Equity-Minded Reform of Faculty Evaluation
A Call to Action

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EQUITY-MINDED REFORM OF FACULTY EVALUATION: A CALL TO ACTION

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Introduction

Higher education stands at the edge of possibility. It is a time of "both . . . and." Racial injustice and structural inequality permeate every part of our society—many higher education institutions are more diverse than they have ever been and yet they are not fully inclusive. And, because of higher education's compelling interest in diversity and demonstrated capacity to address it, we could lead the nation in the remaking of organizations as antiracist. Our climate is in peril. And, we can form the next generation of scientists, teachers, and citizens who will save our world. The Great Resignation has permanently changed the economy. And, research can inform how we retool employees, businesses, and government for better careers and workplaces. We are facing a crisis in our democracy—misinformation threatens civic participation. And, we could contribute meaningfully to civic education and help citizens be better consumers of information. The public and prospective students are questioning the value of higher education, and we have the opportunity to show the impact of our work in new ways. In sum, higher education institutions live at this edge of possibility, and there is much higher education *could do*.

It may seem curious that we see a connection between these challenges and opportunities and academic reward systems. However, academic reward systems are critical enablers of institutional missions. They are how we choose to live and work together, representing our values, aspirations, goals, and legitimacy (O'Meara 2011a, 2015b). Just as no college or university can achieve its greatest aspirations without funding, leadership, and shared governance, academic reward systems can hold institutions back *or* propel them forward.

How can a college or university recruit publicly engaged scholars and those innovating in the learning sciences, and not have policies and practices that uplift, reward, and promote these individuals and their distinct contributions? How can higher education institutions support mission-driven work around diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus and in their community, if the only measure of impact that will matter in faculty evaluation are author citations from peer-reviewed journal articles, rather than faculty contributions to that same community work? Why would higher education institutions expect to

be able to attract and retain talented faculty if the criteria for advancement are ambiguous and do not account for differences in career stages, talents, and work-life contexts? Why would Black, Latinx, and Indigenous scholars stay at an institution that continually asks them to serve as mentors to historically minoritized students, and to serve on diversity, equity, and inclusion task forces and search committees, but considers that work irrelevant in faculty reward systems? Without equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation policies and practices, higher education is limited in the promises it can make and keep.

We realize that there are important debates underway about the costs and benefits of tenure systems and the lack of job security within professional track faculty appointments. These debates are salient and important, but not the purpose of our work.

Our purpose is to provide evidence and rationale for why equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation policies and practices is urgently needed. We offer recommendations and examples as scholars who have studied equity, faculty careers, and academic reward systems, and as consultants who have worked with campuses to revise their faculty evaluation policies to become more equity minded.

Our contribution to this conversation includes three resources for equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation policies and practices:

1. This report, which outlines key principles for equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation policies
2. A second, forthcoming report, outlining specific areas in faculty evaluation policies well-suited for reform
3. An audit tool to assist with reform efforts

As two cisgender, White women we have not experienced the biases, discrimination, and harm encountered by faculty of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQ, and other historically minoritized identities in faculty evaluation systems. However, our research and engagement with colleagues of these identities very much informed our commitments to be allies of equity-minded reform in faculty evaluation systems. As such, our research and practice aims to name inequities in predominantly White spaces, including in faculty appointment, retention, workload, and reward systems.

In the next section, we explain why it is so important to engage in equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation now.

Why Is Equity-Minded Faculty Evaluation Reform Important Now?

Higher education institutions should consider conducting an equity-minded audit of their faculty evaluation policies and practices for three compelling reasons.

1. Diversity, equity, and inclusion

There is extensive evidence that faculty members who are women and from historically minoritized groups are not recruited, promoted, and advanced at the same rates as their White and men faculty counterparts. This reality has been true for a long time, despite an increase in the diversity of undergraduate students and PhD recipients. Take, for example, the following statistics:

- Although the share of undergraduate students of color grew between 1996 and 2016 from 29.6 to 45.2 percent, and the share of graduate students from 20.8 to 32 percent, people of color held only 21.1 percent of full-time faculty positions, and faculty of color were less likely than White faculty to hold full professorships (Espinosa et al. 2019, xvi).
- Women make up the majority of non-tenure-track lecturers and instructors across institutions, but only 44 percent of tenure-track faculty and 36 percent of full professors (AAUP 2018; AAUW, n.d.).
- An analysis of data from 1993 to 2010 in the *Survey of Doctorate Recipients* showed that Black assistant professors and women professors with children under six were less likely to have achieved tenure than their peers (Connolly, Lee, and Savoy 2015).

Overall, the latest statistics across different fields and most institutional types show that women and historically minoritized faculty are underrepresented at career entry and make slower progress through the ranks of higher education (Arellano et al. 2018; Blue, Traxler, and Cid 2018; Durodoye et al. 2020; Ivie, Anderson, and White 2014; Leslie et al. 2015; Ong et al. 2011; Trower 2002; Turner, González, and Wood 2008; Valian 1999). Black, Latinx, and Indigenous faculty are historically minoritized, especially at predominantly White higher education institutions.

