

Supporting Faculty Careers and Development During COVID-19 and Beyond

How Institutions Can Help Faculty
Navigate Their Pandemic-Disrupted
Career Paths

The Opportunity in These Challenging Times

As any faculty member in your economics department will tell you, there is opportunity in disruption.

Of course, none of us would wish for the upheaval and tragedy that has unfolded as the COVID-19 virus spread across the globe. But as all of us work to respond to the crisis and mitigate its impacts, it's helpful to remember that challenging times often make us re-examine our assumptions and improve our practices.

That is—however adequate or inadequate your institution's continuity of operations plan was for this particular crisis—there is now an opportunity to improve your systems going forward.

It's almost certain you've already addressed the most immediate challenges the pandemic presented: you figured out how to rapidly implement online learning and instituted new public health measures.

But now, as colleges and universities settle into a new way of operating, you've likely turned your attention to other concerns, including the impact of the pandemic on faculty career paths and how to remotely manage the faculty lifecycle.

To help you respond to these challenges, Interfolio convened a digital roundtable of your peers, academic administrators who focus on faculty lifecycle management.

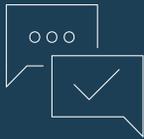
These administrators, all of whom use Interfolio to manage faculty data and workflows, shared how their institutions have adapted during the pandemic to support faculty development and careers—and how Interfolio's Faculty Information System (FIS) made those changes easier.

The Interfolio FIS is an online platform that both manages and documents the journey of all faculty employees at an institution, starting with their application to work at the institution and the process by which they're hired. The platform also collects data about all faculty's professional activities, such as research, involvement in teaching committees, receipt of grants, and even mentorship.

In addition, every moment of formal academic review, whether that's an annual review, tenure, promotion, or sabbatical review—and all other types of evaluations—are supported and captured through the platform.

In this eBook, we share four main pieces of advice on how to effectively support faculty development, review, promotion, and tenure during this time.

Ways Your Peers are Supporting Faculty During COVID-19 (and Beyond)



Communicate Often—Especially Key Messages



Stop the Tenure Clock or Allow Faculty to Opt into a Stop



Retool Development Programs and Informational Resources to Support Coping with the New Normal



Adopt Interfolio Platform to Support the Entire Faculty Lifecycle

Four Ways To Support Faculty Careers and Development During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

1. Communicate Often—Especially Key Messages

Faculty members are used to uncertainty. Their profession is a highly competitive one in which there is no guarantee they'll obtain a tenure-track position or tenure.

But add the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and even the most unflappable members of your faculty are likely ruminating on these worrisome questions:

How will a delay in my research affect my career?

Will performance reviews take into account the challenges of online teaching?

How will promotion processes change?

The best way to address these concerns and minimize uncertainty is frequent communication.

Rather than letting rumors and gossip dictate what faculty think will happen, tell them clearly what will change—and what won't—as well as what they should focus on, and how the administration will solve other challenges.

Dr. Roger Bounds, Interim Dean for the College of Health and Human Services at Northern Arizona University, advised, "Don't be afraid to repeat yourself early and often. Just because you've sent the message at 19 different public forums doesn't mean everybody heard it, or heard it in the way you intended it. So we just have to be persistently consistent."

Elizabeth Hendry, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Queens College of The City University of New York (CUNY), made a similar observation:

"The need to communicate with faculty during this time is critical. And obviously I did that beforehand. But I've been much more conscious of trying to do that now. Particularly when we first went online and things were at their height in New

York, we said to faculty, ‘Don’t drive yourself crazy.’ And we communicated information to support online teaching as well to address their other concerns.”

At Vanderbilt University, Danielle Certa, the Assistant Director of Faculty Appointments in the Office of the Vice Provost, reassured faculty regarding their concern about student evaluations of their online teaching: “We let faculty know that there would be caveats associated with teaching evaluations and student feedback; we in effect said, ‘we’re not expecting you to operate the same, and we are not operating the same.’”

Certa added, “We’re constantly updating our FAQs, and our Provost and Chancellor are messaging very frequently on everything, including what it’s like to be a researcher during this time and how often department heads should check in with their department members.”

The Interfolio FIS, a digital, cloud-based platform, includes the Lifecycle Management module, which translates all of an institution’s policies on academic employment models, eligibility, position types, and advancement pathways into a digital and visual format. By using this administrative module alongside the faculty-facing modules for hiring, data, and evaluation workflows, academic leaders can build trust, practice transparency, and clearly communicate the expectations and exceptions to faculty review and advancement.

2. Stop the Tenure Clock or Allow Faculty to Opt Into a Stop

For many faculty members, the pandemic has prevented data collection and set back research projects.

These delays, of course, have implications for the tenure clock—the probationary period during which junior faculty take steps to show they should be granted tenure. With research projects delayed, many faculty members will need more time before their tenure review occurs.

That’s why all the institutions represented on the panel have either stopped the clock for all tenure-track faculty or given faculty the option to stop it based on their circumstances. (Some faculty members are still able to continue their research during the pandemic and do not need an extension.)

Hayley Spizz, Faculty Policies Administrator at Smith College, explained how their institution combined a tenure-clock stop with changes to course evaluations:

“In April, our committee on tenure and promotion made some initial decisions about how to support faculty. One of them was automatically extending the probationary period for all our tenure-track faculty. They could opt in to waive it, but the extension was automatic. We also decided not to have their spring semester course feedback reports distributed in the ways they normally are. Specifically, faculty could opt in to have their chairs and the committee on tenure promotion see the evaluations, but that wasn’t the default.”

Although the changes these institutions made to review and tenure procedures were in response to the pandemic, colleges and universities have a known need to track faculty flexibility under other circumstances. For example, during normal operations, the administration could offer flexible opt-in tenure extensions and review changes for faculty members who experience a family emergency.

Whether during the pandemic or normal operations, implementing changes to faculty review, promotion, and tenure policies and practices is easily accomplished on the Interfolio digital platform. In addition, because all platform administrators can see the changes, the platform fosters communication, transparency, and consistency across campus.

During the pandemic, Interfolio fast-tracked development of a feature in Lifecycle Management to pause or accelerate any individual’s academic timeline, enabling our clients to accurately document and plan for tenure clock adjustments.



What’s happening to faculty members’ research right now is going to have repercussions for the next five plus years. For example, we’ve heard from faculty that were scheduled to do data collection this year, and because they can’t do it, they’re three to four years behind from where they set out to be.



-Hayley Spizz
Faculty Policies Administrator
Smith College

3. Retool Development Programs and Informational Resources to Support Coping with the New Normal

As faculty moved to teaching online and lost the ability to have in-person interactions, the panelists' institutions took steps to create new programs to help their faculty further develop their professional skills.

For example, Northern Arizona University's Roger Bounds explained, "We've been adding various professional development activities: things like, what does work-life balance look like in the remote world, because it's different than it looks than it used to look. And we've retooled our online teaching best practices program."

Vanderbilt University also reconfigured their faculty development offerings as well as provided additional information and documentation on faculty lifecycle policy changes to schools within the university.

"We internally reviewed the resources that we had available for the various aspects of the faculty lifecycle: how you do a non-tenure track reappointment, how you bring forward a promotion with tenure or a promotion to full professor, etc," Certa explained. "Then we added on to all of those resources. So schools can take what they want from it, but hopefully we've given them so much information that it helps inform the various changes and adaptations that they will have to make at the school level."

4. Adopt the Interfolio Platform to Support the Entire Faculty Lifecycle

In addition to the advantages Interfolio provides in accommodating changes and fostering transparency, the platform makes managing every stage of scholars' careers easier for administrators and faculty members alike.

For example, with all teaching and administrative work shifting to a remote environment, having a cloud-based, online program for managing faculty reviews was a huge advantage.

"In a remote work environment, when it came to reviews of contract faculty, we of course had to capture approvals in a way that wouldn't delay the review or the recommendation to reappoint," said Vanderbilt's Certa. "With Interfolio, the

review process was fast and seamless because our reviewers could do an electronic approval within an automated workflow. We did not have a single interruption in our process.”

Certa added that the ability of her Faculty Appointments office to carry out business as usual during the pandemic reassured these faculty: “We in effect could tell them, ‘You focus on your role as a faculty member and teaching, and we’ll take care of your reappointment process with no problem.’”

