

One-time Offset in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Effective for merit actions with effective dates of July 1, 2021 through July 1, 2026

Introduction and Purpose

Because of the effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic on faculty members' research, particularly their productivity, some faculty have expressed concern about the consequences for their next merit review. Although longstanding campus practice is to address temporary dips in productivity by extending people's time for reviews (e.g., allowing a tenure-clock stoppage or a year's delay in a merit review), the widespread and unprecedented nature of this pandemic warrants a different response. This is especially so because the productivity effects are likely to have disparate impacts across the faculty. Consequently, as a one-time measure, when there is clear evidence of significant loss of productivity due to COVID-19, such that an individual cannot earn a full-step advance,¹ a half-step offset will be provided so that the individual receives a full-step advance or the equivalent thereof.

Terminology

Effective date: the date on which a merit action goes into effect.

Review period: this is the period being reviewed. For faculty whose last review was their appointment, it is the period since appointment through the June 30th of the year prior to the year of the effective date of the merit action. So, as an example, for a faculty member hired July 1, 2019 with a merit review effective July 1, 2022, the review period would be July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021. For faculty whose last review was a merit review (including promotion reviews), it is the period commencing the July 1st of the year prior to the effective date of their last merit review and ending the June 30th of the year prior to the year of the effective date of the merit action. So, as an example, for a faculty member whose last merit review was effective July 1, 2020 and for whom the effective date of the subsequent merit is July 1, 2023, the review period would be July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022.

Threshold: a threshold is a promotion in rank (Assistant to Associate Professor or Associate Professor to Professor); advancement to or beyond Professor Step VI (the Step-VI threshold); or advancement to Professor Above Scale.

Equivalent of a full-step: In some instances, a faculty member receives the equivalent of a step advance rather than an actual step advance. This occurs if the faculty member is not yet able to cross a threshold. Relevant situations are:

- The faculty member is at Associate Professor or (full) Professor Step V and is not yet ready to gain promotion or cross the Step-VI threshold; for such an individual, the equivalent of a full-step advance is advancement to Step V.9.
- The faculty member is at Associate Professor or (full) Professor Step V.5 and is not yet ready to gain promotion or cross the Step-VI threshold; for such an

¹ For the purposes of this policy, "step" should be understood to include Above Scale increments.

individual, the equivalent of a full-step advance is advancement to Step V.9 plus an increase in the individual's off-scale increment equal to half a step.

- The faculty member is at Associate Professor or (full) Professor Step V.9 and is not yet ready to gain promotion or cross the Step-VI threshold; for such an individual, the equivalent of a full-step advance is an increase in the individual's off-scale increment equal to a step (note such an advance is ordinarily available only once at each Step V.9—see https://bmap.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/excess_of_merit.pdf).

Out of headroom: A faculty member is considered to be out of headroom if (i) the faculty member is at Step V.9, at either the Associate or full Professor rank, and, at that step, has previously received the equivalent of a step in the form of an increase to their off-scale increment; or (ii) is at Professor Step IX and not ready to advance to Above Scale status.

The Policy

Faculty members for whom

1. the review period of their next merit review (including mandatory five-year reviews) includes one or both years in the period July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021;
2. have records of teaching and service for that review that are judged to be good or better (very good or better if Above Scale);
3. whose research record at their *prior* review was judged to be consistent with a step or more advance;
4. whose research record at the current review is judged not to meet expectations for a full-step advance;
5. who attest in a self-statement that their research was significantly negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; and
6. who are not out of headroom,

will nonetheless receive a full-step advance or the equivalent thereof.

This offset cannot, however, carry someone across a threshold; for example, if, but for the offset, the record would warrant an advance from Professor Step V to Professor Step V.5, the offset cannot take the individual to Professor Step VI (although it can take the individual to Professor Step V.9).

This offset cannot be used to justify a greater-than-normal advance (*i.e.*, a 1.5 or two-step advance). Hence, even if the teaching or service or both records are deemed outstanding, if the research record, but for the offset, fails to meet normal expectations, then the faculty member in question can receive only one step or the equivalent thereof.

This policy does not (nor is it intended to) lower standards for what is considered excellence in research—its purpose is solely to aid those who fail to meet those standards because of the consequences of COVID-19. Thus, this policy cannot be used to argue that a research record that meets Berkeley's already high

expectations is now extraordinary and so deserving of a greater-than-normal merit advance.

This policy does not change the merit review process itself: at all levels, reviewers are expected to assess the record fully, including the research record. As is true in all merit reviews, faculty are invited to offer context concerning their record on all its dimensions. Chairs and Deans are likewise expected to assess and provide context for all the dimensions of a candidate's record.

This policy expires after July 1, 2026; that is, it expires after the effective date of the last five-year review that could encompass July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 in the review period.

Policy with regard to faculty whose last personnel action was appointment: In light of Condition #3 above, an obvious question is how faculty who have had no prior review at Berkeley will be treated. Given that the standards for a first merit after appointment for Assistant Professors are already fairly minimal, it is unlikely that any newly hired Assistant Professors will need the offset. Nonetheless, it should be understood that all newly hired Assistant Professors will receive at least a one-step advance. For faculty who were hired with tenure, the individuals, their chairs, and/or deans should provide evidence that a research record that fails to meet expectations is the result of COVID-19.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- Q.** Faculty member A has a review in fall 2020 with a July 1, 2021 effective date. Because the review period encompasses July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, A is eligible for this offset this fall. Since A's *subsequent* review would include July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 as part of the review period, would A again be eligible for this offset?
- A.** No. This is a one-time offset. No one can get it twice.
- Q.** Faculty member B is a Professor Step IX and has been at step four years. B contends that, but for COVID-19, they would have had a research record that would have warranted a full-increment advance to Professor Above Scale. Can B rely on the offset to carry them across the Above Scale threshold?
- A.** No. As noted above, the offset cannot be used to cross a threshold. The best course of action is for B to delay their review for a year.
- Q.** To benefit from the offset do faculty need to explain how the consequences of COVID-19 affected their research?
- A.** For faculty whose last review was a merit or promotion at Berkeley and who meet the eligibility criteria for this policy, it should be sufficient for them simply to attest that their ability to do research was significantly reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, it would certainly be advisable, as is

always true, for faculty to explain circumstances affecting their record in their self-evaluations and for chairs and deans, when they know, to provide relevant context. For faculty whose last review was appointment with tenure, they should offer sufficient information that it is clear that their research was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please keep in mind that providing context does not require revealing private personal information (e.g., it is sufficient to say that childcare responsibilities limited productivity, not that one is caring for a child with special needs; or it is sufficient to say that one was unable to come to one's laboratory, not that one is immunocompromised).

- Q.** To be eligible for the offset, one must have a record of teaching that is judged good or better (or very good or better at Above Scale). What if the move to remote teaching went very poorly for an individual? Is that individual still eligible for the offset?
- A.** Probably. Keep in mind that assessments of teaching will take context into account. As long as the reasons for problems with the move to remote teaching do not reflect lack of effort or similar behaviors that would also be deemed problematic with in-person teaching, the candidate is not likely to be “dinged” for issues around teaching.
- Q.** Faculty member C is ineligible because, at C's last review, C's research record was found not to support a normal merit advance. Can C still make a case that, but for COVID-19, their research record would have warranted a full-step advance this time?
- A.** Yes. Faculty are always permitted to provide context about any aspect of their record. In situations such as this, reviewers will assess the evidence provided by the faculty member and will seek to arrive at appropriate recommendations and decisions.