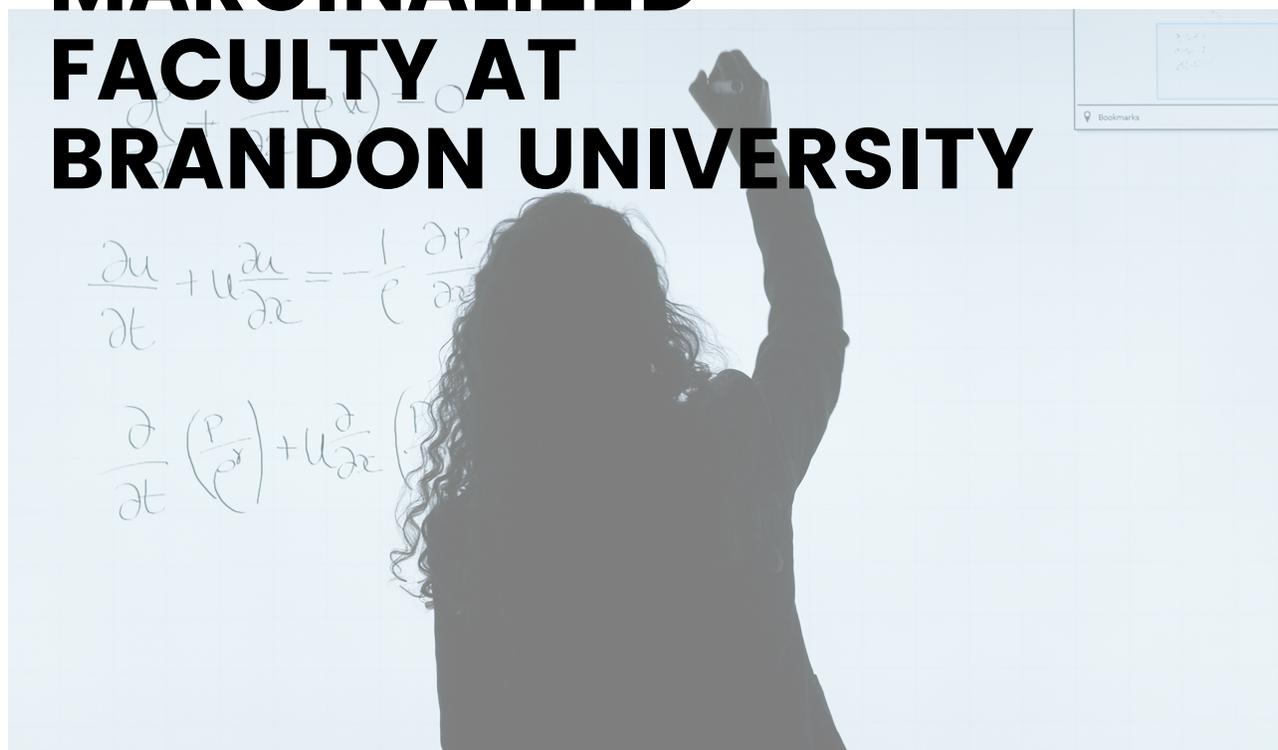


IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GENDER- MARGINALIZED FACULTY AT BRANDON UNIVERSITY



Status of Women Review Committee

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ABOUT THE STATUS OF WOMEN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Established in 1988 in the Collective Agreement, this joint committee of the Brandon University Faculty Association (BUFA) and Brandon University (BU) collects data on new hires, the awarding of promotions, tenure, leaves and research grants, and gathers information from gender-marginalized faculty on working conditions.

This group, made up of representatives from BUFA, the Board of Governors, the Administration, Library/Student Services and each Faculty, are committed to establishing equity for all members of the University.

For more information, visit us at <http://brandonu.ca/swrc>

We would like to acknowledge the participants in this research project, who took the time to write and speak about their experiences at a difficult time. We hear you and we recognize the work you do.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public health research across the province, country, and around the world, has demonstrated that the impacts of the COVID – 19 pandemic have been unequal and inequitable, with people who are structurally and systemically disadvantaged bearing the brunt of the health, economic, and social burdens of the pandemic, including the loss of life.

In the fall of 2020, the Status of Women Review Committee (SWRC) set out to study the impact of the COVID – 19 pandemic with an online qualitative survey and individual interviews with Brandon University Faculty Association (BUFA) members who identify as marginalized by gender.

36 individuals participated in the online qualitative survey and 8 of those participants agreed to provide more information in a virtual interview.

Key Findings

Caregiving responsibilities

- Caregiving responsibilities demanded more time, labour, focus and emotional energy during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increased caring for children, elders, and students affected participants' work and health
- Childcare responsibilities reduced participants' time for work and self-care, which increased stress
- The costs of added caregiving responsibilities are evident throughout all aspects of work and well-being

Teaching and learning

- The move to online learning had a dramatic effect on teaching
- Gender-marginalized faculty experienced a sizeable increase in workload including preparation time, teaching and supporting student learning
- Many faculty worked through the summer and/or worked longer days
- Participants were concerned about the learning and well-being of students, and reported an increase in worry and emotional labour
- Sense of teaching efficacy was impacted, but some participants valued opportunities to reflect on pedagogy

Key Findings

Research and Creative Practice

- The pandemic had a strong and largely negative impact on the research and creative practice of gender-marginalized faculty
- Online teaching, supporting students, and caregiving all took precedence over research or made research impossible to carry out
- Reduced research productivity has caused more stress and fear about the future, particularly for tenure-track professors

Administrative Duties

- Gender-marginalized faculty who saw administrative duties as part of their work reported a stark increase during the pandemic
- More emails, more phone calls and longer meetings meant a larger and more demanding administrative burden

Academic Service

- Increased service workload during the pandemic was stressful for faculty.
- Some were unable to complete service because of the other stressors and commitments
- Some found the shift to online meetings positive because it increased access and diversity of communication methods

Well-Being

- Compound stressors including public health measures, family illness, caregiving responsibilities, increased pressure, and fear associated with provincial funding cuts greatly impacted well-being of gender-marginalized faculty
- The mental/emotional impact included feeling exhausted, anxious, overwhelmed, mental strain, angry, lonely, isolated and experiencing compassion fatigue
- Compassion fatigue was caused by caregiving for children, aging parents, neighbors, friends and their students
- Physical impact included physical malaise, weight gain, stiffness and a lack of sleep
- Relational support varied among faculty, some felt very supported by partners, friends, colleagues and the university while others felt isolated and alone and the restrictions exacerbated pre-existing relational issues

