

## *An Advisory Statement on Avoiding Bias to Promote Fairness in Promotion and Tenure Decisions*

The process of faculty promotion, including granting of tenure, should be fair and equitable to all candidates. Marquette University values a diverse and inclusive community of teachers and scholars. Results of many recent studies, however, support the view that achieving and maintaining this vision can be hindered by obstacles that can disproportionately affect faculty from underrepresented groups. Everyone involved in the promotion and tenure process at Marquette should be familiar with these obstacles so that each candidate for promotion receives a fair and equitable evaluation. The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview of unconscious bias regarding gender, race, nationality, sexuality and other factors comprising individual identities.

**Multiple Sources of Evidence** - The University Committee on Faculty Promotions and Tenure believes candidate reviews benefit when multiple sources of evidence are provided for review within each of the dossier categories (research, teaching and service). When multiple sources of evidence are available, reviewers are able to consider the preponderance of evidence, rather than evidence emanating from a singular or limited set of sources. As such, the University Committee on Faculty Promotions and Tenure urges department, college, and school administrators to ensure required data, such as annual (or periodic) reviews and peer reviews of teaching, are collected during the years leading up to dossier preparation. Doing so will decrease the reliance on and potential bias associated with any single source of evidence.

**Student Evaluations** - Student evaluations of teaching, such as the Marquette Online Course Evaluation System ("MOCES"), constitute an important part of the promotion and tenure dossier for all faculty at Marquette. The goal of these evaluations is to provide a standardized, quantitative comparison of teaching effectiveness within and across disciplines. However, studies of similar evaluation methods at universities worldwide have demonstrated that factors such as gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and the intersection of these identity factors, for example, can bias these scores. We urge those reviewing dossiers to be aware of students' unconscious or conscious bias. For your reference, below are selected studies that detail these challenges.

- American Sociological Association (2019) Statement on student evaluations of teaching. [Link to article](#)
- Boatright-Horowitz SL and Soeung S (2009) Teaching white privilege to white students can mean saying good-bye to positive student evaluations. *American Psychologist* 64, 574-575. [Link to article](#)
- Boring A (2017) Gender biases in student evaluations of teaching. *Journal of Public Economics* 145, 27–41. [Link to article](#)
- Cesario J and Crawford I (2003) The Effect of Homosexuality on Perceptions of Persuasiveness and Trustworthiness. *Journal of Homosexuality* 43:2, 93-110. [Link to article](#)
- Chávez K and Mitchell KMW (2020) Exploring bias in student evaluations: gender, race, and ethnicity. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 53, 270-274. [Link to article](#)
- Fan Y, Shepherd LJ, Slavich E, Waters D, Stone M, Abel R, *et al.* (2019) Gender and cultural bias in student evaluations: Why representation matters. *PLoS ONE* 14(2): e0209749. [Link to article](#)
- Heffernan T (2021) Sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias: a literature review and synthesis of research surrounding student evaluations of courses and teaching. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2021.1888075. [Link to article](#)
- Kreitzer RJ and Sweet-Cushman J (2021) Evaluating Student Evaluations of Teaching: a Review of Measurement and Equity Bias in SETs and Recommendations for Ethical Reform. *Journal of Academic Ethics* DOI: 10.1007/s10805-021-09400-w. [Link to article](#)
- MacNell L, Driscoll A, and Hunt AN (2015) What's in a name: Exposing gender bias in student ratings of teaching. *Innovative Higher Education* 40, 291–303. [Link to article](#)

- Oberle CD , Nagurney AJ, and Lee CN (2011) Implicit Prejudicial Biases in Student Learning: The Effects of Sexual Orientation. *Journal of Homosexuality* 58:4, 447-461. [Link to article](#)
- Reid LD (2010) The role of perceived race and gender in evaluation of college teaching on RateMyProfessors.com. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 3(3), 137–152. [Link to article](#)

Given the potential for bias, whether conscious or unconscious, in student evaluations of teaching for faculty in the relevant categories, we urge caution in placing undue emphasis on MOCES scores when evaluating faculty teaching, and recommend that the potential for bias, as well as alternative explanations, such as teaching content that is seen as challenging to students’ assumptions or beliefs, be considered when interpreting student evaluation scores.

**Service Expectations** - Female faculty and those from underrepresented groups often have a larger service load. Some of the service can be documented, such as service on committees, but members from marginalized groups often also do more "invisible service." For example, faculty of color are often sought out by students of color for informal mentoring sessions or advice on navigating the college years. These faculty also typically face greater expectations to serve on committees addressing diversity. Finally, faculty of color often play disproportionate roles in community outreach for the University. We urge all those who review dossiers to be aware of potential inequities in service. For your reference, below are selected studies that document these challenges.

- Guarino CM and Borden VMH (2017) Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family? *Research in Higher Education* 58: 672-694. [Link to article](#)
- Misra, J, Lundquist, JH, Holmes, E, and Agiomavritis, S (2011) The ivory ceiling of service work. *Academe* 97, 22–26. [Link to article](#)
- Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017) The burden of invisible work in academia: social inequalities and time use in five university departments. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 39, 228-245. [Link to article](#)

**Scholarship** – Bias can also extend to the evaluation of scholarship. A recent review article (in the neuroscience journal *Neuron*) concluded that gender bias affects “every aspect of academia,” including lower citation rates of articles by women compared to men in some fields, for example. Research on issues related to diversity (e.g., gender, sexual identity, health disparities, racism) has also historically been undervalued in some disciplines. We urge that these factors be taken into consideration when evaluating the scholarship of candidates. Below are selected studies that document these challenges.

- Dworkin, JD, Linn, KA, Teich, EG *et al.* (2020) The extent and drivers of gender imbalance in neuroscience reference lists. *Nature Neuroscience* 23: 918–926. [Link to article](#)
- Eaton, AA, Saunders, JF, Jacobson, RK, and West, K (2020) How gender and race stereotypes impact the advancement of scholars in STEM: professors’ biased evaluations of physics and biology post-doctoral candidates. *Sex Roles* 82, 127–141. [Link to article](#)
- Llorens A *et al.* (2021) Gender bias in academia: A lifetime problem that needs solutions. *Neuron* 109, 2047-74. [Link to article](#)
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). American Time Use Survey Summary. (*Note that in households with small children, women on average spend over two hours more per day than men in child care.*) [Link to article](#)

This document was unanimously approved by the University Committee on Faculty Promotions and Tenure May 8, 2024 and subsequently endorsed by the Provost on May 23, 2024.