

RESEARCH
BRIEF

“On the Verge of Burnout”

Covid-19’s impact on faculty well-being
and career plans



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The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust higher education into uncharted waters with challenges impacting all facets of the institution. While all employees have had to adjust how they live and work, faculty members in particular have experienced significant disruption. Fidelity commissioned *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to conduct this research to gain insights into how the pandemic has affected faculty from a mental and emotional perspective and if it may alter career decisions.* Among the more noteworthy findings:

- The majority of faculty are experiencing elevated levels of frustration, anxiety, and stress
- More than two-thirds of survey respondents are struggling with increased workloads and a deterioration of work-life balance—particularly female faculty members
- More than half of all faculty are considering retiring or changing careers and leaving higher education, with tenured faculty members even more likely to retire than others.

The pandemic has forced all higher education institutions to fundamentally reevaluate the way they deliver value to students while ensuring that faculty and staff have the resources and support they need to perform their jobs safely and effectively. For more than 30 years, Fidelity has served those who work in higher education through their workplace benefits programs and by providing planning and advice to help them achieve financial well-being.

These are trying times for all and Fidelity stands ready to help meet the evolving needs of all higher education employees, no matter what changes or new challenges the future may bring.

Sincerely,



Rick Mitchell
Executive Vice President
Tax-Exempt Market & Retirement Solutions
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*"On the Verge of Burnout: COVID-19's impact on faculty wellbeing and career plans" is based on a nationwide survey of 1,122 professors at colleges and universities, conducted by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The data collection took place in October 2020.

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Contact CI@chronicle.com with questions or comments.

“On the Verge of Burnout”: Covid19’s impact on faculty well-being and career plans was written by Alina Tugend and is sponsored by Fidelity Investments. Chronicle cover image from iStock. The Chronicle is fully responsible for the report’s editorial content. ©2020 by The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be reproduced without prior written permission of The Chronicle. For permission requests, contact us at copyright@chronicle.com.

As the coronavirus pandemic relentlessly wears on, the professoriate is overworked, stressed, and thoroughly exhausted. From higher education's emergency remote reinvention last spring to its anxious reworkings for the fall, faculty members have been pivoting, adjusting, and working harder and faster than ever before to keep up with the ever-changing challenges.

How has this ongoing, extraordinary crisis affected the way faculty members view their careers and their job satisfaction? What catalysts might be prompting them to change direction, or even to leave academe? How are different cohorts of faculty members thinking about the academic career?

To learn more about these views, how they may be changing over time, and what the findings mean for colleges, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* conducted a survey of faculty members in October 2020, supported by Fidelity Investments. The survey included responses from 1,122 faculty members at four-year and two-year institutions around the nation. Nearly half of the respondents were tenured faculty; the rest were tenure-track, nontenured faculty and part-time or adjunct professors.

More than two-thirds of the tenured participants had been in their jobs 11 years or more. A greater percentage of respondents were women in all ranks of faculty; over all, 64 percent were women and 36 percent men. In addition, *The Chronicle* interviewed more than a dozen experts, university leaders, and faculty members and has included some of their thoughts in the report.



“A Mental Exhaustion”

Faculty members are experiencing high levels of stress, hopelessness, anger, and grief. They report heavy workloads and say their work-life balance has deteriorated. Many say they miss the “human connection” in teaching, and more than one-third have considered changing careers and leaving higher education. The pandemic has taken a significant toll on the lives of the faculty, with potentially profound implications for the future.



Disparate Effects

The pandemic’s impact has not been equal. Those with caregiving duties are struggling without the support of day care, school, or senior centers for older relatives, and this tends to have disproportionately affected women. The [stress](#) that women, Black, brown, gay, nonbinary and disabled faculty members face in more normal times to prove themselves is [greatly heightened](#); faculty of color also often come from or have family or friends in communities with high rates of Covid-19. College leaders will need to consider the pandemic’s ramifications on different segments of their faculty.