Key Findings

Vacation and Time Off

- Lack of appropriate time off during the pandemic significantly impacted the mental health and well-being of gender-marginalized faculty and staff
- Several factors compounded to prevent faculty and staff from taking appropriate vacation time, including
 - Increased workload
 - The challenge of creating boundaries when working from home
 - Increased childcare responsibilities
 - Health crises or personal events requiring immediate attention
- The moratorium on travel forced everyone to stay at home, but for many staying at home is not a vacation

Support from Brandon University

- Experiences of support were mixed and inconsistent, underscoring the need for a review of institutional practices and planning
- Individual relationships were crucial to faculty, including support from some compassionate and understanding colleagues, deans, and supervisors
- Participants recognized some support from BU, including
 - Emails from BU leadership
 - Resource people including the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, technical support, and librarians
 - The Employee and Family Assistance Program and health benefits
 - Safety protocols on campus
- Some participants experienced a lack of institutional support, including failing to consult faculty on decision making about online teaching.

What participants recommend for BU

Flexible and accessible health benefits

- Fund to be used like professional development allowance that enables faculty to access services and equipment more readily
- More funds made available for counseling and psychotherapy

Increased mental health support

- Recognition of the mental health strain BU faculty are experiencing
- More opportunities for faculty to take a break
- Expanded in-person mental health counseling options for Faculty

Support for tenure-track faculty

- Recognition of the “lost year”
- Responsibilities during pandemic should not work against future tenure and promotion

Support for teaching and research

- Increased technical support for students.
- More information about online teaching strategies and resources
- Personal protective equipment.
- Course releases or additional supports for the gender-marginalized faculty with childcare responsibilities.

Flexible hours for all faculty

- Create opportunities for non-teaching BUFA members to set hours that work for them and for students

Prompt and clear communication

- Improve communication processes in anticipation of future emergencies.
- Complete a post-pandemic review to assist with future emergencies, drawing on this report and other institutional research

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INTRODUCTION

Since COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency in Canada in March 2020, the global pandemic has had a serious and ongoing impact on the Brandon University community. Public health research across the province, country, and around the world, has demonstrated that the impacts have been unequal and inequitable, with people who are structurally and systemically disadvantaged bearing the brunt of the health, economic, and social burdens of the pandemic, including the loss of life.

The Status of Women Review Committee, which is a joint committee of Brandon University and the Brandon University Faculty Association (BUFA) that is committed to equal opportunities for marginalized genders at the university, has been concerned since early in the pandemic about the specific and distinct impacts it has had on gender-marginalized faculty members. In the fall of 2020, the Status of Women Review Committee (SWRC) set out to study the impact through an online qualitative survey and individual interviews with BUFA members who identify as marginalized by gender.

The study asked gender-marginalized faculty about the impact of the pandemic on their teaching, research, and creative practice, on their caregiving responsibilities, their administrative duties and service, their vacation and time off, and on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. It asked gender-marginalized faculty what support they had received from BU during the pandemic, and what support they needed and wanted.

The findings of the study, which are outlined in this report, reveal that the pandemic has had an extensive, serious, and at times devastating impact on the lives, work, and well-being of gender-marginalized faculty. Individual experiences have varied by position, career stage, and life circumstances, yet each dimension explored was overall more difficult, stressful, time-consuming, and overwhelming during the pandemic, and gender-marginalized faculty have often felt over-worked and under-resourced.

The findings demonstrate that the various aspects of work and life are deeply intertwined in the experiences of gender-marginalized faculty. The impacts of the pandemic on caregiving have affected research, for example, and the dramatic impacts on teaching have affected health, and so on, such that each of the areas explored is interwoven with the others, and with the multiple dimensions of well-being.

This report offers an opportunity for BU and for BUFA to reflect upon the impacts of the pandemic to date, and to strategize and make concrete plans as to how they will support gender-marginalized faculty during future emergencies. Just as impact must be understood holistically, so must supports that are geared towards equity within the university.

METHODS

The multi-disciplinary research team was comprised of members of the Status of Women Review Committee at Brandon University, who collaboratively envisioned, planned, and completed this two-phase study. Brandon University Research Ethics Committee approved the research prior to the collection of data in both phases.

The first phase of the research comprised an online anonymous survey that was open for the month of December 2020. The survey collected demographic information and posed open-ended questions about the impact of the pandemic on respondents' research and creative practices, caregiving responsibilities, vacation, administrative duties, teaching, well-being and supports. Survey responses were collaboratively analyzed by the research team, who identified topics that could be further investigated through individual interviews.

Phase two of the project comprised those interviews, which were conducted in the spring of 2021 by a team member who did not belong to BUFA. Interview questions were the same as in the survey, but with more specific prompts to promote deeper responses from participants, and to clarify what their role was like prior to and during the pandemic. A question was also added about the impact of the pandemic on academic service, to fill a gap identified in the survey. Interviews were transcribed using Zoom transcription, reviewed and anonymized by the individual conducting the interviews, who was the only member of the research team to know interviewees' identities. Each participant was asked to provide a pseudonym; these are used throughout this report. The research team collaboratively analyzed the interview transcripts, identifying key themes and insights within and between the questions.

Participant demographics

Survey respondents

Most survey respondents were Assistant, Associate or Full Professors (n =26) (see Table 1). These individuals worked in a variety of departments within the University. The greatest representation was from the Faculty of Arts (n=13). Other departments such as Education (n=7), Health Studies (n=4), Science (n=6), Music (n=2), and Student Services (n=3) were also represented (Table 2). Most of the participants reported having over ten years of service with Brandon University, the other participants years of service are represented in Table 3. 35 participants identified as woman and one participant identified as queer femme. Six participants self-identified as Indigenous, Black, racialized, a Person of Colour, or a visible minority.

Individual Interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight people, and each person chose a pseudonym for themselves. Two interview participants, Amanda and Tannis, were Assistant Professors in tenure-track positions. Christine and Julie were both faculty within student services, whereas Mary, P03, Rachel and Vicky were tenured Associate or Full Professors. The individual interview questions did not request further demographic information from the participants.

