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Equitable Faculty Evaluation Practices

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EQUITABLE FACULTY EVALUATION PRACTICES

How can we improve how we evaluate faculty?

Faculty evaluation is central to universities, but many strategies for evaluating faculty reflect gender and racial biases. These biases in evaluation help explain the lack of progress most academic institutions have made toward greater representation and inclusion. This makes it urgent for universities to create more equitable review procedures.

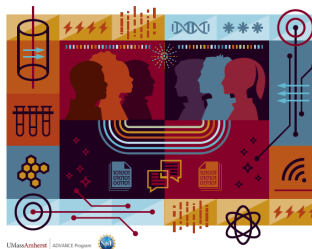
It is also important to remember that faculty evaluation is a *continual process*, and not simply a set of discrete, formal, evaluative events. Thus, to improve evaluation of faculty, we need to target how we evaluate faculty in formal and informal ways. The good news is that relatively simple changes in process and practice can enhance equity and inclusion in faculty evaluation.

WHERE ARE THE POTENTIAL BIASES IN FACULTY EVALUATION?

Across the academy, biases exist in how we evaluate teaching, research/creative activities, and even service. Research tells us that [both men and women](#) display [implicit biases](#), which operate below the conscious level as embedded stereotypes and expectations. Unfortunately, these biases are intensified in [intersectional ways](#), so that gender or race may further intersect with a faculty member's country of origin, discipline/research topic, or where they received their degree, as well as other factors.

Teaching Evaluations: Studies show that [students rate](#) men with a focus on their qualifications and competence, and women with a focus on their personality and appearance. In one analysis of teaching evaluations, researchers find that even though student grades and study time are not affected by a professor's gender, women are rated [much lower](#) than men, particularly by men students. An analysis of data from RateMyProfessor shows that Black and Asian faculty [receive lower evaluations](#) than white faculty. Experimental work further shows that if students think a faculty member teaching an online course is [a woman](#) or a [BIPOC](#) faculty member, they rate them more harshly. Research based on evaluation of the same professors over time finds that women in their middle age are judged more harshly than when they are [younger](#). More [holistic approaches](#) to evaluating teaching helps address bias.

Service & Leadership: Studies show that women [do more](#) service than men, particularly the everyday service internal to universities that is less visible and less recognized than, for example, disciplinary service. This



includes mentoring, emotional labor, everyday committee work, and DEI work. Yet, women are [not volunteering](#) to do more: they are [asked more often](#) than men. These

inequities are also true for faculty of color, and particularly [women of color](#), a form of cultural taxation, which may be an unintentional side effect of efforts to diversify.

Changing who is gatekeeping can shape outcomes. Men are more likely to be asked to speak at colloquiums, unless such committees are [chaired by women](#). Women are underrepresented as editors and reviewers; [when women are editors](#), reviewers are more likely to be women. Diverse review panels can lead to more inclusive outcomes, though [review processes](#) also matter.

Research: In fields where sponsored research is important to evaluation, consistent [biases](#) in funding mechanisms, including the [NSF](#) and the [NIH](#), shape outcomes. In disciplines where publications are key, citations, including H-indices and impact factors, are understood as easy and all-encompassing measures of quality, indicating productivity or research impact. Yet, citations also reflect bias, including through self-citation (women tend to [cite themselves](#) less), editorial coercion, citation clubs, and the influence of racialized and gendered [networks](#). Citation practices thus reinforce inequalities by rank, discipline, institution, field, gender, race, nationality, and career age.

By and large, women are [less likely to be cited](#); men authors, and even mixed-gender teams are [less likely to cite](#) women authors. In one field, women are three times as likely [to cite men](#) than men are to cite women. Women in top-ranked journals appear to be cited less [in medicine](#), but with greater parity in [social sciences](#). Papers written by research teams that include more women are [less likely to be cited](#). Indeed, women are also more likely to [not be credited](#) for their work.