Institutional Response

In spite of feelings of isolation, many faculty members praise their institutions’ response, and a majority — if a slim one — feels at least somewhat or well supported during the pandemic. It is a moment that calls for empathy and support for faculty well-being from college leaders, as well as tangible actions to confront the challenges and obstacles that faculty members are facing.

INTRODUCTION

Many months into the pandemic, faculty members at all levels, from tenured professors to adjuncts, say their workloads are higher, their morale is lower, and their work-life balance is almost nonexistent.

Many longtime tenured professors face the challenge of virtual teaching for the first time; tenure-track faculty live in career limbo; and nontenured and part-time professors bear much of the brunt of furloughs and layoffs.

A significant percentage of all ranks of faculty feel discouraged enough to think about retiring or leaving higher education for other jobs, according to a survey commissioned by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

More than two-thirds of faculty members say they felt extremely or very stressed over the past month, compared with about one-third at the end of 2019.

It is not surprising that all faculty members reported an increase in stress and fatigue since the pandemic started, but they also report much higher feelings of other draining emotions, such as grief and anger,

and say they expected to continue those having those elevated feelings through the rest of the year.

The survey also shows that while all faculty members are struggling, women more than men say their workloads have increased, their work-life balance has diminished, and they have greater fear about the safety of returning to the classroom.

Higher-education institutions' attention is fixed on switching from remote learning to in-person education (and back on a dime), ongoing economic woes, and the mental and physical health of their students. Nonetheless, they are trying not to let their faculty's tribulations get lost in the turmoil.

They are focused — some more successfully than others — on helping with the immediate needs of faculty members, such as technology, child and elder care, and tenure bids, as well as on the potential long-term impact of the pandemic on what the faculty of the future will look like.

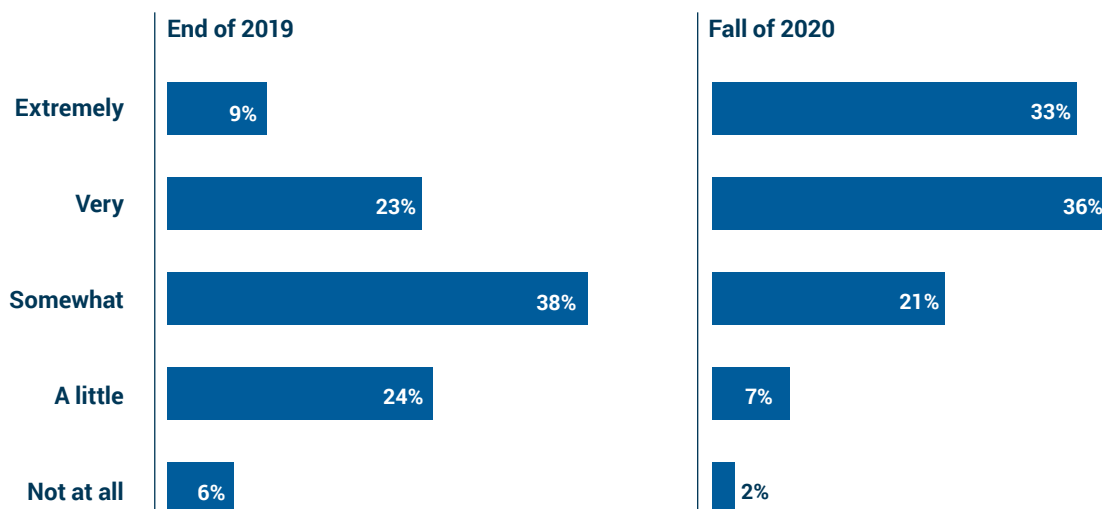
The survey's findings are grim. But in more than a dozen interviews with faculty members, university leaders, and experts, some expressed very cautious optimism that higher education can emerge stronger. The twin pandemics of this year — health and racial justice — have forced to the forefront problems that have long seethed in

higher education. The hope is that universities will use what is learned to make significant changes in areas such as the tenure process and academic evaluations to create a more equitable and diverse faculty.