Table 1: Rank or classification of survey respondents

Rank or Classification	Number of Respondents
Professor (Assistant, Associate and Full)	26
Instructor	2
Instructional Associate	2
Administrative Associate	3
Professional Associate	2
No response	1

Participant demographics

Table 2: Faculties of survey respondents

Faculty	Number of Respondents
Arts	13
Education	7
Health Studies	4
School of Music	2
Science	6
Student Services	3
No response	1

Table 3: Survey respondents' years at Brandon University

Years at BU	Number of Respondents
0 -1	7
1-5	5
6-10	7
10+	15
No response	2

IMPACT ON CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Gender-marginalized participants with caregiving responsibilities reported an overwhelming increase and intensity of those responsibilities during the pandemic. The study left the definition of caregiving open to participants' interpretation. While 11 out of 36 survey respondents reported no caregiving or no change to caregiving, the majority of respondents, and all interview participants, spoke of an increase in caring for children, partners, parents, friends, people with disabilities, and students. Caregiving responsibilities demanded more time, labour, focus, and emotional energy, and participants connected this to the sense of stress, overwhelm, guilt, and reduced productivity that are highlighted in other sections of this report.

Childcare was the most prominent theme among participants, particularly for school-age children. Whether kids were physically attending school or remote learning from home, participants struggled with the loss of caregiving support of extended family and grandparents who were not allowed or able to be in contact with children. One survey respondent summed up what this meant for her:

In addition to working fulltime, I am also largely homeschooling -with some support from their school - my elementary-school-age child. We have no childcare, as our main was grandparents, all of whom are in high-risk categories for COVID. In addition, we also need to support these older relatives by doing shopping and other essential tasks for them that they cannot complete themselves for COVID safety reasons (Survey #35).

Increased childcare responsibilities cut into participants' time for work and self-care, with a snowball effect on stress and wellbeing. Parents of children with disabilities reported being "overburdened" (Survey #16), and feeling guilt about taking more time off work to care for children whose conditions were exacerbated by the sudden shutdown of school (Survey #20).

Managing children's remote learning while working was particularly challenging for participants. One described it as a "draw on time, emotional energy, and my teaching abilities" (Rachel, interview). She described her inability to focus and write, or to think deeply as a result of being interrupted periodically throughout the day: she reported that "That's the absence of childcare, that's the absence of my son having a safe school to go to" (Rachel, interview).

Yet parents of adult children also found their caregiving time and energy to be in high demand. One respondent stated "my adult children are home after almost a decade being away and my husband is unemployed, home and stressed. This has been a blessing as well as being an increased source of stress" (Survey #21). Others similarly reported significant increases in emotional labour for their adult relatives, as the burden of care at a stressful time fell to them.

I do not have young children, but my adult children have really struggled with the pandemic in terms of finding work, dealing with online learning, etc. The added burden of their struggles was difficult for me as a mother. I tried my best to help them negotiate the pandemic, on top of what I was dealing with. My partner and I do not divide this type of emotional labour equally in my household. The weight of their struggles was [borne] primarily by me (Survey #3).

Respondents who care for elderly relatives also reported more anxiety about their family members' wellbeing. Some were a long distance away, and struggled with "more worry and no opportunity to travel and connect [in person]" (Survey #30), even in case of emergency. Two interview participants reported a close elderly family member dying. One noted that there was no time to grieve the loss, with the added pressures of online teaching and other online commitments, while there were also increased responsibilities around funeral and estate planning, which were complicated by pandemic restrictions.

Others shared that much more time and energy went into "connecting with and reminding others to connect with" older family members who lived alone and were at risk for loneliness (Survey #33). A survey respondent whose mother lives in a care home described how her work and personal time were re-organized to enable crucial regular visits.

I am her essential visitor. They only allow us to come in from 1-4pm from Monday to Friday. That's right in the middle of my day. I have complained but they are unwilling to change. They want it to be in the middle of their day, too. So, many days I visit my Mom in the afternoon and work in the evening to make up for it but that means that my personal time gets whittled away to very little (Survey #8).

Lastly, multiple participants reported a marked increase in their caregiving for students during the pandemic. They experienced more worry and concern for students' wellbeing, increased time put into accommodations, and more energy invested to engage students on online platforms. The increase was notable especially because these aspects of teaching are not always recognized as caregiving, though a good deal of labour goes into them. At least one respondent wished that they were cared for as they cared for their students: "I dedicate so much energy to taking care of my students. I wish that my department head and Dean put a fraction of that energy into taking care of my needs" (Survey #32).

The impact of the pandemic on caregiving responsibilities had, in turn, a significant impact on the work and personal lives of gender-marginalized faculty. The costs in terms of time, energy, and well-being are evident throughout this report.

IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching amongst faculty at Brandon University was impacted significantly by the pandemic. The move to online instruction in the spring of 2020 and subsequent closing of campus and adoption of distance learning for the entire 2020-2021 academic year required faculty in many cases to dramatically change the way they instructed their courses. While a small number of faculty already taught in an online environment, those who previously taught in person adopted a variety of methods of instruction, including asynchronous, synchronous, and hybrid/mixed approaches. Data from both the surveys and interviews described the impact of this change on pedagogy. Many participants described their instruction prior to the pandemic as experiential, hands-on, interactive, dynamic, visual and discussion based.

How was my teaching before the pandemic? It was awesome. . . It was so much fun. Oh my God! The vibe of the class, like just being in a class with other people and engaging in dialogue. Before in my bigger classes, I would have like in-class activities where they would have to practice the skill sets, and they would either work alone or with their peers, depending on the activity. And I would like circulate among the people and have conversations . . . It's dynamic right? . . . [In] the smaller classes, I found it great to actually like work through problems or conceptual issues on the board with lots of dialogue. . . which I found that made it a lot more spontaneous (P03, interview).

After face-to-face learning was suspended, participants were forced to reimagine and rethink their instruction in order to engage their students in a multitude of disciplines. Comments from faculty about these changes were varied but included strategies such as the incorporation of guest speakers on Zoom (Survey #30), finding new ways to work with music ensembles online (Mary, interview), using TED talks and YouTube videos in their instruction (Survey #36), and finding ways to have students interact within online platforms.

Several participants noted that they struggled connecting and engaging with students, many of whom had their screens off during classes, and a few noted that they were not able to cover as much content as they had been able to previously. In general, participants felt somewhat dissatisfied with their teaching, noting it felt less interactive and dynamic, and reported feeling fatigued by the extra energy required to undertake such change and engage students in an online environment.