Cheryan and Markus (2020) observe that we might frame inequity in evaluation processes as issues of "differential treatment" (e.g., John and Jamal have the same credentials but are treated differently) and issues of "default characteristics" embedded in the process (e.g., evaluation criteria framed as neutral actually advantage John because he is more likely to be in a group that meets that criteria). As it relates to differential treatment, extensive social science evidence using longitudinal, experimental, ethnographic, and survey methods demonstrates that implicit bias and overt discrimination shape faculty evaluation (Eagan and Garvey 2015; Eaton et al. 2020; El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar 2018; Griffin, Bennett, and Harris 2013; Milkman, Akinola, and Chugh 2015; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012; Posselt 2016; Ray 2019; Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke 1999; White-Lewis 2020). For example, research has shown implicit biases not only in hiring decisions, but also in who is asked to perform an unpromotable task (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar 2018; O'Meara et al. 2017).

Implicit bias has been found in peer review and assessment of scholarship. For example, Sarsons (2017) found women were less likely than men to be given credit for their contributions to collaborative work, and Murrar et al. (2021) found that reviewers were almost twice as likely to recommend publication for research conducted on men than the same research conducted on women. Similar research has found that implicit biases shape evaluation in peer review (Lee et al. 2013; Witteman et al. 2018), definitions of leadership (Marchant, Bhattacharya, and Carnes 2007), and student evaluations of teaching (Mitchell and Martin 2018; Rosen 2018; Uttl and Smibert 2017). A lack of clear definitions and standards for review creates a "foggy" (Beddoes and Pawley 2014) climate for evaluation, which disproportionately hurts women and historically minoritized faculty (Fox et al. 2007; Lennartz and O'Meara 2018; Misra et al. 2011).

Faculty evaluation policies and practices also have embedded default characteristics that make it seem as if the playing field is equal and objective but in fact favors particular groups, typically those who are perceived to be White, cisgender, and men (Cheryan and Markus 2020; Posselt, Hernandez, and Villarreal 2020; Ray 2019). Here are three examples of the role of default characteristics in faculty evaluation: size of field, research topic, and prestige networks.

- **Size of field:** If scholars are evaluated on the number of citations they receive, but there are scholars being evaluated or compared who are from subfields of different sizes, it may look like the scholar in the larger field is doing more important work, when in fact the other scholars had fewer opportunities to be cited (Mitchneck 2020). Relatedly, research topics focused on historically minoritized communities have been less successful in National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant competitions (Hoppe et al. 2019), and novel contributions made by historically minoritized and women faculty are not taken up by colleagues and cited at the same rate as similar contributions by White and men colleagues (Hofstra et al. 2020).
- **Research topic and methods:** Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson's (2019) work on epistemic exclusion revealed how scholarship completed by faculty of color can be framed as problematic—as politically driven or "me-search"—and work that is community-applied, qualitative, and social justice-oriented is devalued in reward systems. Yet historically minoritized and women faculty are disproportionately involved in such work (HERI 2017; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019; Teele and Thelen 2017).
- **Prestige networks:** Many believe the process of asking for external review letters is meritocratic. However, scholars may be evaluated based, in part, on the prestige of those who write their external letters. This can mean that scholars who study topics and use methods that are less present in prestigious high-research doctoral universities could seem less important as scholars. However, a given scholar's network is related to where they received their degree, what they study, and how they study it (Stewart and Valian 2018). Scholars, for example, with primary networks inside Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) may be disadvantaged in comparison with those whose careers were in Big Ten and/or Ivy League institutions.

We intend for this report to help universities consider whether they have default expectations embedded in their faculty evaluation criteria that advantage White and/or men scholars over historically minoritized and women scholars, and/or some subfields over others. We encourage faculty and academic leaders to ask questions about institutional values and criteria for faculty evaluation. Which standards should be applied to all faculty? What can be flexible and/or made more expansive? Are there criteria or practices that are constraining access and success of a diverse faculty contributing across a range of epistemologies, methods, and missions?

2. Twenty-first-century needs and goals of higher education

As we write, faculty are taking on critical issues such as mental health, food insecurity, racial justice, and helping to build back local, regional, and national democracies (O'Meara, Bawa, et al. 2021). Academic programs and departments are taking on grand challenges and doing so with leaner budgets, but these values and commitments are not frequently considered in faculty evaluation processes.

The desire to reflect these evolving values and commitments through faculty evaluation is growing. For example, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2020, 1) held a convening to "re-envision advancement pathways for all STEM faculty." Similarly, President E. Gordon Gee of West Virginia University shared the following:

> As the president of a major research flagship land-grant university, I need maximum flexibility when it comes to rewarding the people who have given so much of themselves for the success of our students. I need creative ways to incentivize their continued commitment to our success. Recognizing faculty with the process to gain tenure when their primary duty is teaching or service is simply the right thing to do. To not do so creates a class system in higher education that does great harm to the academy—and all those whom we serve. (Gee 2021)

Colleges and universities need more flexibility in their evaluation systems in order to honor the faculty labor involved in student success, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), academic leadership, and curriculum reform. In this equity-minded audit, we encourage academic leaders and faculty to consider whether their faculty evaluation policies include mission critical work, or whether some of it is invisible, thus holding the institution back.

3. Changes in what faculty do and how they do it

Faculty evaluation policies and procedures must keep pace with the new, different, and emerging ways in which scholars are pursuing learning, scholarship, and public engagement. For example, public scholarship, along with a pull to translate science to lay and professional audiences, has greatly increased (Ellison and Eatman 2008; HERI 2017). In fact, 47 percent of faculty respondents to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey said that they collaborated with local or regional community partners on teaching or research (HERI 2017). Yet faculty evaluation still prioritizes more traditional teaching, research, and scholarly impact (Butler 2021; Mitchneck and Smith 2021; O'Meara 2018). Technology has drastically changed how scholars disseminate work, but most faculty evaluation policies have not changed to reflect digital work in the humanities and scholarly blogs, public-facing websites, or podcasts (Fenton 2017; Richardson 2013).

Higher education institutions, like many organizations, have also realized that greater flexibility is needed to meet current constraints and opportunities (O'Meara 2015a). The global pandemic caused many institutions to at least temporarily, if not permanently, make changes to reflect the realities of telework, online teaching, and childcare. In 2020, many institutions suspended student teaching evaluations, invited faculty candidates to present COVID-19 impact statements in annual reviews and tenure portfolios, and created opt-out or opt-in extensions to tenure clocks (Gonzales and Griffin 2020). Although many of these reforms or modifications were gratefully accepted, they questioned the assumptions that gave life to the old systems. For example, the overreliance on student evaluations to evaluate teaching and learning has been replaced with recognition that a holistic approach to the evaluation of teaching is critical to understanding teaching, learning, and mentoring contributions (Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman 2021). In the equity-minded call to action of this report and the associated audit, we encourage institutions to question the reasons behind specific policies and practices to see if they meet current realities and goals. Do the policies encourage faculty to document and thereby get credit and recognition for the full impacts of their work?

These rationales for an equity-minded audit of faculty evaluation policies are best summarized by the questions *who*, *what*, and *how*. Institutions say they want a more diverse faculty, as well as a faculty who contribute to mission-critical work and seek to learn, teach, and contribute across a range of methods and epistemologies. The ways that faculty go about their work have changed. To recruit and retain faculty, and to help them thrive, institutional evaluation systems must change as well.

Equity-Minded Reform of Faculty Evaluation Policies and Practices

In this section of our report, we share guiding principles for an equity-minded audit of faculty evaluation policies and practices that can be implemented at one's own institution.

Our audit assumes an *equity-minded approach* (Bensimon 2006; Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham 2016; Gonzales and Griffin 2020; McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux, 2020; Posselt et al. 2020) that is aware of the sociohistorical context of exclusionary practices in higher education and takes ownership and responsibility for equity in processes, resources, and outcomes. As such, although the audit is intended to improve conditions and fairness generally, we are especially intent on auditing faculty evaluation processes for ways that they disadvantage historically minoritized faculty and those who study

across a range of epistemologies and methods.[1] We also draw on empirical research showing conditions that foster just and equitable organizations and workplaces (Bohnet 2016; Correll 2017; Daly and Dee 2006; Gappa, Austin, and Trice 2007; Gonzales and Griffin 2020; Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006; O'Meara 2011b; O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019; Posselt et al. 2020; Stewart and Valian 2018; Turner, González, and Wood 2008; White-Lewis 2020) and research on diversity and inclusion in academic careers and evaluation (Banerjee and Pawley 2013; Carnes, Bartels, et al. 2015; Carnes, Devine, et al. 2015; Dowd and Bensimon 2015; Laursen and Austin 2020; Marchant, Bhattacharya, and Carnes 2007; Moody 2012; Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke 1999; Stewart and Valian 2018; Tierney and Bensimon 1996).

None of these recommendations is a one-size-fits-all fix. Decisions to change policies will appropriately reflect institutional missions, priorities, values, and cultures, which will differ, for example, in the emphasis of teaching, scholarship, and service. Our recommendations are focused primarily on college or university-wide faculty evaluation policies, recognizing that department and program policies will differ based on disciplinary and field differences but tend to follow the general guidelines set by the institution.

Our audit approach is not exhaustive. The recommendations, if completed, will not make a faculty evaluation policy "perfect." Rather, this iterative process is meant to aid an institution as it continuously learns how policies might be more equitable and inclusive.

We also recognize that faculty evaluation occurs in a discretionary space wherein professionals are asked to make judgments, drawing on their own expertise and knowledge (Ball 2018; O'Meara 2021). Such judgments provide important insight and flexibility over automated responses. However, it is critical that faculty evaluation policies provide guardrails around that judgment to ensure that equity goals are achieved (Correll 2017). Policy language can facilitate and/or constrain equity.

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1   The term equity-minded was coined by Professor Estela Mara Bensimon. To learn more about equity-minded approaches in higher education, see the rich resources and equity research at the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education (n.d.) as well as Bensimon's work cited throughout.

Each principle offers a way to both view faculty evaluation policies and consider ways to improve them. There is also overlap between these principles. For example, efforts to improve transparency (providing information to candidates) might also improve clarity (making it easy to understand what is expected). We go into more specific content areas of faculty evaluation policies (e.g., assessment of teaching, external letters) in a subsequent report. However, we wanted to start with the principles and rationales as the foundation.

We recommend reading this report with attention to the rationale and research behind the principles first and foremost. We offer evidence supporting each principle, especially as the principle relates to ensuring an equitable faculty evaluation process. We provide questions to consider at the end of each subsection, which are designed to help individual faculty members, faculty evaluation committees, faculty senates, academic leaders, and other stakeholders in faculty evaluation. These questions can be used to inform how these parties begin a policy reform process, review policies for their own advancement, or think strategically about inclusive practices across an institution.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency refers to the degree to which salient information regarding faculty evaluation is shared accurately and accessibly (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2016). Participants' experiences of organizational injustice and their intent to leave an institution are very much tied to their experiences of lackluster transparency (Barrett and Barrett 2011; Colquitt and Greenberg 2003; Daly and Dee 2006; O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019; Nyunt et al. 2022), thus making it an important principle in faculty evaluation.

Promotion and tenure processes have been described as "archery in the dark" (Rice 1996). Candidates report a lack of procedural justice when critical information about the tenure or evaluation process is not shared with them (Nyunt et al. 2022). When policies exclude critical information about any faculty evaluation process, participants within an organization with inside connections are more likely to access the relevant information, and those who may be less networked proceed at a disadvantage (Beddoes and Pawley 2014; Tierney and Bensimon 1996). Though many studies focus on a lack of transparency in the tenure track, faculty in non-tenure-track roles also find a lack of information about their contracts, opportunities for promotion, and employment renewals frustrating; the lack of transparency communicates to non-tenure-track faculty that they are not valued (Crick, Larson, and Seipel 2020; Kezar 2013; O'Meara, Templeton, and Nyunt 2018; O'Meara, Nyunt, et al. 2019).

Therefore, key information about the faculty evaluation process and procedures should be shared with all participants, including candidates and their evaluators. For example, it is helpful to note in policies that candidates will be provided copies of evaluation policies and procedures when they are first appointed, as well as to share timelines for submissions, outline what materials candidates will submit, and provide information about how external reviewers (if any) will be chosen. If decisions will be shared with candidates at specific levels of review (e.g., after a department vote), that milestone should be noted as well, and when and how notifications will occur should be affirmed.

There are, of course, reasons why some aspects of faculty evaluation processes and procedures are not shared with candidates. For example, many tenure policies require that the identity of external reviewers and copies of their review letters be kept confidential. This practice is thought to encourage an honest evaluation of the candidate's scholarship. Whenever possible, however, those overseeing evaluation processes should err on the side of transparency. When there are good reasons not to provide information, it is still important to ask whether policy silence on a particular issue may differentially affect candidates (e.g., whether some may get access to this information and some may not) and to seek to remove that harm by ensuring more equal access to information.

Transparency: Is salient information related to faculty evaluation intentionally shared, accessible, and accurate? If salient information is intentionally left out, is there a good reason?

CLARITY

Clarity refers to the degree to which faculty evaluation policy language is easily understood. Organizational scholars have further defined clarity as text that is comprehensible, coherent, simple enough, and easily interpreted (Briscoe and Murphy 2012; Potosky 2008). Each candidate under evaluation and each evaluator should be able to read the policy and walk away with the same understanding of what the policy means.

Clarity is an important equity issue. Research shows that when policies are overly vague, unclear, or ambiguous, they disproportionately hurt women and Black, Brown, and Indigenous faculty by making it more likely that evaluators will engage social biases to make decisions (Beddoes and Pawley 2014; Heilman and Haynes 2005; Kulp, Wolf-Wendel, and Smith 2019; Laursen and Austin 2020; Lennartz and O'Meara 2018; Stewart and Valian 2018), which results in favoring White candidates and men candidates. For example, policies using terms such as "outstanding," "acceptable," "high-impact," or "excellent" without providing metrics or examples to define what makes service "high-impact" or research contributions "outstanding" result in ambiguous conditions in which bias thrives as reviewers define these terms in different ways (Kahneman 2011). These conditions are likely to produce negative outcomes for minoritized faculty, as the "benefit of the doubt" (Stewart and Valian 2018) tends not to go to these groups.

Evaluators also associate certain characteristics with certain groups, such as women and caretaking, or men and leadership (Eagly and Karau 2002; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, and Rudman 2008). For example, Marchant, Bhattacharya, and Carnes (2007) found that medical schools that included the word "leader" in their tenure criteria, especially when used vaguely, were less likely to advance women due to the association of the word with masculinity. Similarly, Carnes and colleagues (2005) noted that women were disadvantaged in NIH grant funding processes due to several components, including ambiguity in the performance criteria. Also, as mentioned above, many professional track faculty are reviewed annually. Their percent of effort spent on teaching, service, research, clinical service, and administration may change substantially year to year (AAUP 2003; Kezar and Sam 2013). If their annual evaluation criteria are not tied to their percent of effort, the expectations can be out of alignment with their actual workload. Thus, improving the clarity of faculty evaluation policies can mitigate biases that harm those in the most vulnerable appointment types and career stages.

A closely related reason why clarity improves equity relates to reducing "noise" among evaluators. Kahneman et al. (2016) observe that a decision-making process is "noisy" when there is variability or unpredictability in results where we expect reliability. An example provided by Kahneman et al. (2016) relates to stepping on a scale in a five-minute period. If you step on the scale three times, and each time it tells you that you are three pounds heavier than you know you are, the scale is biased (the scale will always give you a heavier weight than it should). But if the scale tells you the first time you step on it that you are three pounds over, then the next time you step onto the scale it says you are two pounds under, and the third time it says five pounds over, it is "noisy."

There is often noise in faculty evaluation policies when there is incomplete information and evaluators try to guess the meaning of a situation (O'Meara 2015b). For example, if we do not script the process with specific instructions to external reviewers, they may not know how to handle a parental leave year in assessing a candidate. Likewise, when an external reviewer declines to review a candidate and this is recorded in the file without guidance, some evaluators may assume the decline was based on the candidate's file, whereas others may assume it was simply a matter of availability (O'Meara 2015b).

Ambiguity has some benefits (Eisenberg 1984): when used intentionally, it can facilitate flexibility, allow processes to differ based on professional discretion, and engage qualitative judgment in purposeful ways. In fact, some scholars worry that if they identify a clear threshold for performance, scholars will stop working when they reach it. Yet there is little evidence that working under the stress of an ambiguous target fosters great scholarship.

Every department, college, or university needs to determine for themselves the actual criteria, standards, and benchmarks they will use. As Stewart and Valian (2018, 334) observe, "ideally a department or school strikes a happy medium, being neither vague in a way that encourages evaluation errors nor over-specific by using criteria that may not fit all candidates (e.g., an exact number of publications, particular funding sources, only certain publication outlets)." For example, take the issue of campus service. Policy language can outline four different kinds of service and observe that all faculty going up for promotion are expected to have contributed meaningfully to at least two kinds of service to meet expectations. This flexibility ensures that all candidates are aware that they should have at least two kinds of campus service in their portfolio but also allows the specific content of each of those cases to be different. The goal is to provide enough information so that any expectations are clear, while still providing some flexibility in how to meet those expectations.

Based on our prior experience working with campuses, we especially recommend auditing faculty evaluation policy language in the following areas where ambiguity may invite cognitive and social biases and noise in interpretation of meaning. Our second report will provide more detailed recommendations for these content areas in faculty evaluation policies:

- Articulation of how to count parental or other leave time in evaluation
- Availability versus declines of external reviewers
- Intellectual leadership on papers and grant projects
- Documentation and evaluation of international reputation, leadership, and impact
- What external evaluators should focus on in their review of candidates (e.g., scholarship versus all faculty roles)

Clarity: Is information provided in a way that is easily understood? Is there ambiguity that could invite bias, guessing, and misinterpretation?

ACCOUNTABILITY

In using the term accountability, we mean holding a common expectation that established faculty evaluation policies and practices will be followed by candidates and by evaluators. If they are not followed, then responsible actors and steps have been identified to respond.

Studies show that systems of accountability can strengthen a sense of trust among members and positively impact morale. Han and Hong (2019) found that staffing, performance evaluation, and compensation are areas where levels of accountability can be positively established, and therefore significantly affect organizational performance. Accountability is also an important tool in improving diversity in organizations (Bohnet 2016; Dowd and Bensimon 2015). Drawing on federal data describing the workforce of 708 private sector establishments and surveys of employment practices, Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006, 611) also found that "structures that embed accountability, authority, and expertise" are most effective in increasing the diversity of their workforces. Alternatively, left unchecked, violations of policies, practices, and expectations can lead to low morale and delegitimize the evaluation process, leading to distrust among members and between the members and their organization.

Given the high stakes of many faculty evaluation processes, accountability for following policies and procedures and having clear consequences and remedies laid out for when violations (intentional or not) occur is important. For example, what happens when the faculty evaluation policy states that three external reviewers should come from a candidate's submitted list and three should come from the committee, but the committee chair never invites any candidate choices? What if an external letter writer reveals a cultural bias, an intimate relationship, or inappropriate details about the health of a candidate—does the committee disregard the entire letter, or omit the inappropriate content only? What happens when student evaluations show clear gender or racial bias—does the candidate have to address this or does the department chair or committee report it? Who owns these problems and who takes responsibility for them? Equity-minded reform for accountability takes ownership of such situations and crafts steps to mitigate or remove inequities.

Some would argue that embedding stronger accountability into policies and practices could diminish the autonomy and discretion of candidates and evaluators to flexibly and collegially go about their work. However, there is no reason to position autonomy and discretion against accountability. O'Meara (2021) observed that all faculty discretion, and we could also argue autonomy, exists within a set of parameters set by fields, disciplines, and institutions. Thus, holding ourselves accountable is only about making sure those parameters, set by shared governance procedures, and in this case faculty evaluation policies, are kept. Given that equity and inclusion are stated missions of most higher education institutions, being accountable for meeting equity goals is part of "walking the equity talk" (McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux 2020).

Many of the principles articulated in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) publication *Policy Documents and Reports*, also known as the Redbook, are about making sure that faculty evaluation policies and procedures have some method of redress established if there are due process, ethical, or other violations (AAUP 2015). An equity-minded approach does not require asking and answering "what if" for every possible situation. However, when conducting an audit, it is worth considering whether there is a clear process outlined to handle routine types of deviations, especially those that can do the most harm to an equitable process. Provosts' offices, which often handle such situations, are in the best position to help auditors look for places where accountability strategies might be built into policies.

For example, many policies clearly outline how external reviewers are selected and specify the information they are provided to evaluate candidates, but do not provide information on what a review committee should do if information or characteristics unrelated to the criteria are noted (e.g., "he managed his research despite having cancer"). Policies with strong accountability explain whether that information is redacted or if the letter should be removed from the dossier altogether. They explain who a committee member or candidate might report policy infractions to, and how they are supposed to be handled.

> Accountability: Are there responsible actors and steps identified if faculty evaluation policies and practices are not followed? Are there common enough deviations that might be foreseen and a process for addressing them laid out in the policy?

CONSISTENCY

Consistency refers to the extent to which candidates and evaluators in similar circumstances are treated the same in the evaluation process. There are two ways that consistency is often conceptualized in evaluation. For example, external consistency is when there is likelihood, given the same set of evaluation criteria and the same candidate portfolio, that different evaluators will make similar decisions. Internal consistency is when there is likelihood that two candidates who have the same credentials will receive similar outcomes from a single reviewer (Borman et al. 2001; Lievens 2001; Lozano, García-Cueto, and Muñiz 2008; Martinkova and Goldhaber 2015; Moskal and Leydens 2000).

Recent work examining faculty hiring and rubrics (White-Lewis et al., forthcoming) explains how some degree of consistency is often sought as a means of ensuring fair evaluation. For example, as one method to avoid implicit biases in evaluation, many institutions now require structured interviews because they make it more likely that evaluators have similar information on each candidate. This method can reduce biases toward marginalized groups (Bragger et al. 2002; Brecher, Bragger, and Kutcher 2006; McCarthy, Van Iddekinge, and Campion 2010; White-Lewis et al., forthcoming) by limiting the extent to which evaluators rely on personal preferences or candidate rapport. Best practices further suggest that evaluators apply the same clear criteria consistently to candidate materials in making recommendations (Heilman and Martell 1986; Isaac, Lee, and Carnes 2009).

Our recommendation to audit faculty evaluation policies and practices for consistency does not mean that evaluators and external reviewers have no discretion to make their own professional judgment about a case. As noted earlier, most faculty evaluation processes occur in "discretionary spaces" (Ball 2018; O'Meara 2021) where automated decisions are not possible or advantageous. Evaluator expertise is needed, as is flexibility in judgment. However, just as we would not want to see one patient sent home and the other admitted after presenting the symptoms based on race or income, we would not want two different standards to be used for two assistant professor candidates in the exact same situation (O'Meara 2021). When evaluators do not understand criteria or understand how to apply them consistently to candidate portfolios, the effectiveness of the evaluation is threatened (Beddoes and Pawley 2014; Schleicher et al. 2002; White-Lewis 2020; White-Lewis et al., forthcoming).

Auditing faculty evaluation policies and processes for consistency may seem odd, given that most operate in such a way that a committee is evaluating a single individual and their record against a set of department, college, or university criteria, and are not supposed to be comparing one case with another. However, we have come across several ways in which consistency is relevant to implementing a process that is both efficient and equitable.

Campus-wide policies often set overall standards and processes and signal institutional values but leave the details of specific criteria to departments to decide. However, if allowing variability between departments in definitions of scholarship, voting processes, external letter instructions, and/or materials is going to produce inequities between departments or colleges, greater uniformity of policies should be considered.

It is important to look at what candidates are required to standardize in their presentation of teaching, research, and service and what they are allowed to do differently. For example, is an assistant professor in one field (e.g., chemistry) permitted to present their teaching in a way that differs from that presentation in another field (e.g., public health) at the same professorial rank, and for the same level of course? If so, why? Is it because there are important disciplinary differences in how they teach, or in what their task is (e.g., lab supervision versus clinical supervision)? Or is it simply precedent that departments have always been allowed to evaluate the same types of courses differently (e.g., both faculty teach a general education course, but in some cases teaching evaluations are required and in others not used at all)? Such inconsistency could be advantaging some candidates over others and operate counter to institutional goals toward holistic evaluation of teaching. Likewise, are there reasons for one department to notify the candidate after their vote and others not to provide that information until the end of the process? Or for some departments but not others to require external letters for promotion to full professor?

One strategy to address consistency is for a provost's office to provide a template or checklist for what all departmental/unit faculty evaluation guidelines must consistently include (e.g., university definition of scholarship, list of advisees). In addition, it is helpful for a provost's office to create a university-wide template for parts of the process that make sense to standardize, such as external reviewer letters and a standard process for how votes are tallied and reported to the committee and the candidate. Uniformity in this regard is not the same thing as universality; it only means alignment in areas where good reasons exist for things to be the same. A threshold could be centrally established and then departments might differ in how they demonstrate the threshold was met.

> Consistency: Are essential parts of the faculty evaluation process standardized and applied consistently so that when the same kind of activity is evaluated or procedure enacted, faculty can expect similar treatment? If units are allowed to differ, are there disciplinary/field reasons?

CONTEXT

In using the term "context" we mean the setting, backdrop, and/or circumstances within which faculty contributions occur.[2] Equitable systems acknowledge differences in contexts; contextualization is key to fair evaluation (Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham 2016; Mallard, Lamont, and Guetzkow 2009; McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux 2020; O'Meara 2021). Equity-minded reforms pull relevant contexts into view so that performance can be seen against the backdrop of barriers and advantages scaffolding accomplishments (Bastedo and Bowman 2017; Gonzales and Griffin 2020; Posselt, Hernandez, and Villarreal 2020). For example, teaching a required quantitative course may influence student evaluations (Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman 2021), and serving as an undergraduate program director pre-tenure would be expected to shape available time for scholarship (Misra et al. 2011). Recognizing such relevant backdrops does not give the candidate a free pass to have not met clearly stated criteria, such as evidence of teaching effectiveness. Instead, it only helps the performance be seen in full view of its opportunities and constraints, much like the achievement relative to opportunity model at Monash University (Monash University, n.d.).

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2   *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "context (*n.*)," accessed January 7, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/context.

Likewise, although some see an inherent contradiction between the principles of applying consistency and pulling context into view, we think both are important and do not have to be at odds. For example, if a candidate is teaching the only course that deals with issues of race in a major, and that has shaped their student evaluations, then that context should be brought forward in candidate materials and be considered in evaluation of teaching. Here the principle of context leads; otherwise, it might seem like no challenge was present in teaching about race in the U.S., while those challenges are well documented (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019).