“If there’s hope, it’s that faculty are more interested in decisions being made at their institutions,” says Kiernan Mathews, executive director of the Collaborative on

Academic Careers in Higher Education at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. “Faculty are often painted as uninterested in shared governance — I don’t think that’s the case anymore.” And he hopes faculty members use that engagement “to broaden the definition of excellence, to push for a more inclusive, a more empathetic, and more diverse academy.”

To what extent have you felt stressed?





“A Mental Exhaustion”

A glimmer of light in this dark time in higher education is that 50 percent of faculty members say their enjoyment of teaching has stayed the same or increased this year.

The bad news, of course, is that 50 percent don't feel that way.

They are worried about financial and job insecurity, as well as their health and safety — on top of their teaching and research challenges.

These issues are not new but intensified — at times greatly so — by the pandemic. After all, in 2019, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University conducted a

Since the start of 2020, your enjoyment of teaching has:

Increased

7%

Stayed the same

43%

Decreased

50%

[pilot survey](#) of 550 staff instructors at four community colleges and one university; the survey found that 38 percent said they have some form of basic needs insecurity, such as food and/or housing.

Perhaps most worrisome are the feelings of despondency the *Chronicle* survey uncovered. In response to a question about feeling hopeful, about 55 percent of those surveyed say they felt little or no hope over the past month, compared with a nearly quarter of faculty members who say they felt that way in 2019. And that 55 percent only dipped to 46 percent when asked if they expect to feel this way for the rest of 2020.

Even given that these times are taxing for just about everyone, these percentages stand out, says Debra Frey, vice president for analytics and marketing for Fidelity Investments, which conducted a survey of the general population around the same time as the *Chronicle* survey. The Fidelity survey (Fidelity is also the underwriter for this report) asked similar questions about emotions; 34 percent of the general population said they were feeling “very” or “extremely” hopeful, versus 13 percent of faculty members, Frey says. And 69 percent of faculty members reported feeling highly stressed, compared with 35 percent of the general population, she adds.

That striking statistic may reflect the multitude of challenges professors are facing at the same time: worrying about the economic black cloud hanging over much of higher education and the ensuring job insecurity;

handling their own fears and trauma as well as their students; losing a certain amount of autonomy and collaboration; and “the stress of learning a lot of new technology rapidly, and knowing that this technology is literally the way in which we will connect with, or fail to connect with, students who are themselves feeling so disconnected,” says Louisa Mackenzie, an associate professor of French at the University of Washington. That doesn’t mean teachers aren’t teaching well.

Barbara Anderson, a professor and head of the department of interior design and fashion studies at Kansas State University, says her faculty are doing a wonderful job. But they don’t necessarily feel that way, largely because of the difficulties their students have with the tech-

“I’m simultaneously teaching in-person and distance-learning students; each requires vastly different techniques. I feel like if I address one group properly, the other group suffers.”

– Anonymous survey response

nology of remote learning.

“Everyone is expressing a psychological exhaustion, a mental exhaustion, from not being able to do as well as you would like to do in teaching,” Anderson says. “I see a tremendous level of frustration.”

Tenured faculty who have the most stability in this very unstable time would appear to be the least affected, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. A *Chronicle* survey question asked this of all ranks of faculty: “Since the start of 2020, have you seriously considered: changing careers and leaving higher education; changing jobs within higher education; retiring; or none of the above?”

Since the start of 2020, have you seriously considered:

(select all that apply)



About one-third or more of tenured professors answered affirmatively to the first three options. Sixteen percent selected only the option to retire.

“I think about leaving academia almost every day now,” says one tenured professor at a state university who asked not to be identified. “But I’m only 50. I find myself jealous of retired colleagues and those old enough to jump-start their retirement plans. And I am tenured, with a course load not as intense as some others. I don’t have kids at home. If someone like me wants to bolt, how many more must there be?”

Some 73 percent of tenured professors who responded to this question say they have moved up their retirement date. Almost half say they plan to retire within two years or less; only 20 percent say that at the beginning of 2019 they thought they would retire within two years.

