfortunately we don’t have simple solutions to address all of these problems.

But, we can offer some guidance based on what we learned in our interviews, and based on what we have read in published studies and reports.

REMINDER: EQUITY ≠ EQUALITY

“Equity is successfully enacted when all groups are given the needed number and types of resources so that they achieve equal results in comparison with other groups (Malisch et al. 2020).”
TAMU Actions: COVID-19 Impact Statements

- TAMU Department heads have been encouraged to ask faculty to document the impacts of the pandemic on their research, teaching, and service in annual performance reviews.
  - Similar statements should be taken into account for graduate student reviews, tenure and promotion evaluations, and post-tenure reviews.
  - Unit heads need more guidance on what to do with this information, and how to ensure that this information does not introduce bias into the review process.
  - Administrators (and ADVANCE) should provide faculty with some guidance on how much detail is needed (and how the information will and will not be used).
TAMU Actions: COVID-19 Impact Statements

- How can faculty be reassured that COVID impact statements will not just be filed away?
- Should a faculty member whose personal life has been totally disrupted due to the pandemic be evaluated in the same way as a faculty member who has been able to remain productive?
- How will this information come into play when it comes to making decisions about merit raises?
- Are there other ways that the department can provide resources and assistance to faculty who indicate severe disruptions due to the pandemic?
TAMU Actions: Student Evaluations

- TAMU faculty have been told that they will be “held harmless” for student evaluations of teaching (SET) during semesters affected by the pandemic, but can “opt in” to have SET included in reviews.
  - Based on our interviews, further guidance on this policy is needed for the leaders of academic units.
  - Several faculty indicated that evaluations were still included in their annual review this year.
  - Faculty were unclear where they could find this policy, and which semesters could be excluded if so desired.
TAMU Actions: Tenure Clock Extensions

- TAMU has indicated that all tenure-track faculty can receive a one-year tenure-clock extension due to disruptions from COVID-19.

  ○ Tenure clock extensions should be regarded as a “first step,” not a solution, when it comes to addressing the impacts of COVID-19.

  ○ Alternative solutions might include acknowledging that responsibilities in teaching and service may have increased due to the pandemic, and evaluate the record accordingly. Committees and external reviewers should apply a different standard when assessing years impacted by the pandemic (Gonzalez and Griffin 2020).

  ○ It may take more than one year for some affected faculty member to “catch up.” However, secondary clock extensions are not advised.

The time it takes to “return to normal” is going to vary from one scholar to the next.
For PhD students, OGAPS has provided an opportunity for graduate students to request an extension of tuition and fee coverage for assistantships beyond 4-5 year window (in cases where a department or PI can provide funding).

- University administrators might want to consider granting this extension to all students (without the need to document the need for the extension), similar to the way tenure clock extensions have been handled.

- Individual departments and colleges may be taking additional steps to assist PhD students who have been impacted financially. The university may want to assist with these efforts.

- Some departments might want to consider reducing graduate admissions in order to fund existing students who need an extra year to complete their degree due to COVID.
Considerations for Faculty Hiring

- Hiring committees should recognize that disruptions to research will disproportionately affect some scholars, and this might make it more challenging than ever to compare scholarly records.

- Be prepared that candidate pools are likely to be larger (due to hiring freezes and economic instability of other colleges/universities)
  - For units who are hiring, this is likely to be an opportunity to get a large and diverse pool of strong candidates.

- The pandemic is not over yet. Remember that international candidates may not be able to travel here for interviews.
What will a “return to normal” look like?

- Family Friendly Policies Before the Pandemic
  - Guidance on family-friendly policies allowed flexibility on work hours and recommended that meeting times be scheduled during school hours.

- Multiple interview participants indicated a new appreciation for what they can achieve while working remotely.
  - What will the “new normal” look like?
  - Some departments are already discussing whether they will continue using Zoom for faculty meetings in the future.

Not everybody is!
Additional Challenges to Consider

● What can be done to ensure that PhD students and postdoctoral scholars can “weather the storm” as they enter a job market with fewer opportunities? How can we ensure that candidates from minoritized and underrepresented groups remain in the pipeline?

● What, if anything, can be done to reassure APT faculty members that the institution truly values the additional teaching responsibilities that they took on during the pandemic? Can they receive more timely reassurance that their contracts will be renewed to reduce that serious stress point?

● What can be done for tenure-track faculty members who were unable to use research bursaries before the stated deadline?

● What should happen if a faculty member experienced severe disruptions to their research while on research leave?

● Can the university take steps to push for improved internet services in the larger Bryan-College Station community?
Final Note on the Next Steps

- A video of this presentation and the slides will be posted on the ADVANCE website next week.

- A report will be prepared and distributed after we have finished analyzing both rounds of interviews.

- We are planning to submit multiple journal manuscripts.

- We have plans to extend the study in new directions in the near future.
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ATM

LIBERAL ARTS

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Questions

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Thank you for your time!