As WGS faculty who work on intersectionality and equity, we have growing concerns about Covid-related disruptions on instructional faculty and staff, particularly women and employees of color who are disproportionately and differentially impacted by the effects of the pandemic, and who can expect to have these effects accumulate over the next several years. Therefore, we urge the administration to intentionally and explicitly prioritize intersectional equity when making all Covid-19-associated decisions related to faculty and staff. By this we mean that CoC as an institution must take into consideration not only disproportionate impacts according to gender, race, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, citizenship status, family status, age, etc., but also how these factors interact.

Mindful decisions need to be made both for the short-term (fall and spring semesters) and long-term (performance evaluations, promotion/advancement, tenure). This letter addresses the immediate issues that should be considered for the coming academic year for all employees of the College. While many of the following concerns are pertinent primarily to roster faculty, centering equity in decision making necessarily requires that we are inclusive of all personnel in our approaches: contingent, part-time, and full-time staff as well as roster, visiting, and adjunct faculty.

Several decisions that have been made recently and that will be made in the coming weeks provide cause for concern. The impending layoffs of adjunct faculty, administrative staff, and other support staff must be mindful of race and gender. For example, like many campuses, since most of our custodial and food-service workers are women, Black and Latinx, we need to be mindful of the racial disparities resulting from staffing changes and work to mitigate these.

Specifically relevant to faculty, the recent move to extend tenure clocks for pre-tenure faculty, while well-intentioned, may exacerbate gender and race inequalities. The combined announcement of reducing adjunct faculty across the College with pressures to maintain 80% of courses in face-to-face formats create tacit pressures for adjunct faculty to teach in-person classes regardless of their health, caregiving circumstances or sense of safety doing so.
The ways in which the FMLA and the EFMLA policies are being interpreted and applied may not provide sufficient coverage with respect to pay or leave time allotted, and are inaccessible for employees who have had previous medical or care-giving needs this year, or whose children’s schools will be partially open. Moreover, some faculty or staff facing care-giving responsibilities are unable to take FMLA or EFMLA for financial or other reasons. There has been much confusion about what other options are open to these members of our community who need to balance workload with care giving.

Attending to these issues by centering intersectional equity and implementing policies and processes related to them “advanc[es] our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion” as per our strategic plan. It furthers our overarching goal in the pillar of Employee Experience & Success “to create an inclusive workplace that inspires excellence and innovation resulting in a thriving faculty and staff community.”

Our concerns fall broadly across several categories:

**Child and Other Care constraints.** Labor inequality within the home results in disproportionate impacts on women who perform the majority of household labor, child care, schooling, and care of elders and other adults. “In times of health, social, political, and economic crises, gender inequities are exacerbated, and deepen when factors relating to income level, race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, non-traditional family structures, and ability are added to the equation.” (UW System Gender Consortium letter). Closure of daycare services and K-12 schools in spring 2020 resulted in major disruptions for instructional and research faculty with children. These are expected to persist given the uncertainty of school opening in the fall. These disruptions are likely to be most acute for the parents of younger than school age children, who face daycare closure and limited access due to class size restrictions and shortened hours, as exemplified by the closure of ECDC.

Staff employees who will be increasingly required to report to work will need to make even more difficult decisions than usual about child care, schooling, and their employment. And, given stricter protocols for isolating children and family members who present with cold/flu symptoms, we can expect the burdens for coordinating care and schooling to be magnified for most families until there is a vaccine.

Those with elder care responsibilities and who live with adult family members who have underlying health conditions also face more substantial pressures for procuring groceries, medicines, health care services, etc. so that these members of the household are not unnecessarily exposed to the virus.

Supervisors should be mindful of these disparate responsibilities when making decisions about teaching and service assignments for faculty, and “on the bricks” responsibilities for staff. For example, employees with young children may need considerable accommodations to pivot to online/remote work to provide care and schooling support to young children during regular workday hours. Emerging research indicates that telecommuting results in increased household labor and increased emotional distress for working women more so than in comparison to working men. A broad policy allowing flexible choices to be made without fear of repercussion in terms of promotion or contract stability is critical. The recently announced COVID-19 Special Requests for Accommodations is a welcome improvement, but not sufficient to ensure equity and fairness.
Scholarly Productivity. Empirical research is already emerging with evidence of diminished scholarly productivity for women in the wake of Covid-19, particularly for those in STEM fields who already experience lower funding, fewer publications, and lack of access to mentoring and networks because of systemic gender-bias.