Of course, there are those considering delaying retiring for financial reasons, or even because remote learning suits them better — as one respondent says, “Being able to work from home has made staying more tolerable.”

The survey findings “fit my experience very closely, and I’m worried about it,” Anderson says. “While higher education may

need to change quite drastically, it doesn’t need a third of the faculty to quit.”

However, Adrianna Kezar, a professor of higher education and director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, says the possibility of more tenured professors retiring is not solely a negative, as many who will be leaving will most likely will be white and male — and their empty posts might make room for more women and professors of color.

“I’m sad there are people who are no longer enjoying teaching, but that’s a pro and con — we’re losing some highly talented people, but at the same time, there’s long been backlog of people to get in,” Kezar says. “There’s an opportunity in that shift.”

Peter Starr, acting provost at American University, agrees. “We have an extraordinary opportunity to diversify our faculty as a function of retirement. The challenge is to be as inclusive as diverse since inclusion is where American high education has traditionally fallen down.”

Of all the ranks of professors, those who are on the tenure track expressed some of the highest levels of stress and fatigue, something Mathews says he found unexpected.

Some 43 percent of tenure-track professors replied in the survey that they had

seriously considered changing careers and leaving higher education — the highest percentage of all faculty levels.

“I thought it was surprising how much more precarious pre-tenure faculty were describing their position even compared to part-time and non-tenured-track faculty, who are typically described as the most under threat in these sorts of situations,” he says.

That may not be that unexpected, given the enormous difficulties many professors are facing to continue their research in the face of the pandemic, something that weighs particularly heavily on tenure-track faculty members.

Leslie Gonzales, an associate professor of higher education at Michigan State University, also serves as a faculty-excellence advocate; she liaisons between the faculty, dean, and provost. In that role, over the summer, she interviewed about 30 professors out of about 200 in the College of Education.

“During the course of those interviews, I spoke to three pre-tenure faculty who are saying, ‘Why am I even going to try to go up for tenure? It’s just impossible,’” Gonzales says. “They articulated the idea that they might leave, and we know the greatest predictor of faculty turnover is the initial articulation that someone is going to leave.”

The road to tenure has never been easy. But it’s particularly difficult now. “I think in faculty at the very beginning of their careers — Year 1 through 3 — this is tough. This is very tough,” Gonzales says. “Earning tenure at any institution is a huge challenge, but when you’re an early-career scholar who is pre-tenure and living away from family, with no day care or school for child care, and you don’t have your typical support system, the hill to get tenure becomes even greater,” she says. “You’re thinking, ‘How am I going to do this now?’”

On the other hand, Starr says, in spite

of appearances, there may be room for optimism.

“The rate of tenure lines becoming vacant because of retirement is far outstripping historical norms, opening up the possibility for increased tenure-line hiring once we’re through the pandemic,” he says.

Of course, many faculty members don’t want, or can’t, leave their profession. But some also say they don’t know how long they can continue to work under the strain they’re feeling now.

“I am in my second year in my new job, and the pandemic hit before I completed my first year in a new town. We are in lockdown, and I have no close friends nearby. At the same time, my workload feels like it has at least doubled, and I am struggling to keep up.”

– Anonymous survey response

“The survey findings were an uncanny reflection on a macro level of my own experiences and those of colleagues I’ve commiserated with privately,” says Mackenzie, the professor at the University of Washington. “The increased workload and anxiety is something I don’t think non-teachers can quite grasp — for me, at least, to teach effectively and thoughtfully requires about twice the time, and there’s a constant sense you’re never doing enough. What so many teaching faculty are feeling is far beyond stress — it’s exhaustion, radical self-doubt, and wondering how much longer we can sustain it.”

Disparate Effects

Although this year has been grueling for everyone, the responses from women professors consistently showed that they felt more overworked and overwhelmed compared with men.

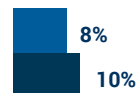
When asked how their work-life balance had shifted over 2020, 74 percent of all women faculty surveyed responded that it had deteriorated, compared with 63 percent of men. Eighty-two percent of women professors said their workloads increased, compared with 70 percent of men.

