

# Guidance concerning reviews for University Library academics during the pandemic

Library Cabinet  
8 September 2020

In this memo we set forth guidance on the academic review process and responsibilities for University Library academic employees during periods of significant pandemic-related disruption.<sup>1</sup> We understand that COVID-19 is likely to have effects on academic performance across the span of the pandemic. That will be taken into account in future reviews; in particular, we will treat the consequences of this crisis compassionately. The Berkeley tradition is and remains that we want to see our employees succeed.

## Review considerations

Academics are reviewed on a number of different criteria. In general, the standard of review calls for “superior professional skills and achievement” (APM 360-10(c)). Because the duties and skills of academic employees vary widely, reviewers are instructed that “reasonable flexibility is to be exercised” (APM 210-4(e)3). With a mixture of types of contributions, “superior professional achievement” must be evaluated in context. The disruptions from the pandemic are an important part of that context. The University Librarian, whether as the final decision maker or as an advisor to the Vice Provost for Faculty (depending on the academic position), will take into account adverse circumstances and constraints, and the academic’s contributions under those circumstances, when evaluating cases for which the review period includes a substantial segment of time disrupted by the pandemic, and will advise CAPA to do so as well.

Academic employees should focus their activities on the area(s) in which they can make the most valuable contributions to the Library’s mission, and not feel that they must have activity in every academic area. For example, per the APM for academic librarians consideration is given to contributions in four areas: professional competence and quality of service within the Library; professional activity outside the Library; university and public service; and research and other creative activity. Of these, the first is mandatory for all and is given the greatest weight. Librarians are then also evaluated on *one or more* of the other three: major contributions to all three are *not* required. At all times, librarians should be considering to which areas they can make the most valuable contributions to the Library mission. This continues true during the pandemic: it is not necessary to make any specific type of contribution to any one (much less all) of these areas. Similar considerations apply to contributions made by those in other academic titles.

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<sup>1</sup> The University Librarian also reviews librarians employed in other campus units. The University Librarian will employ the same flexible review considerations discussed below. However, job responsibilities for those librarians who report to other units are set by those units, and the section below on “Responsibilities” does not apply to them.

To aid reviewers as they exercise “reasonable flexibility”, we recommend that candidates for review include in their submission a brief statement of pandemic impact, highlighting any special circumstances they faced that might have affected their contributions during the review period, and how they adjusted their work in response to these circumstances. Although in their self-evaluations academic employees may wish to articulate specific impacts of the shutdown on their professional activities, they are never expected to reveal personally sensitive information, such as that relating to their own health or that of others. For those who had opportunities to do so, they might also highlight any contributions, outside of their normal responsibilities in non-pandemic times, that they made toward the Library’s greatest needs and priorities during the pandemic, recognizing the every employee has different opportunities, and will be contributing to the Library’s mission in different ways.

## Responsibilities

The Library is in the midst of a societal crisis. We need our academic employees to step up in the spirit of service so that we can fulfill the Library’s mission to serve our students and faculty. Academic positions carry responsibilities that are more flexible and open-ended than the job descriptions of many classifications. We have been delighted to observe this happening across the Library since the commencement of the pandemic, for example in the rapid redesign of reference and instruction services for effective remote delivery, the development of the electronic reserves and contactless pickup services, and many other examples.

Professional competence and quality of service within the Library is the one imperative for all academics, and in particular during a time of extreme challenge should be their primary focus. Indeed, the greatest service to the Library’s mission may be to perform tasks that are not normally part of one’s assignment. As called for by APM, “reasonable flexibility [will] be exercised” (APM 210-4(e)3) in considering other contributions beyond one’s primary duties.

We expect Library academics to exercise “judgment, leadership, ... and ability to relate their functions to the more general goals of the library and the University” to adjust their work to changing needs of the Library and the University, and to be flexible and responsive, within the broad parameters of their job description (and the APM), when asked to adapt their work to changing needs. Such adjustments are to be expected in professional positions; APM acknowledges this and even provides for “reassignment” in more extreme cases (APM 360-20(e)1).

There will be no shortage of academic professional work within our Library during the pandemic period. If an academic believes at any time there is not enough work through which to contribute to the Library’s goals, they should consult with their supervisor. There may be greater limitation on certain types of professional work than during normal times; the academic should adjust to provide greater contributions through other types of work, demonstrating proactive “judgment,

leadership, ... and ability to relate their functions to the more general goals of the library and the University” (APM 210-4(e)3.a). Reviewers will take these adjustments into account.

Academics should also consider what the underlying goal of their professional contributions might be, and look for ways to adjust the work to fulfill that goal in different ways. For example, many conferences will not be held in person, but alternative forums provide opportunities for meaningful professional service, research, and creativity.