UMass Amherst DPC Pandemic Impact Statement for Sociologists

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Department Personnel Committee Statement on the Impact of Covid-19 on Sociology Faculty Careers (Oct 2020)

The UMass Sociology DPC is sensitive to the fact that faculty have faced vastly different circumstances during the pandemic. Across academia, scholars are facing restrictions on access to their offices as well as ancillary resources such as libraries and common meeting spaces. Research teams are not able to meet regularly in person, conferences have been curtailed or moved online, and the shift to videoconferencing as a default mode of communication is cognitively costly. In their roles as mentors and teachers, scholars are facing unprecedented stress and trauma, and in their roles as caregivers many scholars are stretched thin by simultaneously being responsible for dependent care and schooling. Mindful of disparate impacts especially by gender and race, the PC notes some common disruptions to productivity that faculty in our discipline of sociology have faced which may not be as common in other fields:

- Main disciplinary association (ASA) annual meeting moved online this summer. In addition to preventing in-person networking and meetings with collaborators for on-going research, this switch created a heavy service burden for those organizing sessions—ASA had no central tech support so sociologists were required to get up to speed on making a secure and functional online meeting space without support. In addition, workshops/professional development trainings are often associated with major conferences, and with those moved online, those continuing education opportunities are temporarily curtailed.

- Shutdown means lack of access to data collection in on-site archives or with in-person human subjects. Many sociologists use research methods that have necessitated (best case) modifications to data collection protocols to move online, and (worst case) not being able to collect data at all. These modifications are often time-intensive, forcing a near-complete or complete rethinking of every aspect of the research process that concerns human subjects. Research productivity has been significantly slowed down, and for a longer term that will affect careers, unequally, and unevenly, for years, a point we expand upon below.

- The racial and gender inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic requires action informed by sociological expertise and has created a need to support equitable policy creation and training at the university. Perhaps ironically, university service to educate and ameliorate long term disparate effects of the pandemic has taken away from sociologists’ own individual productivity; we would note that the service burden has fallen especially on women sociologists.

Prepared by University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Department of Sociology 2020-2021 Personnel Committee: Laurel Smith-Doerr (Chair), Sanjiv Gupta, Mark Pachucki, Ofer Sharone, Millicent Thayer