“Over all, the results are consistent with pre-Covid researching showing gender disparities in stress and workload and that those differences have gotten worse during the pandemic,” says KerryAnn O’Meara, a professor of higher education at the University of Maryland and the 2020 president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. “It is

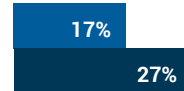
Since the start of 2020, your work-life balance has:

■ Female ■ Male

Improved



Stayed the same



Deteriorated

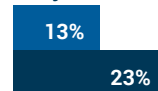


your workload has:

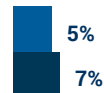
Increased



Stayed the same



Decreased





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striking that in every category of faculty, women were more likely than men to say that since the start of 2020, their workload has increased, and their work-life balance has deteriorated. What we need to ask is what are the likely factors contributing to making a situation that was already gendered and racialized worse?”

Research has consistently found that women do more of the family caregiving, whether it be for children or other relatives.

And the pandemic has essentially wiped out almost all the forms of assistance in this area: day-care and senior centers are shut down in many parts of the country; school-age children are at home, needing attention and help with learning; and informal but crucial help, such as grandparents who can pitch in, might have disappeared due to the health risks of spreading the coronavirus.

“It’s not my case personally, but all of

“Feel like giving up and leaving my career. With so much uncertainty and so many responsibilities, managing a career and my family has become overwhelming and left me questioning whether it is really worth it to continue my career in academia.”

– Anonymous survey response

the faculty I know on my campus who have had to take leave to provide caregiving, including unpaid leave, have been women,” Mackenzie says. “It seems inevitable that more women academics will see their career trajectories stall as a result of the compounded pressures of caregiving and work.”

Women, faculty of color, and gender-nonconforming faculty often also do more service on committees, as well as mentoring and helping students; Mackenzie, who is nonbinary, says “this has long been the case, but Covid is accentuating it as students are increasingly seeking more intensive forms of personal support from faculty.”

These are not simply requests for academic help or even morale boosts; professors talk of students who suffer from

various types of trauma, as well as those who are potentially suicidal, seeking help.

“A lot of students are experiencing mental-health issues, and students tend to go to women,” Kezar, of the University of Southern California, says.

Faculty of color also are more likely to come from communities that have experienced more coronavirus infections and deaths. “In my own family, which is working class, many are engaged in health care and customer service — which is very typical of Latino families — and several members have been infected with Covid,” Gonzales says. “Thank goodness my family members have all survived and are OK, but dealing with that level of loss, level of stress — that is an additional layer that faculty of color are very likely balancing.”

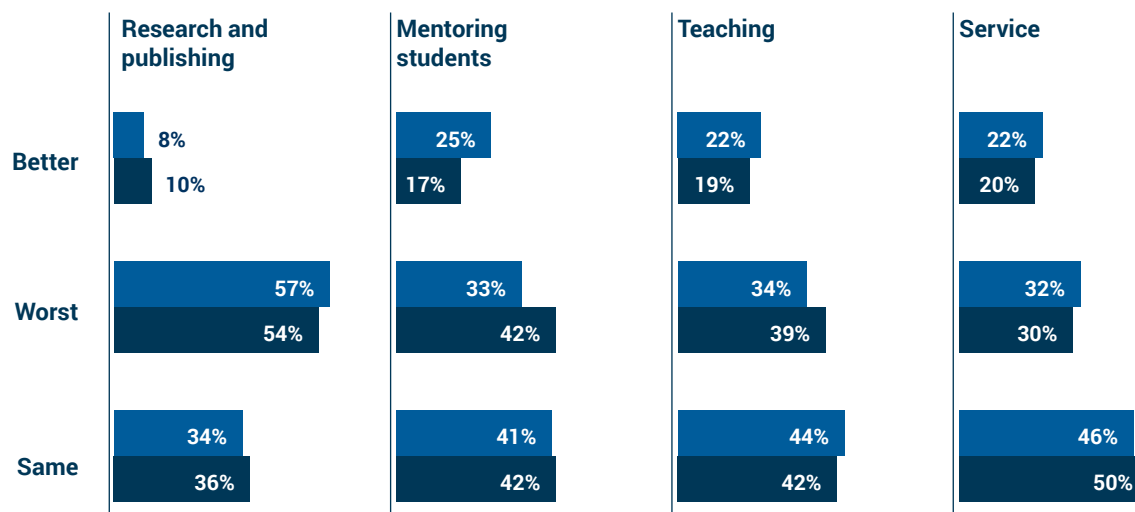
And while the work burdens are real, research has also shown that women tend to be more self-critical, less willing to say no, and more fearful that asking for help might reflect poorly on them.

