

## AAUP Labor Working Group

### Statement on Caregiving

August 21, 2020

We live in a culture that does not invest in the care of children, nor adequately support their parents, caregivers, or educators.

COVID has driven the crisis of childcare to a breaking point in our community. On August 4, the *Democrat and Chronicle* [reported](#) that the majority of public-school districts in Monroe county would not offer more than two days a week of in-person instruction at the elementary level. Since then, an increasing number of districts have opted against hybrid learning models for K-12, including the [RCSD](#), where in-person learning has been completely eliminated for at least the first three months of the school year. There are approximately [105,000](#) public-school students in Monroe county, and since the University of Rochester is the region's largest employer, these shifts in K-12 public education and widespread daycare shortages will substantially impact U of R employees across all units, divisions, and jobs.

The University has been slow to acknowledge that these shifts in K-12 education and daycare feasibility will radically impact faculty and staff. Less than two weeks before the fall semester is set to begin, the university issued two “family-friendly” statements: first, they asked supervisors to be [mindful](#) of the “challenges” that employees face and encourage “flexibility” and second, they advertised a subsidized [childcare program](#) at participating YMCA branches, limited to non-union, non-remote employees and excluding care for preschool-aged children and babies. Neither of these initiatives, though positive and seemingly under review for enhancement, meet the crisis faculty and staff will face this fall.

The emerging public education crisis in Monroe County adds to already existing conditions of impossibility for parents. Since March, parents have experienced widespread disruption as daycares and childcare facilities closed temporarily and in many cases permanently, and K-12 schools switched abruptly to online learning to effectively “flatten the curve.” Last spring, the University responded to this state of emergency with various emergency measures. These included prohibiting in-person instruction and mandating remote work in general, instituting Pass/Fail measures, suspending/cancelling extraneous programming, discounting student evaluations, and suspending residency regulations. But even though our childcare crisis will persist into this academic year whether or not we are subject to increased community spread, the University has advocated a return to a “business as usual” model, only slightly modified to be “COVID-compliant” to reduce the risk of a viral resurgence. Administrators sent countless messages over the summer to reassure faculty, students, and parents that university life could go back to normal and everyone would stay safe, despite the growing insecurity facing so many of the university's workers. These gestures from the administration have continually shifted responsibility downward and have had the painful effect of hiding how the faculty and staff of this university have had to work harder, under more stressful conditions, with less support.

The University of Rochester AAUP Labor Working Group therefore asks departments and programs first to understand and acknowledge that caregivers are facing burdensome, and in some cases impossible, working conditions, and second, to consider implementing no-cost or low-cost structural changes at the departmental level:

1. Caregivers face not just “challenges” but “crises.” This fall, parents will continue to try to manage without non-domestic options for childcare and educational supervision for their children, while the university fails to account for this in widespread, structural, financially supportive ways. We all must understand that “encouraging flexibility” regarding “working from

home” does not ameliorate the condition that many employees face, if working from home also means simultaneously caring for all children under the age of full independence. Caring for and educating young children is work, and it cannot be done at the same time as other work. Some of the reasons why work has become impossible have been compiled by faculty members at the University of Rochester, led by Faculty Senate co-chair Amy Lerner and SBAI Director Kristin Doughty, including:

- **Less time** each day to complete work tasks due to additional demands (e.g., homeschooling and child care) resulting in **no mental space** because of extra tasks and care needs; writing.
- **Conflicting scheduling demands** among family (where our classes or meetings may conflict with the classes of our children, in addition to the meetings or classes of partners working from home)
- **Noisy environments** during teaching / meetings
- **Disruptions** to typical routines and schedules
- **Interruptions** during classes and meetings
- Needing to **teach and parent** and potentially **homeschool** simultaneously
- **Uncertainty** about schedule for fall because of shifting school plans
- **Stress and exhaustion**
- **Job insecurity** and concerns about **unemployment, intensified by general socioeconomic trends as well as gestures by the university leadership that indicate to untenured and non-tenure-track faculty that their positions have become especially precarious in the face of revenue shortfalls.**

These conditions affect and undermine teaching, research, writing, service, and all forms of productivity.

2. In light of these crises, we recommend that departments and programs consider implementing the following work reductions for the coming academic year:

- **Suspending any projects, events or planning initiatives beyond basic departmental functions** until the 2021/2022 academic year.
- **Cancelling** some classes to free up space to redistribute labor—for example, one faculty member drops a class with only a few students and then takes a service burden from another faculty member.
- **Working proactively with faculty who are particularly affected by caregiving responsibilities to adjust service, teaching, and research commitments as needed,** rather than waiting for faculty to ask for new arrangements.
- **Encouraging directors and department heads and chairs to consider reducing the size of committees and/or deferring or reducing service tasks** that are not time-sensitive for the duration of the pandemic.
- **Supporting faculty and staff who have chosen to work remotely without prejudice,** with an understanding that it does not “solve” a childcare crisis but does relieve some pressures.
- **Eliminating Teaching Evaluations for this academic year or at least removing them from consideration in evaluation and promotion.** While studies have shown that student evaluations are even in the best of times discriminatory, the pandemic is challenging fundamental conceptions of what teaching is, and when standards and practices are in flux it is unlikely that an automated survey of students will be fair or particularly useful.

- **Eliminating FARS entirely this year** as the logic of FARS will only continue to highlight the disparities in "productivity" that faculty and staff with caregiving responsibilities have. Without the professional accounting system of FARS, faculty might feel more able to make decisions with integrity about what is the best use of their time, towards being stronger teachers and researchers. Chairs and supervisors should determine appropriate expectations for teaching, research, and service activities in consultation with individual faculty.
- **Clearly communicating and amplifying medical leave policies** for faculty, staff, and graduate students, including leave to care for others.

Beyond these changes for the upcoming academic year, we strongly recommend that departments, programs, and the university as a whole acknowledge and anticipate the long-term impacts that this crisis will have on all faculty forced to balance their work with caregiving responsibilities. Supervisors should adjust long-term expectations of the faculty that they supervise and refrain from using any reduced loads or other essential accommodations against faculty members when making future hiring or promotion decisions. Departments should advocate for the extension of the tenure clock for tenure-track faculty (and contract extensions for non-tenure-track faculty) by one semester for every semester in which their caregiving needs interfere with research or other essential duties. Finally, we should all recognize that the impacts of this crisis will exacerbate existing gender equity concerns, and we must monitor the impacts of this crisis on pay and other disparities for years to come.