

Class C resolution regarding reconceptualizing merit

WHEREAS, the current pandemic, political unrest, and ongoing protests of systemic racism and violence against BIPOC people have haphazardly, sometimes tragically, affected the capacity of university faculty to contribute to the multiple missions of their various units and have precipitated drastic changes in workload; in the conditions and demands for teaching, research, and service; and in work circumstances, including those related to the use of technology; and

WHEREAS, BIPOC and female faculty have been disproportionately impacted by these contexts and resulting demands; and

WHEREAS, the shift to online instruction has required going beyond the usual demands and procedures of direct classroom instruction, creating additional need for preparation, course development, and implementation of appropriate instructional methodologies; and

WHEREAS, travel restrictions, social distancing requirements, building closures, and cancellation of professional-society conferences have limited faculty members' ability to conduct and present research and other scholarship; and

WHEREAS, ongoing problems with full access to the infrastructure and technology required to learn online, sustained personal trauma associated with the pandemic and political events, and the effect of both on students' mental and physical health has created additional need for student mentoring and support on the part of faculty; and

WHEREAS, other uncontrollable, durational situations such as natural catastrophes and social or biological emergencies may trigger similar exigencies and impacts in the future; and

WHEREAS, the existing merit system appears to be antiquated, inconsistently applied across campuses, inequitable, and lacking in appropriate flexibility to accommodate environmental conditions; and

WHEREAS, merit is categorized and assessed differently across departments, units, and schools, and the faculty's ability to nimbly respond to the pandemic situation has already created more expansive definitions of research, teaching, and service in some departments, units, and schools, definitions that present viable evaluation mechanisms to be considered in similar times of duress; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate recommends that departments, units, and schools across all three campuses review existing merit evaluation procedures for 2020–2021, with the goal of considering the following changes:

1. During challenging times created by natural disasters or unexpected social, political, and/or financial instability within or outside our university community, departments/colleges/units across all three UW campuses should be encouraged to create broad and flexible interpretations of what constitutes "meritorious achievement" for faculty, as well as provide targeted supports for faculty who may be disproportionately impacted during these challenging times.
2. An adaptation of our merit evaluation system to accommodate challenging circumstances should allow for and support broad interpretations of what can be considered meritorious in the categories of research, teaching, and service. In the category of teaching, for example, faculty members' ability and willingness to quickly adapt to sweeping changes in instructional formats (online), as well as the shift in student advising and mentoring demands should be recognized and acknowledged as meritorious. Faculty have also had to make significant adaptations to how/when/where they conduct research due to the limitations of travel and access to research/resources, as well as far fewer service opportunities available to faculty across campus and within the community.

3. The merit evaluation system should provide more agency and flexibility to faculty to choose the work they believe illuminates their meritorious contribution to students, colleagues, their department, the university, and/or the community during times when the normal operation of the university, or their regular function as a faculty person are interrupted or compromised. In particular, departments, units, and schools should work with faculty to approve alternative structures/systems/procedures for student evaluation of teaching during these unprecedented times (as allowed under Faculty Code Section 24-57, Subsection A).
4. Thus, assessing how merit is defined, reviewed, identified, and awarded during these and future extraordinary circumstances, will also serve as a catalyst for a more general, comprehensive review and reconceptualization of merit and the review process beyond 2020-2021.

Approved by:
Faculty Senate
February 25, 2021