Nearly half of the survey respondents, and all interview participants for whom teaching was in their job description, reported an increase in workload related to preparing for instruction, teaching, and supporting student learning during the pandemic. Rachel reported for example that the pandemic had “really forced me to go above and beyond what would be normal for teaching load expectations,” though she recognized that as a tenured full professor, she benefited from confidence and familiarity with her courses and teaching (Rachel, interview). Together, the extra demands and logistical and technical hurdles related to teaching significantly lengthened participants’ workdays, inhibited their ability to engage in research, and required them to spend a significant portion of the summer months preparing for the fall term. Four participants specifically noted a lack of recognition for the increased workload and its impact on their research productivity.

Concern for the learning and well-being of students, and the emotional labour associated with such concern, was another central aspect of the impact of the pandemic on participants’ teaching and learning. Participants described concern about students’ marks falling (Tannis, interview), the potential loss of students from courses and from BU (Survey #3), and lack of skill development in situations that are best supported by hands-on learning, such as medical skill development (Amanda, interview). They described incredible flexibility and accommodation in their courses in response to these concerns, and compassion for students struggling with individual circumstances during the pandemic.

One survey respondent wrote, “I am becoming more of a therapist for isolated students. For some, I am their only external source of communication, and I feel responsible for their mental health and well-being. I feel overworked and underpaid” (Survey #10). Another survey respondent wrote, “At this point, the students are burnt out, stressed, disengaged and disconnected, and so am I” (Survey #33). The following interview excerpt illustrates some of the ways participants cared for the mental health and well-being of students in their classes, and the impact this had on their teaching:

A lot of worry and anxiety about students, I would say, yes. And it's mostly to do with supporting students who are in all sorts of dire pandemic-related predicaments. They're either directly pandemic-related, where I've had students who caught COVID and their whole family caught COVID, and COVID was running through their community, their remote community, and so it slowed down their ability to complete the course. I've had other students who are having financial problems because they've lost their job and so I'm having to support them in getting through the course and those circumstances and make adjustments in some cases to deadlines. I have students who are ill, in other circumstances, who need adjustments to the course and if there wasn't a pandemic on, they might be able to be doing better but it's not safe for them to be out moving in the world. I have folks who are new parents, who are having challenges with new babies and trying to get coursework done. And I, you know, feel very strongly about wanting to support all the students and so that's really messed with my ability to follow normal teaching timelines, the ability to do all of my marking at once, my ability to get all of my marking back, get all of the grades in on time (Rachel, interview).

Similar descriptions of the emotional labour engaged in by teaching faculty surfaced throughout the data, illuminating why this work with students was also identified as a form of caregiving. The impact of the increased emotional labour was palpable in their comments; this is perhaps why several respondents described stress, anxiety, fatigue, exhaustion and burnout in relation to their experiences teaching in a pandemic.

Efficacy in teaching was a final theme that emerged from the study. A few respondents reported dissatisfaction with their teaching during the pandemic, describing it as "an unsatisfying experience" (Survey #14). Others expressed a lack of confidence, due mostly to issues with online delivery and student engagement; one respondent shared for example "my focus has always been on engagement but I feel that I have failed this term. I have revised most lectures to include some group work/activity but it has not been highly successful" (Survey #33). Some also reported positive impacts on their teaching, including opportunities to reassess and reconsider their teaching priorities and practices, and to develop new pedagogical strategies. Some respondents appreciated using online platforms, and indicated that it was something they would consider using post-pandemic. Such positive impacts were a silver lining where teaching was otherwise a significant challenge and source of stress and overwhelm for gender-marginalized faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IMPACT ON RESEARCH AND CREATIVE PRACTICE

The pandemic had a strong, and largely negative impact on participants' research and creative practice. The few participants who talked about creative practice related that it was slowed down or stopped. Mary said in an interview for example that "the pandemic has thrown so much of my work into hypothetical territory, like, creative work with no clear deadline, no clear idea of when it's going to be safe to do something." Many more participants commented on the pandemic's impact on their research work, and summed up that impact with succinct statements like "it has devastated it" (Survey #14), and "it has ground to a halt" (Survey # 19).

Multiple factors played into the devastation, slow down or stoppage of research, at the centre of which was the issue of time. The increased workload associated with online teaching, supporting students, and caregiving put research on the backburner, or out of the realm of possibility entirely. As one participant put it "I no longer have time to do research. Too busy preparing for courses, performing pastoral functions for students, and being stressed about the pandemic" (Survey #32). Another similarly reported "I am a lot less productive research-wise because online teaching requires a lot more time. Zoom fatigue is real" (Survey #26).

The mental, emotional, social, and physical toll of the pandemic also negatively affected research and creative practice, with multiple participants sharing that they had "no capacity to carry out research or writing" (Survey #35). Rachel shared in an interview for example "I have not been able to write during this pandemic. It's just the part of my brain that allows for any kind of focused, concentrated thought that is needed to do writing and analysis is just not there." Themes of stress, anxiety, and fatigue were again central to how participants talked about their experiences. One person reported that "I was more affected than expected by the stress of caring for an aging parent while the pandemic swept through care homes in Manitoba. So, the semester where I should have moved research forward went quickly" (Survey #8). Amanda, who lost a grandparent to COVID in a Manitoba care home, similarly said that "I did what I needed to do, but I wasn't really cognitively processing as much, as well as I typically am, so that all that intellectual work like writing a grant just wasn't really happening" (Amanda, interview). As a result, many participants reported that the pandemic had "completely undermined" their research.

The inability to meet in person and to travel to collect data has also had a major effect on research projects themselves. Qualitative researchers found that their projects had to be paused or revised entirely, taking on remote approaches to data collection, or focusing on literature and archival work that did not require being in person. One reported for example, “I have had to re-vision a major research project 2-3 times due to COVID. Communities and participants were not available due to the pandemic, and so the study had to be rethought. This was an inordinate amount of work” (Survey #3). Researchers who were able to move qualitative interviews online found that it affected the quality of the process and of the data. “Trying to do Zoom interviews at home office is not ideal (partner and dog interruptions, lack of [rapport] with interviewees)” (Survey #34). In some fields, such as nursing, research participation is down, causing concern about the integrity of important projects. As Tannis put it, “the buy-in and the participation is less, and so trying to get the numbers that I am looking for, or what I feel would be good numbers to have a full, robust survey or research study has been challenging” (Tannis, interview). While online options likewise began to offer opportunities to report on research as the pandemic continued, video conferencing exacerbated fatigue, stress, and pain for some participants.