Co-authorship networks are segregated by ethnicity and nationality, which tends to lead to [lower levels of citation](#). Black researchers tend to have smaller collaboration networks, and to be [cited less often](#). Research also shows that racism is embedded in [search algorithms](#). Interdisciplinary research, which tends to reflect the work of more women and BIPOC faculty, is [cited less](#), and takes longer to be cited.

EQUITABLE FACULTY EVALUATION PRACTICES

Letters of Reference: Reference letters written for [women](#) tend to be [shorter](#), and are more likely to [raise doubts](#). Reference letters written for men tend to include more [standout terms](#).

HOW CAN WE DISRUPT BIAS?

- Set up effective teams (such as personnel committees) for assessment. Research suggests that teams have higher “[collective intelligence](#)” when they are [more diverse](#); they tend to be more inclusive, more participatory, and have higher trust in one another. [Leader inclusiveness](#) can foster greater psychological safety and participation.
- Allow sufficient time to review materials. Making [quick decisions](#) tends to lead to biased results.
- Use a [structured process](#) to choose and discuss criteria. Review committees should begin by discussing criteria, and then developing systematic approaches to consider those criteria (for example, through using rubrics).
- Committee members should come to meetings prepared to discuss how they used these criteria in making assessments and conclusions.
- Use multiple forms of evidence to support conclusions, rather than focusing on one metric.
- Assess teaching not only through [teaching evaluations](#) (which often [do not capture teaching effectiveness](#)), but through more holistic forms of evaluation, including assessing student letters, syllabi, assignments, and observations of classes. [Mitigate](#) biases in teaching evaluations by including language intended to reduce bias. When using teaching evaluations focus more on specific measures (was the instructor prepared?) than global measures (how much did you learn?), which tend to be more biased. Also consider the range of scores rather than the mean score.
- Evaluate advising and mentorship with attention to both visible (student committees) and more invisible (letters of recommendation) measures. Encourage students to provide input, which can help make invisible advising more visible in assessments.
- Consider both visible and more invisible forms of leadership and service, recognizing the cultural taxation that women and BIPOC faculty often pay.

Recognize inclusive leadership strategies for disciplinary service such as [editorial boards](#).

- Review research not only through citation counts, but through evaluating the quality of any research or creative products. Instruct external reviewers to also focus on the quality of the scholarship, rather than measures such as citation counts. Consider [citation concept analysis](#), which [better contextualizes](#) the importance of citations. Use a variety of approaches to assess impact such as [Altmetrics](#), which captures downloads and media mentions and differs from [how reviewers may assess](#) papers. Yet, it's important to recognize that online recognition of papers also tends to be [gender biased](#).
- Adjust expectations based on person's conditions of work during the COVID pandemic. Treat the COVID statement seriously, recognizing that it provides important information about the opportunities that the faculty member had. Evaluate based on quality of the work and potential for future contributions rather than pace or timing. Inform external reviewers that the pandemic may have impacted the productivity of faculty, and that the university review processes keep this in mind, focusing on [faculty achievement relative to opportunity](#). Thus, rather than “back to normal” or asking them to compare current candidates to those who were evaluated before the pandemic, external reviewers should be instructed to take the impact of the pandemic into account in their reviews.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE THERE FOR AVOIDING BIAS IN EVALUATION?

Buster Benson's [Cognitive Bias Cheat Sheet](#)
University of Arizona's Commission on the Status of Women's [Avoiding Gender Bias in Reference Writing](#)

WHERE CAN I FIND RESOURCES FOR EVALUATION AT UMASS?

The [UMass Provost's office](#) includes specific guidance for evaluations. Questions can go to academic.personnel@umass.edu. The [Massachusetts Society of Professors](#) (MSP), the faculty union, provides [workshops for personnel committee members](#), and other materials on its website. Contact [the union](#) for further guidance. The [Office of Faculty Development](#) provides many resources and support for career and leadership development. Contact: OFD@umass.edu [UMass ADVANCE](#) provides workshops for both faculty members preparing for evaluations and evaluators. See the [COVID evaluation tool](#) and [equitable peer review template](#). Contact: [Joya Misra](#)

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