Strategies for Equitable Faculty Evaluation

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted higher education and the work of faculty in many ways, with serious repercussions for diversity, equity, and inclusion. This brief summarizes studies that consider the impact of the pandemic on different groups of faculty members; describes interventions institutions have used to mitigate and document the impact of the pandemic on faculty equity; and finally identifies key equity issues that may emerge in faculty evaluation and provides strategies for how evaluation committees can put in place "equity checks" (O'Meara, 2020; Posselt et al., 2020) to enhance fairness.

Impact of COVID-19 on Faculty

Though all faculty members have likely been influenced by the pandemic in some way, women faculty members, who are more likely to be in caregiver roles, and Black, Brown, and Indigenous faculty members, communities that have been most impacted by the pandemic, have experienced disproportionate disruptions to their scholarly productivity. The research in this area is substantial (and growing) and shows:

- The pandemic has negatively impacted women faculty members' scholarly output, as indicated by analysis of publications (Cui et al., 2020; Squazzoni et al., 2020) and self-reports (Krukowski et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020). Increased childcare responsibilities in the wake of school and daycare closures and an increase in domestic responsibilities along gender lines are the primary reason women faculty members' productivity has been undercut (Cardel et al., 2020).
- Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities have been more dramatically impacted by the pandemic (Evans, 2020; Garcia et al, 2020). As such, faculty from these groups may encounter greater or changing caregiver demands. Furthermore, in the wake of the protest for racial justice, many faculty members of color have experienced intensified stress and been called upon to participate in even more diversity, equity, and inclusion service activities, thereby increasing their workloads (Domingo et al., 2020; Hanasono et al., 2018)
- Pandemic-related barriers vary by discipline/field, with faculty members in STEM fields reporting physical barriers to accessing their labs, and faculty in the humanities encountering barriers to physical materials and performance sites (Myers et al., 2020; Settles & Linderman, 2020; Wachorn et al., 2020).

In response, many higher education leaders have called for new ways to keep equity in mind as units move forward with faculty evaluation activities (merit reviews, annual reviews, promotion and tenure, etc.). Some of these activities include:

- COVID Tenure Delay (Clark et al., 2020; Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Malisch et al., 2020;)
- COVID Impact statements (Clark et al., 2020, Misra, 2020)
- Documenting the Impact of COVID (Misra, 2020; University of Maryland ADVANCE)
- Modification of evaluative criteria that recognize pandemic-related slowdowns/impact (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Settles & Linderman, 2020)
- Training for evaluation committees on equitable evaluation (UMass ADVANCE; Georgia Tech)
- Alternative forms of teaching evaluations (e.g., written reflections, before and after syllabi, peer observations) (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020).
- Workload modifications (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; O'Meara et al., 2021; Settles & Linderman, 2020)

Table 1 outlines evidence-based strategies institutions can use to embed equity within the faculty evaluation process. Importantly, while some of these strategies have become more prevalent within the context of the pandemic, the strategies discussed can foster fairer evaluation regardless of the context.

Table 1. *Key Equity Issues and Strategies for Improving Faculty Evaluations*

Key Equity Issue	Summary of the Research	Evidence-Based Strategies for Increasing Equity	Read More
Implicit Bias	(1) Across domains of the academic workplace (e.g., hiring, promotion and tenure, evaluation of research), gender and racial bias shapes the ways faculty members are evaluated, with a preference for white and men candidates over Black, Brown, and Indigenous faculty members and women faculty members. Often these biases will intersect with larger biases against caregivers, which can make faculty (and especially women faculty) hesitant to make visible their caregiving roles. (2) Traditional faculty evaluation processes and procedures tend to more harshly scrutinize interdisciplinary and community-engaged scholarship and scholarship that focuses on marginalized populations.	(1) Promote awareness of implicit bias in evaluation through study of the literature and implicit bias training.[1] (2) Use data to assess patterns in prior evaluative contexts (e.g., past hiring trends, past P&T trends). (3) Make everyone on the committee responsible for an inclusive process by identify concrete steps or "rules for engagement" that will be used to hold one another accountable for mitigating bias (e.g., collegial questioning of assumptions).	Barringer et al., 2020; Carnes et al., 2012; Center for Work-Life Law, 2016; Devine et al., 2017; Drago et al., 2006; Eaton et al., 2019; Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2017; Marchant et al., 2007; Madera et al., 2018; O'Meara et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2015; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005; University of Michigan, 2018; Williams & Mikaylo, 2019

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[1] See examples from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Georgia Tech University.

Clarity	(1) Guidelines for evaluation are often ambiguous. Faculty members are not aware of the criteria and/or benchmarks they are expected to meet within specific evaluative contexts (e.g., tenure, promotion, annual review, merit pay). (2) Senior department members and/or mentors may give early-career faculty members differing or unclear feedback on expectations (e.g., "you need 12 publications" versus "you need a handful").	(1) Establish concrete guidelines and rubrics for evaluation.[2] (2) Share guidelines and rubrics with faculty members being evaluated and their mentors. (3) Use guidelines to structure mentoring meetings and assess progress.	Banerjee & Pawley, 2013; Beddoes et al., 2014; Devine et al., 2017; Fox, 2015; Heilman, 2001; Lisnic et al., 2019; O'Meara et al., 2021
Reliability of Evaluation	(1) Evaluations are often conducted haphazardly, without guidelines or rubrics to focus evaluators on specific qualifications or criterion upon which to base evaluation. (2) During committee-based evaluation, faculty evaluators often bring their individual perspectives on what each criterion means and the kinds of evidence that should be considered when evaluating each criterion (e.g., have different views and use difference evidence to evaluate "impact"). (3) So-called "objective" criteria (e.g., publication count) can reflect gendered and racialized patterns of bias and cumulative disadvantage.	(1) Create rubrics and decision-support tools; Embed space for qualitative justification for quantitative scores.[3] (2) Prior to evaluation, discuss and review each criterion; Establish consensus on what each criterion means and what evidence will be used to evaluate each criterion (e.g., citation count, journal impact factor, media mentions, teaching evaluations, observations, other artifacts). (3) Incorporate holistic criterion that might not be captured in purely quantitative evidence (e.g., impact of research on the field or community; use of innovative methods). [4]	Bohnet, 2016; Isaac et al., 2009; Ginther et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2020; Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Liera & Ching, 2019; Marchant et al., 2007; O'Meara et al., 2020; Posselt et al., 2020; White-Lewis, 2020; White-Lewis et al., 2020

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[2] See examples from The University of Washington, Kent State University, Florida Atlantic University, Missouri State University
[3] See example of qualitative responses on a hiring rubric from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (p. 72-73).
[4] See example from the University of South Florida.

| Context | (1) Traditional evaluation guidelines often do not reward or incentivize teaching and service, particularly the critical diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work of women of color, rendering work in this area invisible.
(2) The pandemic has differentially impacted the productivity of faculty members based on identity (e.g., race, gender), status (e.g., caregiver), employment type (PTK, TT), and type of scholarship (e.g., historical, empirical, theoretical). These impacts may not be clear based upon traditional evaluation evidence (e.g., CVs, faculty activity reporting) | (1) Embed DEI-related criteria into rubrics and evaluation guidelines[5].
(2) Provide the opportunity for faculty to submit with their evaluation packets a COVID Impact statement or DEI statement.[6]
(3) Provide strategic mentoring to faculty about how to document the impacts of COVID on their teaching, service, and scholarship. | Antonio 2002; Croom, 2017; Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Griffin et al., 2011, 2013; Misra, 2020; Misra et al., 2011; O'Meara et al., 2021 |

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[5] See example from the University of Michigan.
[6] See example from NC State University, University of Texas Austin, or Michigan State University.

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