Some survey participants found that their research workload expanded during the pandemic, as a result of not taking vacation and of moving data collection online. One respondent said for example “I actually stepped it up in April.... I also did more research than usual in summer term....so...I didn’t even realize that I was probably compensating for COVID by doing way more than usual” (Survey #9).

For many, however, and particularly for tenure-track professors, the way in which their research has suffered has created more stress and fear about the future. Anticipation of being evaluated down the road for work not done in this lost period creates added worry. Rachel brought home the vulnerability that gender-marginalized faculty feel in this situation.

The scholarly side has definitely suffered. And I’m scared to say this stuff, I’m scared that administration is going to hear women and women-identified scholars as not being productive during this and we’re, you know, we’re a liability somehow to the university, so it is scary to even come out and suggest or admit that I haven’t been as productive as I normally might be (Rachel, interview).

The prospect of the impact of the pandemic on research and creative work having career-threatening effects for many years to come underscores the urgency for the university to plan equity strategies to support gender-marginalized faculty in the long term.

IMPACT ON ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES

Participants who saw administrative duties as part of their work reported a stark increase in their administrative workload during the pandemic. Administrative tasks multiplied, people took on increased responsibilities as others went on sick leave, and administrative processes slowed down as they went online.

As one survey participant put it, “everything takes twice as long to do” (Survey #14); or, as Christine put it in an interview, “every task just seemed to be like climbing a mountain.” One faculty member reported that “contact with students is through the roof,” (Survey #34) and supporting students through administrative processes, particularly at a time of high student anxiety and stress, became a much more time-consuming and challenging task.

A participant in a non-teaching role described the challenge in detail: “A lot of my interactions with students involve getting forms filled out and sent between offices, and that has been a nightmare. I can’t walk down the hall with a student to get something updated or to ask a colleague a question. That aspect of the administration of my job has taken a hard hit” (Survey #20).

While some survey respondents found that some administrative work was made easier by meeting over Zoom, and by leadership that recognized the draining nature of online meetings, others reported that more emails, phone calls, and longer meetings meant a larger and more demanding administrative burden.

IMPACT ON SERVICE

The survey did not include a question about the impact of COVID-19 on service work, however several respondents mentioned it, and the research team chose to add a question to the individual interview guide. Participants who complete service as part of their role discussed how dramatically service work changed during the pandemic. The inability to meet in person required all committees to move to online distance platforms. A few participants reflected that this shift to online meetings was a welcome change as it allowed for additional options that were not available in in person gatherings. For instance, Amanda stated, “everyone is on Zoom, not just remote faculty, meetings are more equitable”. Another participant mentioned that the chat function on Zoom is useful in larger meetings such as General Faculty Council and union meetings.

The added stress of other responsibilities made service work impossible for some participants. For instance, Christine stated, “I did a lot more before the pandemic. I played an active role in [service] and then when the pandemic hit, it was one of the first things to get cut because there just wasn’t any space to be thinking about something extra” (Christine, interview). Service work was also associated with an increase in responsibility and workload during the pandemic. P03 commented that conducting meetings on Zoom takes longer, “I feel like it takes me longer now to do my service work than it did before.” Vicky echoed this sentiment, indicating, “the work on some committees has been increased as a result of the pandemic because we needed to meet more often to make sure we had everything done.” Rachel suggested, “I wish I could have dropped the service. That would have been great. It would have been really great to not have to be dealing with the service on top of everything else right now.”

While online committee meetings meant increased access and diversity of methods to share thoughts and ideas, the increased workload, and in fact the inability to do service work at all because of other aspects of overwork, were significant factors for the academic service of gender-marginalized faculty during the pandemic.

IMPACT ON WELL-BEING

The pandemic had a significant negative impact on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of gender-marginalized faculty. Study participants juggled multiple, ongoing, stressors that compounded each other throughout the pandemic, with a detrimental impact on their well-being. The most common stressors mentioned were public health restrictions, family illness, caregiving responsibilities, increased pressure, and fear associated with the loss of their jobs due to government funding cuts. Rachel touched in the following way on the thoughts of many of the other participants who were fearful of losing their jobs during the initial stages of the pandemic:

I think early on when there was so much mystery about the pandemic and how COVID was spread I was feeling really stressed, really worried about my family, really worried about my, my mom and my grandmother and others in our family, who are vulnerable medically. And it was, it was really scary, I think, back in the spring as well when this asshole of a Premier that we have was threatening university funding, was saying because the universities are online that we don't need the kind of funding, and it was put on universities to come up with ways to cut spending. That was extraordinarily stressful, worrying. 'Oh, am I going to lose my job?' or 'am I going to be forced to take unpaid leave?' or something like that. That was a very stressful time for me and for my family, worrying about that (Rachel, interview).

Multiple stressors affected participants' well-being holistically, with physical, emotional, and relational consequences. Numerous survey respondents mentioned the mental or emotional impact of COVID-19, including feeling exhausted, anxious, overwhelmed, and experiencing mental strain and compassion fatigue. To explain the compassion fatigue, one respondent wrote, "It's not just my own well-being but trying to support others' wellbeing. Key people in my life are not doing well" (Survey # 26). Others indicated compassion fatigue tied to the emotional work of caring for students. One wrote, "I have to imagine a bottomless well of patience and understanding for my students. While it is rewarding to be able to support them, and they have been appreciative of the extra work I have done, it takes a toll on me and adds to my workload" (Survey #5).

Others concentrated on the general emotional burden they were carrying. One said, for instance: “Some days I feel the morbs (as the Victorians would say). Other days ennue. Other days the general malaise of being unable to plan for the future. It’s been good days and bad days” (Survey #23). Interview participants also discussed the difficult emotional consequences of the pandemic, Tannis explained that “the mental and the emotional, kind of goes in waves,” and Mary shared that “I have a hard time focusing mentally, which is usually not that hard for me”.

Other emotional consequences included feeling angry, lonely and isolated. One respondent wrote,

Being at home so much and not interacting with anyone other than my partner can get very old too. I really miss just going to campus and interacting with people there. This feels very isolating and the community aspect is lost- for us and our students (Survey #29).

Amanda reiterated this feeling of isolation, stating, “it’s been particularly challenging living alone and working from home” (Amanda, interview). Whether living alone or with others, gender-marginalized faculty struggled with isolation.