So much of the attention on the challenges surrounding higher education during this crisis has been on how faculty members are teaching and how students are learning; less highlighted is the interruptions to scholarly research and what that will mean in terms of career advancement and tenure.

But faculty members, and especially women, are well aware of the cost. The *Chronicle* survey asked if, since the start of 2020, they felt better, worse, or the same about meeting their responsibilities in four areas: teaching, service, research and publishing, and mentoring students.

Since the start of 2020, do you feel you have done a better or worse job meeting the expectations of the following faculty responsibilities?

■ Female ■ Male



Over all, the respondents say they felt worse or about the same in all the categories. However, when broken down by gender, women professors felt slightly better than men in all areas except one: research and publication.

In this last category, the divide was most striking among tenured and tenure-track faculty; 66 percent of tenured women professors and 69 percent of tenure-track women professors responded that they feel they have done a worse job meeting their responsibilities in research and publication, compared with 58 percent and 61 percent respectively of male professors.

That is not surprising to Joya Misra, a professor of sociology and public policy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. “My research shows that women tend to take time out of their own hides,” she says, “for example, putting as much time into their mentoring, service, teaching, but less into their research when they are pressed, such as when they have small kids, while men protect that research time.”

She notes that a recent study, “[No Tickets for Women in the Covid-19 Race?](#)” showed that women were submitting proportionally fewer manuscripts to scholarly journals during the pandemic than men but continued to accept peer-review invitations around the same rate as men.

“Our findings indicate that the pandemic has already created cumulative advantages for men,” say the authors of the study.

On the other hand, some faculty members, without smaller children at home and with a topic that can continue to be pursued, may actually have more time to focus on research and publishing. That’s why institutions need to acknowledge the unequal ways that faculty members have experienced the pandemic.

One of the initial steps universities took — 259, according to the latest update of a crowdsourced [Google doc](#) — was to quickly extend tenure bids, typically by one year. Some allow professors to opt-in to the delays and some to opt-out.

While this early action was welcomed by many, a tenure delay raises its own problems, leading many to question what the next step could be.

“The instant reaction in the immediate aftermath of Covid was to grant tenure-clock extensions,” Mathews says. [Research](#) has shown, however, “that gender-neutral — and you could argue race-neutral — policies such as ‘stop the clock’ benefit both men and women, but men benefit more. Black faculty and white faculty both benefit, but white faculty benefit more.”

That’s because women and faculty of color will continue to [face discrimination](#), and, in some cases, more difficult economic situations, that don’t stop when the tenure clock stops — on top of the extra burdens they shouldered during the pandemic.

The second problem is that a tenure delay is also a pay and promotion delay. “By saying everyone is going to get another year, we’re further delaying — for pre-tenure faculty in particular — citizenship in the full rights and responsibilities of the university,” Mathews says.

Some universities have taken specific steps to address the pay issue. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, for example, will backdate the tenure-pay bump — if the candidate is successful — to when he or she should have received tenure if the pandemic hadn’t interfered, Misra says

As of July, a “pandemic impact statement” was also made part of the annual faculty

review at her university. Professors don’t have to fill it out, Misra says, but it gives them the opportunity to say how the pandemic affected all aspects of their work.

“Our sense is, two years from now people will forget,” she says, “but if we document it now, it will be in their record forever.” Misra created a [two-page tool](#) the university distributed to assist faculty members in writing up their statements.