Interfolio also makes committee review meetings easier, particularly during the pandemic, because all of the relevant documents are in a digital environment, with the ability to modify permissions as needed.

“We’re getting almost 100% attendance at some of the important committees,” said NAU’s Bounds. “And arguably, that means the decisions are more informed, because the collaborative conversations happen at the right moment.”

Another advantage of the platform is that it provides consistency in review processes across schools and departments while also being adaptable to the needs of different departments and schools. The platform’s flexibility is something that Elizabeth Hendry at CUNY particularly likes:

“In our Division of Humanities and the Arts, where faculty’s output is things like artwork and performances, you would think it would be harder to fit those things into an online format than something like journal articles. But our Dean of Humanities and the Arts and the division’s faculty were very enthusiastic about the opportunities the Interfolio platform gave them to present their work compared to what they had been doing,” Hendry explained.



When you’re dealing with thousands of faculty reviews, having a digital system spares you from the drudgery and tremendous human capital and time that would be involved in administering a paper-based system.



-Danielle Certa
Assistant Director of Faculty Appointments
Office of the Vice Provost
Vanderbilt University

In all of these ways, the varied institutions represented on the panel indicated how the Interfolio platform is making it easier for both administrators and faculty to manage and track faculty career journeys.

Implementing Interfolio Across Campus

Each of the institutions represented on the panel took slightly different paths in rolling out Interfolio.

Northern Arizona University implemented the platform overnight across the entire university system, while CUNY piloted the platform first with reappointments.

At Smith College, they recognized that some faculty might be resistant to a digital experience and helped them with the transition. “It was important to be compassionate to our faculty about whatever tech-phobia and resistance they might have, and provide them with extra assistance,” Spizz said.

Northern Arizona University also relied on “champions” within each department or school to serve as go-to experts on the platform and to help illustrate the many advantages of going digital.

Vanderbilt University assigns a similar role to their “Interfolio specialists,” who not only serve as experts but help advise the administration on how to set up workflows within the platform so that the workflows serve the faculty’s needs.

“Having faculty champions really informs our process—and has helped us develop a very supportive workflow for faculty members, and that’s something we’re really proud of,” explained Certa.

Why You Should Sweat the Small Stuff

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that [one of the things we fear the most is uncertainty](#).

Will the vaccine work? Will it provide lasting immunity? When can life return to normal?

But this dread of uncertainty, of course, is with us even during normal times. The specifics may vary, but there is always something we're unsure of that may provoke anxiety.

That's why, whether you're operating in a remote environment or with normal campus life, communicating often and establishing clear, standardized processes helps to dispel uncertainty and puts your faculty at ease.

Interfolio's Review, Promotion & Tenure module provides a transparent and consistent review experience for faculty members, committee members, and administrators.

Although such transparency and clarity may seem like small things, they matter greatly. They contribute to an impression that your institution is well organized, on top of issues, efficient, and fair. All of these traits in any employer, when present, engender goodwill, and—when absent—sow considerable discontent.

In other words, these small actions of being transparent, efficient, and fair help with attracting and retaining faculty, while failing to act in these ways aggravates faculty and erodes trust between faculty and the institution.

Here at Interfolio, we believe faculty are an institution's most important asset, which is why we designed our digital tools to enable the kind of easy, painless processes that delight your faculty.

We'd be happy to discuss with you how our platform can alleviate administrative burdens and reassure faculty that their career paths are in capable hands, both now and in the future.

We also invite you to read more about [Interfolio's Faculty Information System](#) and [request a demo](#).

About Interfolio

Conceived by academics for academics, Interfolio is an education technology company headquartered in Washington, DC, USA and in Cambridge, England, UK. Founded in 1999, Interfolio operates the acclaimed Faculty Information System for colleges and universities, the Researchfish impact assessment platform for funders and research organizations, and the widely used Dossier service for individual scholars. Over 400 clients based in 15 countries choose Interfolio's technology for hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, faculty reviews and promotions, and research impact analysis. Interfolio provides scholar-first products for the full academic lifecycle—from job seeking to professional accomplishments, committee service, funding award compliance, career growth and advancement, administrative leadership, and beyond. For more information about Interfolio, please contact team@interfolio.com or visit www.interfolio.com