

Questions to Consider during Promotion & Tenure Review Processes

Understanding How Unconscious Bias Influences Decision Making

- 1. Is the feedback provided within external/internal letters consistently valid, constructive, pertinent, and useful to the career development of the faculty member under review [1]? Do letters include basic features while aligning the candidate with their critical job responsibilities [2]?** Compared with recommendation letters written on behalf of men, research has shown that letters written on behalf of women were shorter and more likely to lack basic features, such as a statement of how the letter writer knew the applicant, concrete references to the applicant's record, or evaluative comments about the applicant's traits or accomplishments [3]. Letters written on behalf of women had more "doubt raisers" (hedges, faint praise, and irrelevancies) and were four times more likely to refer to their personal lives, compared with letters written on behalf of men [2,3,4]. Research has also shown that in recommendation letters, descriptions of men more closely align with critical job requirements (i.e., research record and ability) compared with descriptions of women [3].
- 2. What approaches to evaluating collaboration might be appropriate [1]?** With regard to collaboration, identify the advantages and disadvantages to collaborating [1]. Research has found that women prefer collaborative work more than their male peers do [5]. Address the difficulties and complexities related to the assessment of collaboration for tenure and promotion [1]. Is the work of women faculty members unfairly attributed to a research director or collaborators, despite contrary evidence in publications or letters of recommendation [4]? Is less credit given to women faculty because the research was not done alone? Are collaborators viewed as equal contributors, or is one viewed in a secondary or assisting role?
- 3. How will you weigh student teaching evaluations, and what other mechanisms will you use to evaluate teaching effectiveness?** Some scholars have found gender to have no (or very little) influence on evaluations of teaching, whereas other scholars have found gender to affect evaluations significantly [6,7,8], in which case findings generally show that student teaching evaluations are more negative for women faculty [9-19] with possible implications extending to award considerations [20]. Other possible alternative evaluation methods may include alumni ratings, peer ratings, informal student surveys, self-assessment statements, syllabi and other course documents, examples of student work, and teaching portfolios [6,21,22].
- 4. Is a heavy service burden evident in the candidate's portfolio [1]?** Many possible conditions exist for excessive service. For women and minority candidates who report spending more time on service commitments than their male and majority peers, respectively, it could lead to evaluation penalties for their not saying "no" to excess service, when saying "no" is sometimes not a viable option for them [1, 23]. **Are there any additional positive benefits to the institution when the female or minority faculty members participate in this type of service [1]?**
- 5. How will the committee account for gaps in the candidate's record, leaves of absence, or tenure clock extensions [1]?** Gaps during the review period can be evaluated in various ways such as by viewing achievements as cumulative. Extensions to the tenure probationary period should not increase the expectations for an individual faculty member's achievements towards tenure [24]. If the candidate for tenure had received an extension to his/her tenure probationary period, the reasons behind this extension will not be disclosed within the committee's letter [25].
- 6. Consider how gender shapes expectations for family responsibilities. Does parental status of a candidate affect arguments for or against a case [1]?** Traditionally, men with families are viewed as stable, settled, and committed to career, whereas women with families are expected to put family first and thus not considered to be serious about their careers [1,4].
- 7. What is your responsibility as a reviewer to notice and address potential issues of bias for the committee [1]?** Becoming aware of and minimizing bias is a collective endeavor. As a committee member, is the expectation that members will inform the committee of possible bias issues in the review process for a particular candidate? Is the expectation that members will discuss bias that they or others exhibit?



References

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