Some participants also indicated that the pandemic had exacerbated pre-existing conditions of depression and anxiety. Two interview participants took stress leave at different periods during the pandemic in order to try and cope through the stressors and emotional toll. One interviewee told a very difficult story about how the added stressors caused depression and suicidal ideation. Although a few people indicated that they were adapting and that they were doing ok, the overwhelming majority of participants were struggling with the added pressures, conflicting demands and other emotional consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most reported physical impact of the pandemic was an overall physical malaise. Other consequences mentioned were weight gain, stiffness, and a lack of sleep. Some participants used physical exercise as a means of coping, whereas others described the negative impact of gyms closing. Tannis stated that she felt her physical health had in fact improved because of the addition of a dog to her family unit, which ensured that she was walking outdoors more regularly. Other participants described clenched jaws, loss of hair, and eye strain as physical manifestations of the stress of the pandemic.

Quite a few respondents discussed the importance of support from others during the COVID - 19 pandemic. Some found new professional supports in the form of counsellors or psychotherapists, while others expressed comfort knowing that if they needed professional support that they would be able to access it through the university's resources. Other respondents talked about the support they experienced from family and friends. Rachel commented for example,

I think my partner is very supportive. I think we're very supportive to one another. Our son is just a fantastic, smart, understanding kid who's also really compassionate, and we've just kind of pulled together in the ways that we could to look after ourselves and look after friends and family, where we can. Most of that is coming through emotional support and figuring out how to do things differently, whether it's outdoor gatherings, whether it's a Zoom meetings (Rachel, interview).

Vicky also mentioned, "I'm very lucky. I have a very excellent partner who it's been easy to share, you know, emotional upsets or just days when I'm frustrated" (Vicky, interview). Other gender-marginalized faculty unfortunately did not find support in friends, family, or professionals. Instead, the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing relational issues they had within their lives. One participant wrote, "I have a partner who is emotionally abusive at times and the pandemic meant that I was stuck working at home in an environment with him. This had a significant impact on my well-being" (Survey #3).

Lastly, some participants expressed gratitude as an aspect of their well-being, for example for surviving the pandemic when others have not. One participant wrote, "I am very blessed to have been spared the trauma of losing relatives and friends to COVID-19. I desperately want us all to get the vaccine so that we can avoid the horror of more illness and death" (Survey #9).

The impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of faculty that identify as marginalized by gender is hard to ignore. Although some faculty expressed coping well and thriving within the spheres of emotional, physical, and relational well-being, these were outliers. The majority experienced negative consequences that greatly influenced their well-being.

IMPACT ON VACATION AND TIME OFF

The ability of gender-marginalized faculty and staff to take appropriate days off and vacation time was overall negatively impacted during the pandemic. Central factors included converting classes to an online format, shifting courses earlier to the summer semester, the increased demands of administrative work and research, the inability to create boundaries between work and time off when working at home, increased childcare responsibilities, and health crises or personal events requiring immediate attention. As a result, one survey respondent reported for example,

[i]n the past six months [June to December, 2020] I have had a total of seven days where I did not do school-related work. Otherwise, I have worked seven days per week. On weekdays I work from eight to twelve hours per day and on weekends I work from two to six hours per day (Survey #5).

Interview participant P03 likewise took one weekend off between November 2020 and April 2021, reporting that “...the actual demands of my job are [now] much greater...[and] in order to do it well, it just trickles into the weekends” (P03, interview).

Preparing for online learning was the most significant factor that prevented faculty from taking time off. As is reflected in our findings about teaching, faculty were forced to begin redesigning courses in terms of their goals, outcomes, methods, delivery, and evaluation, all within, what was for many, the uncharted territory of teaching online. One department offered courses in the summer semester to provide students with more flexibility in the Fall and Winter semesters to complete their coursework. Amanda taught these summer courses, which left her with no opportunity for significant time off. At least one respondent to the survey, which was open in December 2020, wished that the university had delayed the return date for the Winter 2021 semester, to allow faculty some reprieve.

Some participants had difficulty separating boundaries between work and time off while working at home. One respondent wrote, “even when off, I was providing support to students and co-workers” (Survey #12) and another reported that “[s]ince the pandemic began, I am working at all odd hours. I have not taken a weekend off. After all my office is my home and work is available anytime” (Survey #10). The feeling that others would expect her to be “on” also affected the vacation time that Tannis was able to take; being off work but at home translated into feeling that she should always be available.

For many, working from home was accompanied by feelings of guilt and the desire to make sure their contributions and their value as an employee were “seen.” These concerns fueled a reluctance to take vacation, and some employees, particularly in non-teaching positions, felt guilty about their desire to take vacation time. Christine said that “...it just seemed like nobody else was [taking vacation]” and “...maybe it would have helped to be encouraged to take time off.” Despite the notion of “being in the pandemic together,” which was often implied and circulated, everyone’s experiences were not the same or equal. Christine’s family had experienced multiple stressors and events that were not visible to colleagues working from home, including health emergencies, property damage from extreme weather, and supporting friends and family in need, forcing her to take a leave from BU, as Julie also reported doing. As Christine described: “...whether you’re in a raft in an ocean or on a pontoon boat in a calm lake are two very different things” (Christine, interview).

Even when she lost a family member during the pandemic, Vicky found herself unable to take time off. Her mother passed away, and the following morning she was back online attending meetings.

[The next] morning I was back on Zoom, having a Zoom meeting. So... there was no time to really talk about taking time to grieve or anything like that it was just boom. Carry on. Gotta Zoom, gotta teach my courses, gotta prep for courses to be online, what were the courses, it was just go. So, no, there's been absolutely no vacation (Vicky, interview).

Yet some participants reported that their ability to take vacation was unaffected by the pandemic. Mary was able to take time off and “check out” safely within the pandemic restrictions, while others were able to take some time off during the summer, with the longest break reported at two weeks. Others found ways to squeeze in short breaks including, “some long weekend breaks in the summer,” (Survey #27), “single day trips” (Survey #15), “a day or two here and there” (Survey #11). For those participants for whom travel was specifically an opportunity to recharge and visit family and friends, the impossibility of travel had a negative impact on energy levels, mental health, and sense of well-being.