COVID-19’s effects are driving more of a wedge between women and men in academia in terms of research opportunities. When disseminating scholarly work, women are already confronted with bias in peer review and grant review panels. For example, women must be 2.5 times as productive to be judged as equally competent in grant applications. With the recent decrease in scholarly visibility, women are less likely to be invited to speak at conferences and seminar series, to serve as grant panelists, or be asked to review articles. These combined factors will lead to a quantifiable slump in publications and grant submissions from women (https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2020/06/24/2010636117).

Increased service and teaching expectations, combined with intensified family obligations and pandemic-elevated expectations for emotional labor from students and colleagues, which are generally higher for women academics, (Bird 2011, Tunguz 2016), will further exacerbate women’s ability to create time for scholarship, carve out time to focus on now-online conferences, be physically present in their labs or field sites, and apply for funding, fellowships, etc. These all have long-term impacts.

Service Assignments, Invitations and Responsibilities. The reality is that the small number of faculty and staff of color disproportionately advise and mentor students of color, and women faculty and staff overall are sought out more frequently for support with mental health concerns. Given current stressors unlike any others faced in our or our students’ lifetimes -- rampaging health crises in their families and communities; a series of blatant, systematic and markedly visible acts of violence against Black and Brown people, a deepening economic recession -- these students will be seeking out trusted staff and faculty mentors even more. These same individuals are also being tapped to serve on new task forces, committees, advisory boards, etc. related to addressing systemic racism and entrenched white supremacy at the College. If service assignments and “invitations” are imperative (and most are not immediately so such as curriculum revisions, peer teaching reviews, attendance at non-essential faculty meetings, assessment), there should be options to engage remotely and/or asynchronously on family-friendly schedules.

Teaching. It is inevitable that the workload for instructional faculty will increase for the fall semester with expectations for hybrid learning, ensuring increased student access to course content in multiple formats (F2F, recorded, synchronous, and asynchronous), requiring flexibility in student evaluations and assignment deadlines, etc. Despite careful planning and thorough training, disruptions inevitably impact students’ expectations and experiences of their courses. Suspending student’s feedback on teaching (aka “evaluations”) without undue threat of negative consequences, and exploring ways to value and reward the extraordinary efforts faculty are expending on their pedagogy and course design are imperative.

As the College of Charleston continues to adjust its expectations and plans for teaching, research, and service during COVID-19, we might consider pursuing strategies that other institutions have implemented. For example, some workload adjustments at other institutions include:
• Changes to or suspension of teaching evaluations as a strategy to account for burdens caused by pandemic-related care-giving disruptions
• Development of a research accommodation opt-in policy
• Coordination of sick leave pools and efforts to share tutors, nannies, and care providers
• Options to direct professional development funds to help offset costs of care-giving as an alternative way of investing in a scholar’s professional development as it frees them to write, conduct research, etc.
• Suspension of all non-essential service responsibilities.

The issues and strategies outlined here are not comprehensive. Thus, we recommend that faculty-driven and staff-driven task forces, including the Faculty Welfare Committee, should take up this work with urgency and with the authority to make actionable recommendations to College administrators who will in turn take steps to support College employees in this moment of crisis through policies and processes. Simply being attentive to these issues without structures for accountability and transparency is insufficient. We urge all supervisors to center equity in all decision-making, with attention to the interlocking and accumulated disadvantages resulting from systemic oppressions on axes of gender, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, citizenship status, family status, age, etc. Anything less perpetuates existing inequities and will result in exacerbated inequalities.

Respectfully,

The Women’s and Gender Studies Faculty Executive Committee:
Vivian Appler, Department of Theater & Dance
Kris De Welde, Women’s and Gender Studies Program
Cara Delay, Department of History
Melissa Hughes, Department of Biology
Christy Kollath-Cattano, Department of Health & Human Performance
Julia McReynolds Perez, Department of Sociology & Anthropology

Resources:
• Labor Inequalities for Faculty and GE Caregivers During COVID-19: A Call to Action https://csws.uoregon.edu/labor-inequities-covid-19/
• The Gender Studies Working Group on Gender and COVID-19, University of Notre Dame, letter to campus leaders, July 01, 2020
• University of Wisconsin System Gender Studies Consortium letter to campus leaders, June 23, 2020
• University of Pennsylvania “contingency planning for loss of daycare or school closures” policy
• In the Wake of COVID-19 Academic Needs New Solutions to Ensure Gender Equity
• Women Researchers are Publishing Less Since the Pandemic Hit…
• Reopening Campuses, Racial Disparities
• Gender Differences in Telecommuting and Implications for Inequalities at Home and Work
• Fall’s Looming Child-Care Crisis