

KEY
TAKEAWAYS



Supporting Women Academics During Covid

WITH
SUPPORT
FROM

Kelly Education

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

**Powering your
institution
with the
best talent.**

**Helping colleges and universities recruit, hire, and
engage best-in-class instructional faculty and staff.**

With more than 20 years of experience, Kelly® Education is the leader in education talent. Our solutions help solve your most complex talent challenges—both today and in the future.

Contact us today to get started:

800.Kelly.01

kellyeducation.com

- **Adjunct Faculty**
- **Academic Coaches**
- **Curriculum Designers**
- **Instructional Designers**
- **Tutors**



The pandemic has profoundly changed academic work lives for all faculty members, but, as in other sectors, women have been disproportionately affected. Women have assumed greater caregiving responsibilities during Covid — child care, elder care, and student emotional support. As a result, they are reporting higher levels of stress and lower research productivity, and are submitting fewer papers for publication. In response some institutions have announced extensions of the tenure clock, but many experts do not believe those measures are sufficient, and they do nothing to help the large number of women who are contingent faculty.

What can be done to better support women faculty as they manage changing professional and personal demands? To find out, *The Chronicle*, with support from Kelly Education, recently hosted a virtual forum, “Supporting Women Academics During Covid.” Moderated by Liz McMillen, executive editor at *The Chronicle*, the panel included Jessica Calarco, an associate professor of sociology at Indiana University; Vineet Arora, the dean of medical education at the University of Chicago; Robinson W. Fulweiler, an associate professor of biology at Boston University; Henrika McCoy, an associate professor of social work and interim associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Joya Misra, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The following comments, which have been edited for clarity and length, represent key takeaways from the forum. To hear the full, hourlong discussion, access the archived version [here](#).

Liz McMillen: Jessica, I’d like to set the stage for this conversation with something that you said last year: “Most countries have safety nets; the United States has women.”

Jessica Calarco: Things like paid family leave, paid sick leave, affordable child care, living wages, and universal health care — these are what we think of when we think of a social safety net. In the United States, the paltry safety net we do is designed to be as stingy and even as punitive as possible.



Liz McMillen
executive editor,
The Chronicle



Jessica Calarco
associate professor of
sociology,
Indiana University

The work of that social safety net falls to women. Women run the bake sales so schools can have an art teacher. They run church-outreach programs, check in on sick family members, help their colleagues at work feel like part of a team. Women do all of that unpaid service for institutions, including academia.

And then they go home to do even more work in their families.

My colleagues and I found that these patterns became even more pronounced during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, we were following a group of 250 mothers with young children through the early years of parenthood, and when the pandemic hit their lives were just completely turned upside down.

Back in December and into January of 2021, we surveyed about 350 faculty, staff, and graduate students at Indiana. Across the board, even if they also had increased caregiving responsibilities at home, they weren't slacking off on their core tasks for the university. What was getting cut instead was research.

We also saw that those with caregiving responsibilities — who were disproportionately women and especially women of color — had amplified stress during the pandemic. Burning the candle at both ends, waking up at three or four in the morning to work for a couple of hours, before the kids woke, then staying up until midnight.

McMillen: Robinson, I wonder if you can talk a little about day care, which I know you've been writing about.

Robinson W. Fulweiler: Data is important, and it needs to be gathered, but we felt very much like we want solutions. We felt pretty frustrated and fired up, because these are all solvable problems. They've been solved in other countries; it's not like we have to reinvent the wheel here.

I think it was Elizabeth Warren who said that day care is infrastructure. High-quality day care keeps women in the work force, and when women are employed, everyone does better. Those are clear data from a variety of countries, so if you are fiscally oriented, and you only care about the economy, day care makes sense.

To me, it's a crime against women.



Robinson W. Fulweiler

associate professor of biology,

Boston University

McMillen: Joya, I'm interested in hearing about the grant work that you've done with the National Science Foundation project and the kind of structural impediments you've been identifying that slow the progress of women.

Joya Misra: What are the structural things that need to happen? Our model is aimed at university administrators, and the point is, you need to be thinking ahead, collect data. You need to provide resources in the short term to the faculty. Let's get those elder-care resources in people's hands; let's make sure people have the technology that they need in order to do things online; let's make sure that there's some child-care support.