SUPPORT FROM BU

When asked how BU supported them during the pandemic, the responses of gender-marginalized faculty ranged from reporting many positive supports to very little or no support. Participants recognized support from the institution, from employee resources and services, and from colleagues, as well as technical support and support for their health and well-being. When participants reported that they had received no support, they generally did not elaborate, though a few specified that BU had failed to include faculty members in decision making about teaching, and to advocate for them to the provincial government.

Institutional support was recognized in email communications about teaching online for the Fall 2020 semester and in the professional development opportunities offered by the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT). Respondents overwhelmingly recognized positive support from IT services, from librarians, and from the workshops and programs offered by the CTLT. Individuals from all three areas were described as “in many instances [having] gone above and beyond their mission and mandate” (P03, interview) to support faculty in transitioning to online teaching and learning. Christine also appreciated institutional recognition about how difficult the transition to working from home had been citing support from SWRC, emails from the president, and the additional day off in the summer. These simple gestures had a significant impact for those who were struggling. However, some participants wondered about the efficacy of these gestures if the sense of recognition did not trickle down to some deans and directors.

Participants named specific people who had provided crucial support during the pandemic. Several participants described having supportive leaders, including deans and supervisors who employed clear and respectful communication, engaged in collaborative discussions, and fostered good relationships with their staff, faculty, and students. Individual colleagues commiserated and shared teaching strategies, which had a significant impact. Participant P03 identified support from “colleagues who had the will to support each other” with “a desire to help and [show] compassion... and collegiality” (P03, interview). Others found their chair or department particularly supportive. Curt Shoultz, Director of the CTLT, was singled out several times for his individual support with respondents saying “There should be more than one of him” (Survey, #23), and “[h]e has talked me off the edge on a number of times when teaching and technology has gotten the better of me” (Survey, #33). After speaking with Curt at the beginning of the fall term, one respondent reported that “I felt less alone in the process of figuring out how to teach online” (Survey #18).

Good leadership appeared to be central to whether gender-marginalized faculty felt supported at BU. Midway through the pandemic, Amanda experienced a change in leadership for two positions, dean and chair. Although she reported that the changes happened at a stressful time, they turned out to be extremely positive because the new dean worked collaboratively with staff and students and the new chair was “someone that we can rely on and someone that we trust” (Amanda, interview). Julie’s director returned partway through the pandemic, which she described as “a blessing” (Julie, interview) further emphasizing how crucial individual relationships are to the success of gender-marginalized faculty and staff.

Many participants needed equipment at home to successfully perform their jobs, and expressed gratitude for the equipment and licenses they received. Christine was thankful, for example, that she was provided with what she needed and was able to take office supplies home, but also recognized that others were not afforded these same supports.

Respondents also recognized safety protocols on campus as well as sick benefits and access to employee and family assistance provided by Homewood Health, as supporting their safety, well-being, and mental health.

Fifteen survey respondents indicated that they had had insufficient support or no support from BU, however. Some felt that the university had failed to advocate for them against “the hostile attitude the provincial government has toward higher education,” and that though “the provincial government didn’t follow through on the cutbacks to funding, [that] certainly wasn’t because our president was advocating in any public way to maintain our institution” (Survey #20).

Others reported a lack of communication and information, particularly regarding the committees that were planning the pandemic response. Some respondents would have preferred consultation about going online, which courses would be taught, and the scheduling, noting that “[t]here was very little transparency in the process leading up to being online. I’m not for in person teaching...but I did expect to work with the employer to transition in ways that empowered us as workers” (Survey #24). Another reported feeling frustrated by the “business as usual” message in the transition to online teaching:

Nothing was normal in my world, and I had childcare responsibilities that I was trying to juggle as well as possible with my partner. I think, in retrospect, that there should have been options to scale down/shift/‘I don’t know what but let’s think of something’ options to reduce our teaching load especially for the Fall term (Survey #27).

The respondent argued that having options “would have significantly reduced the pressure for teaching and the balancing act of doing everything” (Survey #27). Conversely, other respondents expressed gratitude for the decision to go online “as much as possible with a minimal amount of debate around the issue. This helped to ensure stability for instructors and students” (Survey #35).

An overall feeling of being unsupported was reflected by interview participants like Vicky, who felt that the pandemic had heightened a pre-existing lack of support for her at BU. Amanda reported that the level of support from colleagues was good early in the pandemic but dwindled as time went on, while others did not feel safe participating in the opportunities offered in their faculties. One survey respondent said for example “I’m not going to show up to an open meeting and admit what I am having a hard time with, that is way too risky” (Survey #18).

Experiences of gender-marginalized faculty regarding support from BU was mixed and inconsistent, underscoring the need for review of the pandemic response and planning for how the university might do better in the future.

PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO BU

Study participants were asked what kind of support they wanted and needed from Brandon University during the pandemic. This resulted in recommendations as to how BU could better support gender-marginalized faculty, including in organizational practices, teaching, mental health, the structure of work hours, and the creation of flexible benefit funds.

Health benefits that are flexible and easy to access

Participants called for improved access to benefits that support their well-being and the well-being of their family members. They recommended creating a fund that functions similarly to a professional development allowance, enabling faculty to access the services and equipment they need depending on their specific circumstances. This recommendation was tied to participants' reports that some of the benefits available to them are inadequate or not exactly what they need. One survey respondent noted for example "they should be making it easier to use insurance benefits for things we actually need and can use! obviously I don't want massages right now. I desperately need some coaching for ADHD about how to work from home" (Survey #14). Participants also noted that the \$350 funding allocation for psychology and mental health therapy is woefully insufficient, as it may not even cover two sessions with a professional. Faculty members are the experts on what they need to navigate the pandemic. Some suggested that they would benefit most from a treadmill at home or noise cancelling headphones; access to flexible funds would enable such supports. Gender-marginalized faculty also need increased support to access existing benefits, including assistance with paperwork to speed processes along.

Increased mental health support

Participants also recommended that supports for faculty members' mental health be prioritized and increased, including more knowledge and communication at all levels of leadership about mental health and the differential impact of the pandemic, as well as improved practical supports. Participants noted for example that they hear a commitment to mental health on the part of BU's President, but that "it doesn't trickle down to the next layers" and "the next levels need to be trained in their comfort level around that, too" (Christine, interview).

Participants often wished for recognition of the mental health strain and burden, including “some acknowledgment that we are living through stressful times. Although the work carries on, I feel like I can see the strain on everyone” (Survey #7). Participants recommended that BU leadership recognize the ongoing, differential effects; Christine noted in an interview for example that some people have “come out on top and are loving life right now and living their best lives with their introvert worlds working from home. And maybe their mom lives next door to them or whatever, and other people are still freaking struggling this far away.”