It is important for faculty evaluation policies to encourage candidates to present both the relevant contexts that frame how they have met evaluation criteria, and guidance to assist committee members in knowing how to assess and apply those contexts. In terms of strategies to add context to faculty evaluation policies, we provide a few examples, which typically come down to (a) pulling context into view so it can frame the evaluation and (b) making sure that the candidate is not being evaluated against inappropriate contexts. For example, engaged scholars and those doing work in newer interdisciplinary fields face specific challenges, such as a lack of expertise on the faculty committee evaluating their work (O'Meara 2001, 2018). Some institutions have chosen to address this issue by adding someone doing engaged work to the committee to add context to the evaluation (O'Meara 2011a; O'Meara 2014; O'Meara, Eatman, and Petersen 2015). Other universities have required that at least one external evaluator be someone involved in the same kinds of scholarship. Likewise, if a candidate is one of a very few Indigenous women faculty on campus and is asked repeatedly to be on search committees and called on for diversity commissions, this workload context is relevant in discussing that individual's contributions (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Griffin, Bennett, and Harris 2013; O'Meara et al. 2018; O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019; Misra et al. 2021; Turner, González, and Wood 2008).

Another example mentioned earlier but also relevant here would be in the evaluation of professional track faculty for promotion. Often professional track faculty efforts in teaching, research, and service differ from those of tenure track faculty, and can even change year to year. If someone is on a professional track contract where 40 percent of their effort is clinical service, compared with most professional track faculty who are 80 percent teaching and 20 percent service, that context should be presented early in an evaluation portfolio. It can be helpful to ask candidates to complete a cover sheet for their portfolio that shows percent of effort toward each activity during each of the years since their last appointment, so that their accomplishments are viewed against this backdrop.

Sometimes, however, it is important to audit policies for places where contexts are being inappropriately added to the evaluation. For example, when template language for external reviews asks that external reviewers comment on whether the individual would be tenured at the external evaluator's institution, the policy is replacing the context where the candidate actually works with the backdrop of another institution where they do not work. The other institution could have had more resources, a different teaching load, or different tenure criteria, so this comparison should be discouraged (O'Meara 2015b; Stewart and Valian 2018). Likewise, reviewers should not be asked to comment on teaching and service roles if they are not being provided any real data on either—as they lack the context to make a fair judgment (O'Meara 2015b). Finally, some institutional guidelines ask the reviewer to provide an assessment of the candidate against others of their career stage in their field. Given that scholars study different subfields, are in different institutional types, and entered positions with different levels of professional expertise, this comparison invites noisy, random comparisons (O'Meara 2015b; Stewart and Valian 2018).

> Context: Do the policies and practices provide ways to bring relevant contexts into view for the evaluation of faculty work? Does the evaluation invite comparisons that do not fit the circumstances?

CREDIT

One definition of "credit" is recognition for work that has been done.[3] In higher education, for example, we give students standardized "credit" for their coursework that counts toward their degree. In applying the concept of credit to faculty evaluation policies, we believe it is important to ensure that faculty candidates are getting credit for work that is central to the institutional mission but may be invisible and undervalued (Hanasono et al. 2019). Much work in DEI, student success, and public engagement falls into this category (Griffin, Bennett, and Harris 2013; Griffin and Reddick 2011; Turner, González, and Wood 2008). There are social biases and expectations that particular groups (e.g., women, historically minoritized faculty) will perform well in and have commitments to areas such as mentoring, service, and DEI (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar 2018; Wessel et al. 2015). Therefore, evaluators are less apt to notice exceptional work in this area. A "cultural tax" faced by historically minoritized faculty has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Antonio 2002; Baez 2000; Griffin and Reddick 2011; Turner, González, and Wood 2008). Women and historically minoritized faculty are engaged in more teaching, mentoring, and service activities, and yet report less time for research than men and White peers in similar careers stages, disciplines, and institutional types (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar 2018; Hanasono et al. 2019; Jimenez et al. 2019; Misra et al. 2011; O'Meara 2016; O'Meara, Culpepper, et al. 2021). Although academic departments and colleges can address part of this problem through equity-minded workload reform in how labor is taken up and assigned (Misra et al. 2021; O'Meara et al. 2020), a big part of the problem is moving more of this work into what counts in faculty evaluation systems.

We see three ways that the issue of credit tends to play out in faculty evaluation policies. First, institutions realize that critical work central to their missions and goals is not adequately rewarded in faculty evaluation policies and add language to recognize such work. They describe that work, connect it to the mission of the institution, tell candidates where they can document it, and provide advice to evaluators on how to assess it. This strategy moves mission-critical work from invisibility to presence in policy. Second, institutions realize that mission-critical work is included, but there is no differentiation between doing that work in a way that solely meets standards and doing it in a way that is outstanding or above standards, rendering the work of those who went above and beyond invisible or undervalued. Third, committee members often have to make decisions about whether the full contributions of a candidate will count in their evaluation or only those that are most recent. For example, some institutions have a practice of only crediting work completed while at the institution or since the faculty member's last appointment. Given career interruptions and the many years spent in postdoctoral positions, allowing a candidate to include full career contributions provides greater flexibility and may have benefits to equity in evaluation.

> Credit: Do faculty evaluation policies recognize mission critical work (e.g., mentoring, institutional service, DEI)? Do policies provide a way to differentiate between levels of effort when it is important to do so?