But we also need to be rethinking evaluation. How we evaluate the faculty is a huge issue. When I am asked to write for tenure and promotion cases, I'm often asked to compare people to others from institutions that I know have very different situations — lower teaching loads, more research resources.

McMillen: I was interested to hear you address elder care, which is not on many institutions' radar.

Misra: Absolutely. It's a huge problem. We need paid family leave so that you can actually take off time to care for your spouse, or your parents, or your siblings — people other than your children that need care.

McMillen: Vineet, I think you came up with a really interesting tool, the "Covid contribution matrix."

Vineet Arora: One of the most demoralizing things about this pandemic for me has been seeing younger faculty, particularly women, minorities, or those with hardships at home, whether it's elder caregiving or other disruptions, reflect on the past year and say, "Gosh, I haven't accomplished anything. I didn't make any progress this year on my grant."

For a lot of our younger faculty, especially the ones that are also deployed on the front lines, or in education where they spent all of their time converting all of that coursework or that field work to a virtual experience, or to connect mentors to students, or to launch a telemedicine program and teach people how to use it, or to open a vaccine clinic — all of these things are important contributions to society.



Joya Misra
professor of sociology,
**University of Massachusetts
at Amherst**

As a promotions committee, you look at gaps on CVs, and the gaps are always in the publications. That's the metric people look at — either that or funding.

When looking at gaps, somebody might say, “Oh well, you know, they had a baby.” And I've always thought, “Well, what if we didn't know that?”

Why not make this sort of information a little bit more transparent? So we started thinking about a tool for academic clinicians, particularly in the medical field, to use to document their contributions and to present them to promotions committees in a better way.

McMillen: What has your institution done to modify standards or practice?

Henrika McCoy: I'd like to talk about what should be done. We are also in a racism pandemic, which we've been in for 450 years. I found myself, like many others, shuttered in my home while watching the TV, faced with countless acts of violence against Black people.

I represent many people, both women and other people of color, who do research that is close to their community. I think one of the things that institutions have to recognize is the impact of that. I'm not a full professor, but I'm not an assistant professor. I would like to be a full professor, but I have had to stop my work to protect my emotional and psychological health. Institutions have to reckon with that.

We also know that many persons of color, particularly Black people, are being called to comment about antiracism. That's always been a significant part of my work, but that takes an emotional toll. It doesn't get valued in the same way. Where does that come into play, and understanding that when I want to go for full professor?

We do have to rethink success. How should it be assessed? What should be valued? If it's important enough to have people present and write about it, it should be important enough to allow for promotion and tenure.



Henrika McCoy

*associate professor of social work
and interim associate dean for
academic affairs,
University of Illinois at Chicago*

Fulweiler: I want to shine a light on this idea of laying out what expectations are and what they should be. The expectations, even for maternity leave, are not clear. Are you really supposed to not go to faculty meetings? Some people go and some people don't. Mentor your undergraduates, advise them for classes? A lot of institutions do not have clear expectations of what leave looks like. What are the tenure expectations?

I can imagine an upper administrator right now saying to me: Well, we can't do that because of legal reasons — we can't make that clear. I think that's a cop out. We have to figure out a way.

I also want to point to a [paper](#) that Sarah Davies wrote (I'm one of the co-authors), "Promoting Inclusive Metrics of Success and Impact to Dismantle a Discriminatory Reward System in Science." It has this idea of looking beyond papers and grants — because there's all this other work that women do. We're just expected to keep the machinery going, and that is not evaluated properly. Imagine looking at training, sponsorship, pedagogy, community engagement, building networks.

McMillen: What's one thing you think an institution should do to make things better for women?

Calarco: Expanding what counts as success and what counts as contributions.

Arora: Empowering leaders to lead with empathy.

McCoy: Having a clear understanding of all the things people have been doing that have never counted. The additional students you take on because you're a person of color, all the committees you have to be on because you're the one person who represents diversity.

Fulweiler: All of these, and I would urge that we actually take action. No more task forces.

Misra: Communication from senior leaders is key. Training in how to create less-biased evaluations is critical. It takes time and effort to change both structure and culture, but it can be done.



Vineet Arora
dean of medical education,
University of Chicago

This "Key Takeaways" was produced by Chronicle Intelligence. Please contact CI@chronicle.com with questions or comments

©2021 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

**THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION**