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[How the Coronavirus Will Change Faculty Life Forever; As the pandemic wears on, expect heavier teaching loads, more service requirements, and more time online](#)

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ABSTRACT

As the pandemic wears on, expect heavier teaching loads, more service requirements, and more time online.

FULL TEXT

This article is excerpted from a new faculty handbook for surviving the pandemic, featuring essential advice and tools for adapting to the new campus landscape. To hear more about Bryan Alexander's vision for the future of the faculty, please join a Chronicle virtual forum on Friday, May 15, at 2, Eastern time.

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It is January 2021, and you are getting ready to begin the new semester.

Fall term was a wild ride, as Covid-19 continued to rack the nation. The pandemic roared through and receded in repeated cycles of infection, relative safety, and reinfection as death tolls rose. During viral lulls, campuses welcomed back students and faculty and staff members, then sent them off campus again as infections and death rates soared. HyFlex term, some called it, a blending over time of face-to-face and digital-learning experiences. Meanwhile, colleges froze or cut spending while the economy staggered through on-again, off-again recessions.

Fall was also your first semester teaching at Tweed College. After winning that rarest thing over the summer, a job offer, you gladly moved cross-country. You coped with the problems of taking such a complex step in an era of temperature checks at roadblocks and social distancing with movers. It was a whirlwind of unpacking and teaching, committees and departmental meetings. You learned a thousand operational details while trying to keep your research going, your family afloat, and your sanity intact ... and all with the novel coronavirus gnawing at our lives.

At last, the winter break gave you a welcome respite, badly needed downtime, and some hours to plan ahead. You are starting the spring semester afresh and with new perspective. What will the new year hold for you?

Teaching responsibilities one year into the global pandemic may differ in some ways from those of the pre-Covid-19 era, depending on one's institution. Faculty members may be asked to take on larger teaching loads if enough adjuncts have not been rehired as full-time instructors have been furloughed or laid off. Instructors in pandemic-centered fields, such as nursing and gerontology, may see class sizes expand, because of student demand and administrative imperative, while those leading classes in other fields see fewer students. Changing class assignments and developing new classes are difficult without a capacity for professional development.

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Adjunct faculty members will face a new marketplace. Some colleges will expand their reliance on contingent academic labor to reduce costs, once they remove full-time faculty members through early retirements or layoffs. Others will cut back on contingent faculty members and assign more work to tenure-track and other full-time professors, because adjuncts' contracts are short-term and can be more easily ended. As colleges and universities emphasize pandemic-related classes, adjuncts with skills in those areas have a better shot at landing gigs; instructors specializing in other fields may well have a harder time.

Teaching, Research, and Service

Most teaching either is entirely online (when the pandemic is at peak) or relies heavily on digital platforms. Instructors have extended their individual classroom styles online, giving their in-person pedagogical personae a digital extension. Each professor considers the best mix of synchronous and asynchronous technologies for each class, based on pedagogical preferences, campus IT support, and a sense of what works best for the students. Social media of all kinds house peer-to-peer instructor networks for comparing online teaching practices and tools. When classes meet in person, some students prefer to remain online - whether from convenience or fear of infection - yielding hybrid-class experiences; some students appear through video, while others prefer to use telepresence robots. Managing all of this requires more than a little IT management and troubleshooting skills from faculty members.

Any instructor's research agenda may be altered. Professors working in medical fields could enjoy greater institutional support and outside funding, given Covid-19's urgency. Other researchers may succeed in making the case for greater support by arguing that their fields are necessary: economists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists dealing with social reconstruction in the pandemic's wake. Their institution may support them in public roles as they share their expertise through social or traditional media. A year into the pandemic, the hunger for information about viral mutations and microeconomics has not abated. Meanwhile, research in other fields suffers a reduction in support as such work is deemed noncritical, even nonessential. Project timelines can advance, extend, or be suspended accordingly. Professional travel is rare, and academics become used to meeting with one another through videoconferencing tools.

Faculty-service duties may change in our speculative 2021. Responsibilities for **advising** could expand or deepen - despite tightened **advising** budgets - as colleges and universities seek to hold on to the students they manage to enroll. Some committee work will bear closely on curricular and staffing shifts, as each campus grapples with changed demands for classes and research support. Other committees will explore revising grading policies, evaluation policies, assessment strategies, and changes in the academic calendar. Technology committees will balance exhausted IT-staff capacities with stressed-out faculty requests. Library committees explore just how much to cut library budgets, services, hours, holdings, and staff, while consortial holdings and off-site storage are reviewed. Colleges and universities facing accreditation renewals will demand faculty time in seeing through that process, which has become much more complex as institutions revise their curricula, shed faculty and staff members, and toggle among different instructional modalities.

Governance, Student Support, and Finances

Faculty members in general will seek to maintain their governance rights, depending on the local culture, as they and administrators struggle through the continuing crisis. By 2021, colleges have each established some form of emergency-management body, either formal or de facto, and faculty members lobby hard to make their concerns heard. Committees decide on when and how to make decisions on tenure review and promotion. Hiring committees' work will very likely slacken or suspend entirely. Younger faculty members than usual may find themselves leading departments or divisions once their elders take early retirement. Not all senior faculty members are offered or accept such options. Some stay on because institutional retirement contributions have been slashed, leading to further hiring freezes. Professors may spend more time managing contingent faculty members on campuses that rely more on them. Professors can also devote hours to managing student workers, who increasingly take the place of laid-off professionals in many campus positions, like staffing maker spaces or taking frontline IT roles.

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The professor of 2021 is more likely to work with institutional staff members than was one from 2019. More responsible than ever for student well-being, this faculty member connects with residence life (to the extent there is such a thing) and mental-health counseling. As classes stay online, each instructor works closely with the full range of information services: IT support, academic computing, instructional design, the library. Curricular shifts and the likelihood of academic-program prioritization (thanks in part to economic distress) mean that professors spend more time politicking with or against their peers in other departments. Economic distress also sees enrollment management, communication, and development working more closely with faculty members as institutions try to win as many students and gifts as possible. Faculty members are increasingly pressed into service to help lobby state governments, nonprofits, businesses, and foundations; those with reputations as public intellectuals are especially sought in this role. Overall, professors are knitted more thoroughly into the campus community in 2021 than they were in 2019.

For these reasons, academic institutions are altered by 2021. Epidemiological and financial stresses give campuses a different physical appearance. Crowds and clusters of students are rare, as most try to maintain social distancing, even when classes are actually in person. Fewer people are on campus, even during those times, as many students and faculty and staff members prefer to work remotely, especially those at greater risk of infection or death by reason of age and/or pre-existing conditions. Building maintenance has fallen behind schedule, in some places visibly so. Analog and digital infrastructure may have degraded somewhat; computer hardware and software replacement cycles have been extended. In contrast, some construction projects continue and new ones are launched, as low interest rates make loans and bonds for capital projects easier to obtain.

Many campuses suffer financially. Public universities see appropriations dwindle as state governments are hammered by revenue drops and spending increases. Presidents lobby their state legislators as well as the federal government, pleading the important contributions their institutions make to the commonweal, especially for mitigating and recovering from the pandemic. Enrollments are lower as some students fear infection or lower-quality instruction online. Endowments can be chaotic or simply smaller, sometimes drawn down during the darkest moments of 2020. Charitable giving has taken a hit, and donors are increasingly eager to use their gifts to address the pandemic. Businesses are similarly concerned with using their investments.

Organizationally, colleges and universities may change in other ways, depending on their situations. Those hit hard by enrollment drops and recession can turn to academic programs in order to reduce expenses, cutting and perhaps expanding departments. The most threatened campuses may take the drastic step of declaring financial exigency, letting their administrations remove tenure-track faculty members. Staff members at all levels may be cut, whether food service or grants offices. Senior administrators may see their compensation or their positions cut. Overall, fewer people may work on campuses in 2021. There is pressure for colleges to close or merge with others, and some have quietly started those processes.

The Balance of Work and Life

Professors use different strategies to preserve their mental health during what some have quietly nicknamed the Emergency. For some, work is what gives their lives meaning, and they throw themselves into teaching, research, and service. Others try to demarcate their professional and personal lives, struggling to balance them even as stresses mount up in both. The Covid-19 deaths and serious illnesses of colleagues weigh heavily. The digital world becomes an escape for many - social media, videos, and games. Some faculty members develop deep skills in hobbies - baking, crafting - during quarantine. They may consult the same mental-health professionals that their students do.

As winter 2021 becomes spring and the pandemic order of things persists, faculty members gradually accustom themselves to these changes. After all, the tenure-track triad of teaching, research, and service still exists. So do familiar professional disciplines, and faculty members get to devote their days to their fields, if with some adjustments in class assignments and research support. Adjunct life can amount to a humanitarian crisis, but it has been so for years. The pandemic's many requirements have become familiar or habitual, whether wearing masks in the library or talking with colleagues through clear plastic barriers. For many there is an urgency to conducting their

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work in the Emergency, applying their hard-won academic credentials to expand and share knowledge, helping a stricken society survive and recover. Similarly, working hard to preserve their home institutions is, for some, a fair responsibility to shoulder. Doing so successfully while maintaining one's physical and mental health is, for them, the great challenge of being a professor during the pandemic.

Bryan Alexander is the author of *Academia Next: The Futures of Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).

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