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility refers to the ability of a policy, practice, or rule to adapt to a new, different, or changing set of individual and/or work contexts. In higher education, flexible faculty evaluation polices have typically included adapting for work-life integration, recognition of different career stages, academic talents, ways of going about work, and on-ramps and off-ramps to the academic career (ACE 2005; Gappa, Austin, and Trice 2007; Trower 2011; O'Meara and Rice 2005; O'Meara 2015a), along with, more recently, adapting to changes in technology (McKinney and Coolidge 2021), intended impacts of scholarship (Mitchneck 2020), and the realities of the global pandemic (Gonzales and Griffin 2020). Institutions can create faculty evaluation policies that have enough "give" in them to recognize, as Stewart and Valian (2018, 327) observe, that "no faculty member enacts the professor role exactly like any other, and faculty evaluation processes should be sensitive to the differences among us."

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3   *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "credit (*n.*)," accessed January 4, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/credit.

Just as many workplaces now have to compete for talent with similar organizations offering greater remote work and telework, higher education finds itself at an inflection point. Institutions that put policies in place for differentiated workload, stopping the tenure clock, and parental leave have found significant benefits to faculty satisfaction, commitment, and retention (O'Meara 2015a). There are several ways flexibility may appear as a principle in faculty evaluation policies, including but not limited to work-life policies and practices like parental or family care leave, years counted toward tenure or in promotion, and the main focus and/or contributions of faculty (e.g., making a case for promotion based on excellence in teaching and service as the primary areas of contribution). We encourage institutions to look across their faculty evaluation policies to see if they offer the flexibility necessary to recognize varied work and work-life contexts.

> Flexibility: Are faculty evaluation policies flexible enough to adapt to the new, different, and changing set of contexts shaping faculty careers and work?

AGENCY AND REPRESENTATION

For the purposes of this paper, we use the word agency to mean a candidate's ability to make the best possible case for advancement and/or recognition (i.e., to take steps to meet their career goals or promotion and advancement) (Campbell and O'Meara 2014; O'Meara and Campbell 2011; Terosky, O'Meara, and Campbell 2014). We use the term representation broadly, rather than legally, to mean that candidates can expect that the individuals evaluating them will have some understanding of the contexts of their work.

Many agency and representation issues are recognized by AAUP's Redbook (AAUP 2015). Overlapping with issues of transparency, examples of issues of agency and representation include notifications of decisions and whether candidates have the opportunity to provide responses to decisions, make corrections to information, or add amendments for significant accomplishments. Some institutions allow candidates to choose invitations for half of their external or internal reviewers to ensure that they will have at least some reviewers who are most inclined to understand their work.

Research shows many professional track faculty are left out of important departmental and institutional matters, and they do not have formal representation in committees that evaluate professional track faculty (Kezar and Sam 2013). In Kezar and Sam's work on contingent faculty, the authors state:

> It is typical for policies and practices to exclude nontenure-track faculty in voting on matters pertaining to tenure track faculty members—especially regarding granting tenure. However, the range of issues on which they should have input is often left out of discussions and union contracts, and many of the interviewed contingent faculty leaders suggested that it is important that contracts or handbooks designate that non-tenure-track faculty have involvement in a range of institutional issues, to ensure that faculty do not become excluded. (Kezar and Sam 2013, 443)

When it comes to faculty evaluation, not having professional track faculty represented on the bodies that evaluate them will perpetuate exclusion and inequity. As institutions have begun to strengthen promotion ladders for professional track faculty, the issue of representation on committees evaluating them has come front and center. Many campuses are reviewing their promotion policies to ensure that the committees that evaluate professional track faculty include at least one member, if not more, who are professional track faculty themselves. Likewise, as the size, shape, and nature of faculty appointments have changed across an institution, it is often necessary to make sure that the representation of faculty on campus-wide committees is broadly attentive to representation across disciplines and fields.

Agency and representation: Do policies ensure faculty rights for notification of the status of the case, and clarification as needed? Do policies provide ways for candidates to represent themselves in ways advantageous to their cases? Can faculty expect that they will be evaluated by colleagues who understand the relevant contexts of their work (e.g., appointment type, field, methods, and epistemologies as relevant)?

Conclusion

This report is one of three resources we have created to support equity-minded reform of faculty evaluation policies. This report focused on principles to apply in evaluating policies, while the second report will center on specific areas in faculty evaluation policy and practice that are often problematic for historically minoritized faculty and those who take up methods and epistemologies not dominant in their field (e.g., public scholarship, digital humanities). The second report will also make recommendations for policy revision to address those problem areas. The third resource is an audit tool combining the principles and particular areas for policy reform into one set of questions that can be asked as institutional agents review their policies to make important changes.

Returning to where we started, let's imagine there is a faculty member just beginning their career who wants to end food insecurity on their campus and in the neighborhoods that surround their institution. The faculty member is working alongside first-generation students, staff, and academic leaders to build sustainable solutions informed by expertise in public health, by the local knowledge of those who are food insecure, and by practitioners providing support. The faculty member wants to know if this work will be recognized and rewarded in their academic home. Will it?

We know those reading this report are working to provide an answer, even if through small advances to "walk the equity talk" (McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux 2020). As authors, we have suggested that institutions begin by examining evaluation processes for transparency, clarity, accountability, context, credit, consistency, flexibility, agency, and representation. Grounded in these principles, we can take the next important step of looking at specific parts of the evaluation policies—such as the practice of requiring external letters, the assessment of teaching, and the measure of scholarly impact—that reproduce inequality for historically minoritized faculty and those studying at the edges of their discipline, using publicly engaged methods and epistemologies.

We hope institutions consider applying this audit to their own faculty evaluation policies; consider the language used by other institutions to develop new, innovative ways to address the issues we raise here; and ultimately find it helpful as they work to align their faculty evaluation policies and practices with their desire to scaffold a diverse and inclusive institution and society.

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