

# FAQ: Faculty and librarian working conditions under COVID-19

The MSP is continuing to collect and answer questions from members. Many questions require significant research, and often advocacy, before we can offer definitive answers. If you have a question that has not yet been answered, please check back soon or email us at [msp@umass.edu](mailto:mSP@umass.edu).

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## **Tenure, Reappointment, Promotion, Continuing Appointment**

I'm overwhelmed with remote teaching and my conferences have all been canceled. How will this affect my tenure process?

The MSP and the administration have agreed that for all pre-tenure faculty, tenure decisions will be automatically extended by one year. Just as with a medical or parental leave, the expectations for tenure will not change as a result of the delay; the usual standards will apply. Anyone who still wants to come up for tenure on the regular schedule can do so by informing their chair/head of their intention.

Will all faculty and librarians have the option to delay promotion, continuing appointment, mini-tenure, and other personnel actions?

Yes. Tenure decisions will be extended automatically by a year, which means that no one has to ask for special accommodations. Promotion to Senior Lecturer and continuing appointments do not have the same research requirements as tenure, so we are not assuming that most people will want to delay those processes. If you do want to delay, simply notify your department chair/head and a one-year delay will be approved.

What if I don't want to delay my tenure/promotion decision?

Great! Go ahead and let your department chair know that you would still like to come up for tenure/promotion at the regularly scheduled time. Nothing will change for you. If your chair has informed you that your tenure process will be delayed, you can tell them that the policy does not require you to delay if you would prefer to proceed on schedule.

Should NTT, pre-tenure faculty, and pre-continuing appointment librarians be worried about layoffs in the fall if enrollments drop?

MSP has asked the administration and we were told that there are "absolutely no plans for workforce reductions." Only some hourly workers without unions and "03" temporary workers will be let go as of April 3, but the plan is to rehire them when campus operations resume. A full class is expected on campus in the fall. While we cannot predict the future in these uncertain times, job security for our members is always MSP's priority and we will always fight to prevent layoffs.

Do the delays for tenure, reappointment, and continuing appointment affect applications for promotion to full professor?

No. Faculty choose when to go up for promotion to full professor, so there is no need to offer a delay. You should go up for promotion whenever you are ready.

## **Dealing with Illness**

What should I do if I test positive for COVID-19? What if one of my students develops a severe case?

Any students, faculty or staff who are concerned about potential exposure to COVID-19 should contact the University Health Services Triage Advice Nurse at 413-577-5229 for further guidance. If students who have gone home test positive in the future, they should also contact the Triage Advice Nurse. If you are concerned about another employee who may have been exposed to COVID-19 on campus, please contact the COVID-19 Response Team at 413-687-2283 or [COVID19HR@umass.edu](mailto:COVID19HR@umass.edu). Their response will include, as appropriate, attention to an individual's health concerns, notification of potentially affected groups, and steps to manage and clean university facilities.

What if one of my students gets sick and cannot finish the course?

You can work with the student and provide an Incomplete for the semester if they cannot do the work. The student also has the option of taking the course Pass/Fail if they have done enough work to pass the course. If a student has no other choice but to withdraw from a course, the deadline for withdrawal (for a W on the transcript) has been extended to April 29, 2020.

Can all courses be taken Pass/fail?

Yes. The MSP, along with many students, advocated for and obtained a policy that will offer the greatest possible support for students. Professors will post grades as usual; if students have opted for P/F, the registrar will determine whether the posted grade would raise the student's GPA, and if so the letter grade will be assigned in place of the P.

More information about the Pass/Fail (or SAT/UNSAT) option is here:

<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/spring-term-2020-guidelines-regarding-passfail-and-satunsat-options>

## Support for Remote Teaching

I've never taught online before! What should I do if I cannot get the tech support I need for new or existing technologies?

The hard-working staff at IT are as overwhelmed as we are right now, so you might have to be patient. If you are not able to receive tech support that is truly necessary for your teaching, please contact MSP and we will raise the issue with the administration. That said, we recommend that faculty set reasonable expectations during this difficult time. If sufficient support is unavailable for a given technology, you may wish to reconsider whether that technology is necessary under the circumstances -- and whether it may present accessibility problems for any of your students as well.

Why does the administration want me to teach a synchronous course?

We really don't know. The Provost's office has confirmed that the administration is not recommending any specific technology or modality for remote teaching; it is up to the faculty. Experts in online pedagogy have told us that asynchronous courses tend to work better, especially when students are in different time zones, have family responsibilities, or may have unpredictable schedules. Each faculty member should determine what works best for you and your students.

What if I want to change my course significantly in order to teach remotely -- e.g., create different kinds of assignments, allow students to work at their own pace, or assign written projects instead of a final exam?

Great! You have the academic freedom to create the course in the way that works best for you and your students. You are encouraged to revise your course plan and assignments if alternative methods would work better in the current crisis.

Once I videotape my lectures and upload them to my course site, what happens to my intellectual property rights?

Your intellectual property is still yours. The MSP contract guarantees that all faculty courses, materials, and creative contributions are treated as exempted works under the university's intellectual property policy, and the university cannot use them without your express agreement.

## Research and Technology Support

I was awarded Research and Teaching Support Funds but I was unable to use them this year before the deadline -- do I lose them?

No. Any Research or Teaching Support Funds that you were awarded in 2019-10 will be carried forward, and can be used in 2020-21. The funds (under Article 26.6.1 of the MSP contract) ordinarily would have to be spent this year, but the administration has agreed to extend the deadline through the spring of 2021.

Will there be an extension of the deadline for expending start-up funds, or PMYR funds, or MSP Research and Teaching grants?

Yes -- the deadline for spending all of these funds will be extended for another year.

How will the university provide ongoing lab access so that I can continue my research?

Vice-Chancellor Mike Mallone's [email of 3/23/2020](#) provides essential information on laboratory access under the statewide stay-at-home order. Of course, the situation is changing rapidly, and we recommend that all members check their email for more recent updates. If you feel that your concerns have not been addressed by administrators or you have received conflicting information, please email [msp@umass.edu](mailto:msp@umass.edu).

Is there a hiring freeze?

No, contrary to widely circulating rumors, at the moment there is not a hiring freeze. Searches that are currently underway are continuing. Obviously the administration is very concerned about budgets: they will pay close attention to new requisitions for the next fiscal year, and may require an added layer of justification for new hires. In departments with significant recent turnover, the administration is still allowing faculty searches to proceed.

## Long-term Implications of COVID-19 Response

If we do remote education well, will this pave the way for the administration to try to convert more teaching to online in the future?

We have been clear that what is happening this semester is a temporary response to a crisis. Faculty are not creating new online courses -- rather, we are coming up with temporary solutions that allow us to teach remotely. If anything, we expect this semester to make clear how challenging and time-consuming it is to teach high-quality online courses.

## **Setting Reasonable Expectations Given Care-Giving Needs**

How can we get our work done at home with kids?

Recognizing this widespread challenge, the MSP has advocated for, and the administration has committed to, additional funding for child care to support remote teaching and research this semester. That said, it will be impossible for many faculty to secure sufficient child care to work full days every day, especially under the statewide stay-at-home order. The reality is that the university, and we ourselves, will need to be more flexible in our expectations this semester.

How can I get support for childcare?

The newly created MERF (MSP Emergency Relief Funds) will support faculty and librarians with emergency childcare needs this semester. An application will go out shortly, and we hope to have funds available within two weeks. We know that the funds will not be sufficient to cover all childcare needs but we are pleased that the administration has created this pool of funds for our colleagues who have young children at home.

How can we set reasonable expectations given care-giving needs at home?

The MSP is consistently advocating for reasonable, humane expectations for all members of the UMass community during this difficult time. The automatic extensions for tenure and reappointment clocks and the elimination of SRTIs will go a long way in relieving stress for many MSP members. At the same time, we urge faculty to remember that students are also facing extraordinary challenges. By setting reasonable expectations for our students, we can also reduce the burdens on ourselves.

What is available for kids who usually get meals at school?

Faculty, staff, and students with children under the age of 18 are invited to participate in a program that distributes free breakfast and lunch to children at many locations in Amherst, every weekday until schools reopen. This is a partnership between UMass and the town of Amherst. Details about locations to pick up free meals are at [www.amherstfood.com](http://www.amherstfood.com). Families in other cities/towns should check for similar programs.

## **Financial Burdens**

I booked a flight and hotel room for a conference that was canceled. Can I get reimbursed for the non-refundable expenses? What if I had not yet filed a travel authorization?

Yes, you can get reimbursed. The administration has committed to reimbursing faculty and librarians for approved travel, even if that travel could not be completed because of COVID-19 cancellations. The MSP recognizes that it is standard practice in many departments to apply for approval after booking travel, and we are advocating for the

administration to reimburse employees even if they had not yet applied for approval when the travel was canceled.

Can the deadline for the new employee Transition Fund be extended?

Yes, the administration will be sending information to everyone eligible for the Transition Fund, explaining that the deadline for applications has been extended.

I need some new equipment in order to teach remotely. Can I get some assistance to buy what I need?

Yes! The MSP has negotiated the new MSP Emergency Relief Funds (MERF) to support the costs of technology needs during this crisis. If you need home equipment (modems, routers, mobile hotspots), new course software, or programs for remote teaching, you can apply for assistance. The application process will begin very soon. You will apply through APWS -- and your application will go directly to the Provost's office for approval. As soon as your expense is approved, the amount will be deposited directly into your paycheck. This will be counted as taxable income rather than a typical reimbursement -- but you will be able to keep the technology that you purchase for home use.

## **Support for Students**

What about student workers? Will they continue to be paid?

Students with semester-long positions will continue to be paid, even if their work no longer exists. This includes graduate RAs and TAs, as well as undergraduate RAs, Peer Mentors, and other unionized university employees, as well as students serving in federal work-study positions, students whose employment is subject to a collective bargaining agreement, students paid for hourly work on a research project, and students who have been identified as critical employees. Hourly student workers whose work has disappeared will not be paid after April 4.

What is being done to ensure our students' wellbeing?

The administration has been working to meet the needs of individual students who are facing hardships. Students with personal circumstances or extreme hardships should contact the Office of the Dean of Students for support (see [www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/student-support-request-referral](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/student-support-request-referral)).

What happens to students who have nowhere to go?

The campus will never fully "close." Students who are unable to return home, or who are houseless, are allowed to stay on our campus. Between 600 and 1,200 students will remain in dorms through the end of this semester and possibly through the summer. Food will be available to them through dining commons or other "grab and go" options.

Staff are cleaning, maintaining buildings, and taking care of students' needs. Thank you to all of the essential staff who are keeping the campus open and keeping our students safe.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To find answers to many other questions, including issues that affect faculty, staff, and students, please see the university's comprehensive website with information about the COVID-19 epidemic: <https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/>