“Work from home has paradoxically made me feel guilty about working rather than interacting with my kids, while also feeling guilty about interacting with my kids rather than working.”

- Anonymous survey response

This is particularly important when thinking about the tenure-promotion process, Gonzales says, because a person’s narrative becomes a key part of their document. She also suggests that institutions provide written guidance and direction for college deans, department chairs, review committees, and external reviewers to remind them

that portfolios will likely look different.

These initial moves are necessary, many say, but not enough. Now is the time, they argue, not just to tweak processes, such as tenure, that they find unfair, but revamp them completely. And a number of colleges and universities are in the midst of studying that option.

If changes aren’t made, Misra says, the fear is that five years from now there will be fewer women and people of color in tenured positions, because they have been hit harder by the pandemic, adding that “if we continue to use the same strategies to evaluate, that’s likely what we will see.”



Institutional Response

Many faculty members report feeling disconnected. In fact, of those considering retirement, the top reasons respondents gave was the “lack of fulfillment in being part of an academic community.”

And yet, while many of the findings in the *Chronicle* survey painted a bleak picture, when asked about their institutions’ response and support, the majority of responses — albeit sometimes a slim majority — were positive over all.

Sixty-seven percent say their institution’s response was “very” or “somewhat” good, and 53 percent responded affirmatively to the question, “Do you feel your institution has your safety as a top priority?” (Twenty-one percent weren’t sure). Half thought their institution had done a “very” or “somewhat” good job supporting faculty in their work and lives during Covid-19.

How would you describe your institution’s response to Covid?

Very good

34%

Somewhat good

33%

Neutral

16%

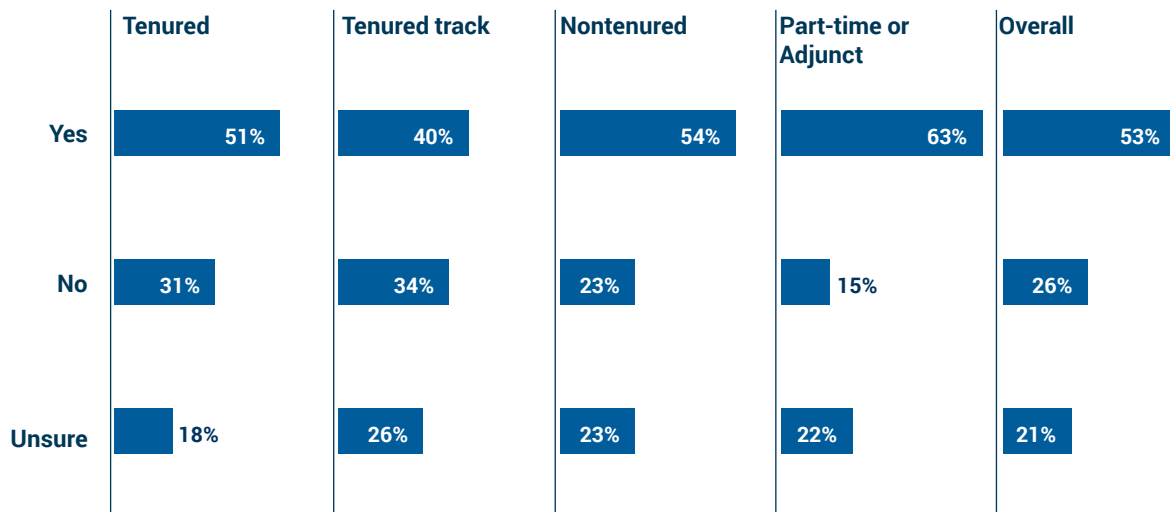
Somewhat bad

13%

Very bad

4%

Do you feel your institution has your safety as a top priority?



And a survey by the American Council on Education of university presidents, conducted earlier in 2020, asked respondents to name the top five most worrisome issues they were facing. The mental health of faculty members was near the top of their concerns, just below the mental health of students and long-term financial viability.

“Often campus mental health is focused on students, but we know that students interact with faculty — they’re often at the front line, and we know supporting faculty is really important,” says Sian Beilock, president of Barnard College.

Many universities offer regular messages of acknowledgement and appreciation, as well as mental-health activities and tips for self-care, which many faculty members say they find helpful. But some feel this is simply placing the onus back on them for dealing with the situation.

“The problem is when these recommendations become panaceas or stand-ins for actually changing our working conditions,” Mackenzie, the University of Washington professor, says.

A combination of tackling the very real obstacles faculty members are facing during

the pandemic, along “with a culture of care on campus,” is what’s needed, Beilock says.

For example, Barnard aimed to address the needs of three populations — faculty and staff members, students looking for virtual internships, and work-study students — by creating the [Preceptor Program](#). About 100 students — three-fourths on work-study — have been hired to assist faculty with their remote-teaching needs. Among other things, they moderate discussions and help with breakout rooms.

In the fall, Barnard also launched a [Virtual Tutoring Corps](#) in which students are paid to tutor children — ages 5-16 — of faculty and staff members. About 30 students — most of whom are on a work-study program — currently participate, but Beilock anticipates the program will grow.

“The idea is that is that faculty and staff are not just faculty and staff at Barnard, they’re also parents,” she says.

In addition, Barnard changed the way it offers backup child-care and elder-care benefits to its faculty and staff members; it increased the number of days covered through benefits from 20 to 30 and also now allows people to be reimbursed for using their own

backup caregiver rather than choosing from a specified list.

Some universities have also tried to lessen the burden on faculty members in other ways: Because so many students dislike remote learning in general — which could unfairly reflect on the instructor — at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, teaching evaluations were suspended in the fall and spring. Professors can ask to have them done and include them in their personnel file if they wish, Misra says.

Misra feels university leadership and the faculty union worked together very well to address the myriad challenges they're

facing, but even so, "if I talk to colleagues at UMass, they say they wish the university would do more."

One of the greatest concerns among faculty members is when and how to go back to campus if they are currently teaching remotely.

When asked in the *Chronicle* survey how they would feel if they were required to return to the classroom in the fall semester, 67 percent responded that they would be "very" or "somewhat" concerned. When broken down by gender, 72 percent of women professors over all, compared with 65 percent of men, replied that way.

Many faculty members say they would like an authentic sense from university and department leaders that they hear and acknowledge the many difficulties faculty members face — and that the pandemic and its fallout are not affecting everyone equally. While that's not enough in and of itself, it goes a long way.

Barbara Anderson, the head of the department of interior design and fashion studies at Kansas State University, says she sometimes debates calling the people she oversees, not wanting to overburden them, but she found that they're often relieved to hear from her. "I just want them to know I want them to succeed and that I'm patient with their challenges, and I think that's the message everyone needs to hear."

If you were required to return to your classroom this semester, how would you describe your feelings about that?

Very or somewhat enthusiastic

21%

Neutral

11%

Very or somewhat concerned

68%

CONCLUSION

Higher-education faculty, already straining under fears of financial doom, demographic shifts, and basic questions of diversity and equity underscored by a year of countrywide racial unrest, often feel near the breaking point as 2020 draws to a close.

But even though everyone is affected by this ruthless pandemic, not everyone is affected equally, and college and university leaders need to ensure they don't just acknowledge this reality but also address it in quantifiable ways.

Many faculty members responding to the *Chronicle* survey say they are considering leaving academe; and a surprisingly higher number of tenured faculty say this year caused them to hasten their retirement.

On the plus side, most faculty members are aware that administrators are “building the boat while in the water,” as one professor says, and many feel their institutions are addressing such a complex situation fairly well. But faculty members say they need continued support from administrators so they, in turn, can help their students through this time.

And not only do institutions need to tackle the immediate concerns of faculty members, but also broader areas that the pandemic's impact has underscored, such as the tenure-promotion process. In the end, how institutions grapple with the fallout of this year in both the short term and long term will define them.

METHODOLOGY

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