RECOGNIZING **JEDI EFFORTS** IN THE HIRING, TENURE, AND PROMOTION PROCESS

By James Pierson, Genevieve Nesslage, Alexandra Fries, Heath Kelsey, Feng Chen, Cathlyn Davis, and Kenneth Rose

In 2022, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) began the first major revision of its Faculty Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure policy document in more than a decade. This document determines how faculty members are hired and how they progress in their careers (e.g., by providing evaluation criteria and descriptions of faculty ranks and roles). In addition, it provides the basis for appeals to decisions made about promotion and tenure. During this ongoing process, the UMCES policy revision committee has identified overarching issues, particularly regarding efforts toward increasing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. A subset of the committee has summarized the issues identified as important for others who may be considering similar policy updates.

Over the last few years and across the academic landscape in the United States, there has been increasing awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the importance and value of diversity in faculty recruitment, growth, and success (e.g., Lafferty et al., 2023). Expanded viewpoints, approaches, and ways of thinking benefit the education and research missions of institutions and better serve and support local communities, students, and society. Diverse teams have been shown to have better problem-solving skills than less diverse teams (Hong and Page, 2004). Given long-standing structures of power and privilege, efforts to diversify and support university faculty require consideration of equity, inclusion, justice, acceptance, and belonging in requirements and expectations for hiring, promotion, and evaluation of faculty.

EXPANSION OF FACULTY EVALUATION CRITERIA IN THE CONTEXT OF DEI

New or expanded criteria for the evaluation of faculty success have emerged, often broadly categorized as diversity, equity, and inclusion, and often including justice, acceptance, and belonging (here referred to as DEI for brevity). These criteria have been embraced by a number of states and universities (Meyer-Gutbrod et al., 2023); for example, many university faculty and administrator positions now require a "Diversity Statement" or "DEI Statement" as part of their application materials (Sylvester et al., 2019). However, changes in policies have been significantly and formally curtailed in some states through legislation (Chronicle Staff, 2024), and there has been extensive discussion about the use and implementation of these statements (Hicks, 2024). Furthermore, even for universities committed to broadening participation and increasing the diversity of persons engaged in academia, the process by which progress toward this goal is evaluated is often unclear, not well documented, and not well thought out in advance of implementing such initiatives (Gibau et al., 2022).

The traditional criteria used by many universities in the United States to evaluate potential and existing faculty center on scholarship, service, and education. These criteria are thought to encompass the broad role of faculty at universities, with the relative importance of each criterion in the evaluation process varying depending on institution and faculty position (e.g., primarily undergraduate universities may have a stronger focus on teaching). Some institutions use an alternative model for evaluating academic scholarship that centers on four different but related criteria: discovery, integration, application, and education (Boyer, 1990). Regardless of the criteria scheme used, the old adage "publish or perish" seems to have persisted at many universities (Sutter, 2022) and intimates that peer-reviewed publications are the most important metric for academic evaluation. That is, without high success in one criterion, scholarship/discovery, faculty may not get hired or promoted. Many research universities would also add to that grantsmanship, or the ability to secure external funds, as a close second metric. In addition to this often unstated but clear emphasis on one criterion over others, the Boyer and classical approaches to faculty evaluation do not include explicit accounting for activities that increase DEI. Even when DEI-related activities result in traditional scholarship, such publications may not be valued as highly as traditional scientific publications.

Overall, there is a disconnect between the written criteria and the subsequent evaluation process. New appointees and existing faculty are increasingly required to demonstrate knowledge of, experience in, and expectations to advance DEI, whereas the policy and procedures for evaluation may not have provisions to account for expected DEI efforts.

EXPANSION OF FACULTY PROMOTION PROCESSES AND ROLES IN THE CONTEXT OF DEI

There are two additional problems related to this disconnect. The first is associated with "postdoc-to-faculty" or "bridge" appointments (e.g., Culpepper et al.,

2021), which seek and support young researchers in making the transition from postdoctoral to tenure-track positions within the same institution. They are aimed at enhancing faculty diversity in the sciences via added guidance and security. However, many promotion and tenure policies may not be flexible enough to accommodate increasingly prevalent postdoc-to-faculty or bridge appointment programs because implementation of the policies was designed for traditional hiring from outside the university.

Second, in addition to shifts in faculty roles and expectations that are related to DEI, there is a greater understanding and appreciation for community participation in the scientific endeavor through collaboration in research, co-production of knowledge, and the transfer of that knowledge to community members, rights holders, and policymakers. Such efforts require an equitable approach to develop trust between faculty and community members. What is valued by local residents, Native communities, industry employers, or other science users may be very different from that valued by the faculty involved on these teams. For example, a peer-reviewed paper may not be the only or even preferred outcome of research activities; however, the scientific effort and process is no less rigorous than any other laboratory experiment, observational field program, or modeling effort. Indeed, the added time, effort, and expertise needed to build relationships, share understanding, and work collaboratively toward outcomes may expand beyond traditional scientific efforts and should be valued and rewarded. Developing appropriate processes and metrics to evaluate these community-based scientific endeavors is crucial to valuing this work and the participating university faculty.

PATHWAY FORWARD: DEI FULLY INTEGRATED INTO FACULTY POLICY

So how do we describe and value DEI efforts focused on expanding participation, viewpoints, approaches, and ways of thinking and knowing in the scientific endeavor? Simply bringing people from diverse backgrounds to a university—as faculty or community collaborators—does not necessarily reflect successful recruitment or highlight a sense of belonging for these individuals. Furthermore, the true success of these efforts often operates on a longer timescale than the annual or promotion evaluation schedules for faculty. A successful effort in this arena would more likely be borne out on the decadal scale. Efforts to increase DEI must be done intentionally and woven throughout our research and education endeavors.

If academia is committed to effectively enhancing DEI among faculty ranks, policies and procedures should be carefully reexamined to help ensure the proper recognition of these efforts. DEI elements should be integrated throughout our policies to reflect the value we place on broadening participation in science for people from historically excluded and marginalized groups. In the case of promotion evaluations, which are often examined over a career, long-term outcomes could and should be included where appropriate. Creative approaches to valuing these seemingly non-traditional activities may include broadening the material accepted for evaluation of promotion. This may include data sets, media engagement metrics, patents, and reference letters from community members. One example comes from the US National Science Foundation, which changed its biosketch requirement; rather than listing "Publications," proposers now list "Products" that include a broader array of research outcomes, beyond peer-reviewed publications (Price, 2013). However, changes to *what* is required is not sufficient. Policies and procedures need to clearly state *how* such changes to the traditional approach are valued and evaluated by administrators and those tasked with making recommendations and decisions about promotion and tenure. This may require redefining evaluation criteria and restructuring certain aspects of the promotion and tenure process.

Promotion and tenure are a crucial part of faculty careers and must be considered carefully and thoughtfully, including from the perspective of DEI. Associated policies and their implementation need to reflect the full extent of the work and expectations of increasingly diverse faculties and their broad array of research efforts.

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