

## Statement on Carework and COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis attendant upon it have exposed deep social inequalities in the United States and around the world, along the lines of race, class and gender. Fordham University's mission and stated values have always foregrounded a core commitment to justice and equity, and yet we are concerned about the lack of attention to race, class and gender disparities among employees in the "Fordham Forward" Plan (June 30, 2020) and Update (July 20, 2020). In particular, the plan makes no provision for the unpaid work of caregiving that has increased exponentially during the pandemic, falling disproportionately upon female and economically disadvantaged employees.

In recent weeks, the New York City DOE and other school districts where Fordham faculty and staff reside have released plans for the fall that involve a combination of online and in-person instruction, with the majority of days for most schoolchildren (at least in New York City) still spent at home. Thus, families that normally rely on schools for child care are struggling to come up with alternatives. Caregivers of sick, elderly and disabled relatives are facing additional challenges caused by the pandemic as well. For example, given the high mortality rates in nursing homes, many families have decided to move older relatives home until there is a vaccine. And, of course, any of us - regardless of age or underlying health - may be stricken ill or face long-term health consequences caused by the COVID-19 virus itself.

While the whole Fordham community has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our staff come from communities in the Bronx that are among the hardest hit in the nation. Many of our contingent faculty and graduate student colleagues were barely surviving financially before the pandemic, and many of our tenured and tenure-track colleagues are newly struggling because a spouse or partner has lost their job.

We are extremely grateful that in the time between when we convened this group of concerned faculty and staff and when we send this letter, the University has modified its reopening plans to allow all instructors to choose the manner in which they will offer their classes, including fully online, and to allow all staff to remain working from home if possible. This is an important step in mitigating the worst stresses and difficulties of balancing work and carework.

We are asking for further steps that acknowledge the additional stresses that caregivers are under at the moment. We recommend the following:

1. Issue a public statement recognizing the extra burdens of carework in the age of pandemic. When the University refuses to acknowledge this reality, it perpetuates the idea that the normative person who matters is unencumbered by the demands of caregiving. As the University struggles to live out its commitment to embodied human life in all of its complexity, simply recognizing carework is an essential step.

2. Allow faculty, staff, and administrators who have been able to do their jobs from home to continue working from home until there is a vaccine or consistently effective treatment (as opposed to a semester by semester decision). Work with all managers and administrators to find creative work-from-home solutions for as many roles as possible.
3. Create an emergency dependent care fund to which all faculty, administrators, and staff can apply for assistance.
4. Ensure that TT faculty caregivers have adequate support to maintain their required research activity. Such support should include extended timelines of FRGs awarded in 2019-2020 and those to be awarded in 2020-2021 to allow faculty to resume full research productivity once the pandemic abates.
5. Recognize that dependent care can be a crucial support for research and professional development. Allow faculty to allocate their FRG budgets to meet the most pressing needs of the current situation, including dependent care, and allow SEIU members to include dependent care in applications to the professional development fund to support conference and workshop participation.
6. Pause non-essential committee work at all levels of the university until there is a vaccine or consistently effective treatment. Instruct department chairs and deans to consider the situations of caregivers when assigning essential committee work, and when assigning graduate assistants. Direct managers and administrators to develop triaged work priorities that allow all employees to prioritize essential work and deprioritize or pause any non-essential work.
7. Suspend the use of SEEQ evaluations in personnel decisions at least for AY 2020-2021 for all levels of instructor (tenured, tenure-track, adjunct, unionized--within bounds of contract--or non-unionized).
8. Convene a committee in AY 2021-2022 (if the crisis has abated) to examine the long-term impacts of the pandemic on caregivers, in terms of faculty research and financial compensation. The committee should provide guidelines to departments to reevaluate departmental norms for tenure, promotion and merit in light of the effects of the pandemic, especially on caregivers, and make recommendations for compensatory actions in the coming years. In addition, all units of the university should be required to evaluate norms for retention and promotion for all employees in light of the effects of the pandemic, especially on caregivers.
9. Create long-term, institutionalized, financial and practical solutions to address the lack of quality, affordable child care for all Fordham employees.

Catholic Social Teaching calls for putting the needs of the most vulnerable first. We are calling upon Fordham to prioritize the needs of its employees who are caregivers during this crisis, recognizing the inequities that exist along the lines of race, class and gender. We are hopeful that as a Jesuit, Catholic institution, Fordham will take this crisis as an opportunity to become a more just, equitable workplace.

Sincerely yours,

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