Participants also recommended practical, collegial mental health supports, including one-on-one check-ins and structuring support for fellow colleagues. One respondent said for example, “It doesn't have to be much, but an email with my name on it asking how I am doing and what I need would go a long way” (Survey #17). As the survey was open in December 2020, several respondents also suggested that BU had missed an opportunity to ease the strain on faculty by extending the break by even a few days. Mental health counselling options also need to be expanded based on participants' experiences; one person reported that they pay out of pocket for counselling, because the one counsellor provided by current health benefits was not a good fit for them. This underscores again the need for flexibility in benefits, so that faculty members can find the help they need.

Tailored and explicit support for tenure-track faculty

Participants recommended multiple strategies to support tenure-track faculty during and after the pandemic, as they are particularly vulnerable to long-term impacts from disruption of their research programs. In particular, participants called for explicit recognition of the impacts of the “slowdown in research productivity” (Survey #1), or what another respondent called the “lost year” (Survey #17), on future tenure and promotion applications (see Impact on Research and Creative Practice above). Participants recommend that BU explicitly acknowledge “difficulties maintaining research/service responsibilities and make a statement that they will make corresponding accommodations for tenure/promotion down the road” (Survey #27). Further, participants recommended a system of ongoing support for tenure-track faculty, noting that adequate support within department and faculty, as well as from staff, is critical to fostering growth in research. Participants suggested that a mentorship or buddy system would be helpful, providing someone who would check in regularly to discuss research challenges, share experience and insight, and answer questions.

Organizational support for teaching and research capacity

Participants recommended a range of organizational and structural resources that would support their work and well-being in the future, both in case of emergencies and in general. Faculty noted that increased support for students, in the form of technical support, for example, would ease some of the burden carried by instructors. Some would like to learn more about online teaching strategies and resources and get a better sense of the professional development available to them. Some faculty members also recommended that BU provide the personal protective equipment to safely teach in close proximity to students.

Participants would like to see the same flexibility extended to students during the pandemic also extended to them. Some recommended creating options for course releases or reduced teaching loads for gender-marginalized faculty, particularly for parents. A survey respondent stated that “regardless of the pandemic, I believe BU should investigate increasing availability of childcare support. Meeting times should be set being mindful of childcare and other care responsibilities” (Survey #27).

Participants suggested that the overwhelming workload outlined in this report could be addressed by practical measures like hiring student assistance and the reduction of service expectations in a time of crisis. For some, remuneration for overload and overwork would also make a substantial difference. As one survey respondent simply put it, “pay us for overtime because we’re all working it” (Survey #33).

For some faculty, vacancies in their department need to be filled, to “make all our jobs more equally balanced” (Vicky, interview). In Health Studies in particular participants reported chronic under-staffing that needs to be urgently addressed:

There are many professors that are trying to pick up the slack in health studies as we are so short staffed and trying to hire nurses during a pandemic that some professors are working over 18CH. There is contention as they do not get overload pay until 18CH, this should change in the next collective agreement. Many professors are working for free, during a pandemic, trying to meet the needs of the students so that we can graduate nurses. There should not be a grey area for overload for professors (Survey #4).

These kinds of faculty-specific issues shaped the experiences of gender-marginalized faculty during the pandemic, and alleviating them should be a priority.

Flexible hours for non-teaching BUFA members

Participants who are expected to work Monday – Friday, 9 – 5 type work weeks recommended that more space be created to “flex” their hours. While professors tend to have flexibility in their working and office hours, non-teaching BUFA members are often expected to start and finish their workdays at specific times. As one participant put it “Your lunch is from 12 to 1, and then you will leave at 4:30. And, like, going off of that schedule is like a no-no, [like] you cannot differ from that” (Julie, interview). Yet working hours outside of the dominant workday can benefit both faculty members and students, who themselves often juggle work and childcare. The opportunity to flex hours would accommodate a diversity of needs and responsibilities.

Prompt and clear official communications

Some of the stress experienced by gender-marginalized faculty during the pandemic could have been reduced by earlier and clearer communication from BU about important decisions and processes. Not knowing whether they would be teaching online or in-person created “a great deal of stress for a lot of folks who need to have a sense of what their year’s going to look like” (Rachel, interview). As a result, participants recommended that BU work on its communication processes in anticipation of future emergency situations. A survey respondent stated for example:

I feel like decision-making and communication was a bit late and/or disorganized. I think working on process would be helpful in the long run. One example of this was the tenure and promotion process. There was no need for the added stress of not knowing how to submit dossiers etc. for this process. The pandemic started in March, and yet there was no communication about this process until just before the deadline. BU as an organization should do a post-mortem on what processes were not up to par during this time (Survey #3).

This recommendation of a post-pandemic review was shared by multiple participants, and this report contributes to such a review.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had extensive and serious impacts on the lives and work of gender-marginalized faculty. This pandemic is ongoing, its impacts continue and linger, and will affect the professional and financial futures of faculty members. This report suggests that the impacts require urgent attention. We might anticipate future emergencies, following global public health expertise, and the experiences and conditions faced by research participants can be acknowledged and addressed at any time, through equity-focused practices and supports at all levels of the university. The effects of the pandemic must be understood for their short- and long-term significance, to gender-marginalized faculty, their families and communities, and the university that depends upon them.

This report has underscored that the various dimensions of faculty members' work and lives are deeply intertwined, and that all dimensions have been more challenging, time-consuming, and stressful during the pandemic. While experiences have varied by position, career stage, and life circumstances, our research demonstrates that the pandemic has had a negative impact across teaching, research, and creative practice, caregiving responsibilities, administrative duties and service, vacation and time off, and mental, emotional, and physical well-being. The impacts of the pandemic must be understood holistically, and so must action to support gender-marginalized faculty and thus to strengthen Brandon University.

This report has demonstrated that there are actions that can be taken at individual, department, faculty, and institutional levels, that would provide practical assistance as well as much-needed acknowledgement of the burden that faculty members have carried and continue to carry. With the rich qualitative discussion of their experiences, and thoughtful reflections on what kinds of support they need, the findings of this study offer a unique opportunity for BU and for BUFA to reflect and to plan to effectively support gender-marginalized faculty now and in the future.