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Colleges and universities say they value diversity, equity and inclusion, but the faculty members doing this work are seldom recognized for it in any career-advancing way. That's about to change at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. The Faculty Council there just overwhelmingly approved a new path to tenure and promotion centered on DEI work.

Values Become Policy

"This is about keeping us accountable," said Jennifer Thorington Springer, a professor of English and associate dean of student affairs at IUPUI who helped draft the new policy. "We've been doing all these other things, reading the research and trying to understand bias in promotion and tenure and how we can begin to close that gap. Fast-forward to now, we're putting a policy in place that speaks to that change. We're no longer just talking about this and discussing this, but we're doing something about it."

Tenure-track and tenured professors are nearly always assessed and promoted based on their work in the areas of teaching, research and service. IUPUI has been no exception. Professors seeking promotion there have been required to demonstrate their "excellence" in one of those three areas and at least "satisfactory" performance in the remaining two areas. Alternatively, professors have also been allowed to present a "balance case" for promotion by demonstrating their "highly satisfactory" performance across teaching, research and service.

IUPUI's existing promotion and tenure standards do acknowledge DEI work. They say that the university is "committed to providing, nurturing and enhancing a diverse community of learners and scholars in an environment of equity and inclusion." The standards also say faculty work that "contributes to the diversity of learners and scholars at IUPUI and that enhances our environment of equity and inclusion is highly valued and should be acknowledged and rewarded in the review process."

But that's in theory. In practice, at IUPUI and elsewhere, many professors who do significant amounts of DEI work say that when it comes to tenure and promotion, they have to contort their efforts into the language of traditional teaching, research and service and hope for the best. Sometimes this works. Sometimes it doesn't. In such cases, reviewers don't see DEI-related work as grounds for promotion.

As a result, academe has [lost](#) ^[1] -- either through attrition or [tenure denials](#) ^[2] -- untold numbers of scholars devoted to DEI work. These professors are [disproportionately likely](#) ^[3] to be from historically marginalized groups, so the trend doesn't bode well for academe's diversity goals. And the cycle of tenured professors rewarding traditional definitions of teaching, research and service continues.

The DEI Case for Promotion

Starting in 2022 at IUPUI, though, scholars will have another option ^[4] for tenure and promotion: the “balanced-integrative case” for excellence in DEI. To be promoted based on this standard, candidates must demonstrate excellence “across an array of integrated scholarly activities aligned with diversity, equity and inclusion.” Professors must articulate a DEI philosophy and show how their teaching, research and service advance DEI. They must also demonstrate independence, innovation and initiative, along with scholarly impact, local impact and development over time.

Would-be associate professors “will have led or been an essential part of endeavors with distinct and demonstrable local outcomes,” according to the new standard. National or international influence is expected. Would-be full professors “will be seen as a local leader and will also have achieved a national or international reputation through their work.”

A Faculty Council subcommittee charged with researching the scope of the new policy defined ^[5] diversity as “Perceived human differences in appearance, thinking, and actions, shaped by historical and social systems of advantage and disadvantage.” Diversity includes, but is not limited to, “intersectional identities formed around ideas and experiences related to race, ethnicity, class, color, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, size, disability, veteran status, national origin, religion, language, and/or marital status.”

Equity, meanwhile is defined, in part, as the promotion of “access, opportunity, justice and fairness through policies and practices that are appropriate for specific individuals and groups.” Inclusion under the new policy is an “approach designed to ensure that the thoughts, opinions, perspectives and experiences of all individuals are valued, heard, encouraged, respected and considered.”

The subcommittee also established a list of minimum standards and what could constitute excellence under the new policy. They address publications, grants, mentorship, teaching, research, service, community engagement and awards.

Individual schools within IUPUI will take the next few months to adopt these standards or tweak them to reflect disciplinary needs and values. Conversations about adopting these standards for non-tenure-track faculty members are also happening in earnest.

Starting With the Tenure Track

James Scheurich, professor of education and another member of the policy task force, said it made sense to begin with tenure standards because “that’s at the core of policy.”

“I’ve been doing antiracist work for decades, and this is the biggest move I’ve seen a university make,” Scheurich continued. “I don’t see anybody else doing this. People are raising consciousness and doing trainings, but I don’t see people changing their tenure and promotion policies.”

Yet this kind of innovation must happen, he said. “We have get down to policy changes to make universities more gender and racially equitable. I hear a lot of talk, but I don’t see a lot of change. Talk is easy.”

As for whether he imagines IUPUI’s approach will spread, Scheurich said, “I hope people see this and call us up and ask, ‘How’d you do that?’”

Wanda Thruston, clinical assistant professor of nursing and special assistant to the dean for diversity, equity and inclusion, also helped shape the new policy as chair of the Faculty Council's committee on diversity, equity and inclusion. She said that her administrative role connects her to dozens of DEI-minded leaders in academic nursing from around the country, and that many are indeed interested in what IUPUI is doing, and how.

Thruston also has a personal investment in the new policy: whereas many of those who helped draft or approve it are already tenured, Thruston will soon be seeking promotion. While she's a clinical faculty member and therefore not technically tenure track, she hopes she can apply for promotion to associate clinical professor with a DEI-based case within the next two years.

Thruston, who does community-based health research involving young Black men in Indianapolis, could make a case for promotion based on excellence in service or even teaching and research. But as a Black woman at an institution where there are relatively few, she said she's been asked to serve in numerous DEI-related roles, from mentor to planner to the lone Black woman on a hiring committee in music, of all programs. This work is not compensated in terms of money or time, she said, but the new pathway to promotion could be a way to finally get some credit for it.

In any case, Thruston said, the policy change is "one of the first steps" toward a more equitable academe.

"There's a lot more that goes into attracting faculty of color, and university promotion is one thing," she added.

Part of Larger Initiative

IUPUI's new policy is part of a larger [commitment to antiracism](#) ^[6], which was sparked by last summer's international protests over systemic racism. But the tenure and promotion policy shift, in particular, was inspired in part by an [open letter](#) ^[7] in *Science* about systemic racism in academe.

Regarding faculty members of color, that letter said that [academic culture fails](#) ^[8] them by awarding them "fewer federal grants due to systemic bias and topic area. BIPOC faculty are most likely to invest substantial time in activities that promote diversity, which are devalued in the tenure and promotion process."

Professors of color are further disadvantaged in tenure decisions "through cultural taxation of unequal service and mentoring demands," the letter also said. "Given these burdens, BIPOC faculty cannot be expected to be the primary agents of institutional change. Instead, those most empowered to make change -- non-BIPOC faculty -- must join BIPOC faculty in their efforts to prioritize recruiting, supporting, and championing diversity."

Gina Sánchez Gibau, associate professor of anthropology and associate vice chancellor for faculty diversity and inclusion, helped lead a subcommittee of the Faculty Council as it investigated how tenure and promotion policies could better embody the university's stated commitment to DEI. For the most part, Gibau said that other institutions asking about DEI within the tenure process wanted personal statements or awarded credit within the area of teaching as inclusive pedagogy. But IUPUI is now

allowing -- encouraging -- professors to “thread the narrative” of DEI throughout their teaching, research and service work.

Gibau said “there’s nothing in the universe of or the landscape of higher ed that has traditionally allowed that work to count. But we do it anyways, because it’s a calling, and it’s important, and it helps students succeed.”

Springer said the 2018 book *An Inclusive Academy: Achieving Diversity and Excellence* [9] also inspired campus conversations about DEI. Virginia Valian, co-author of that book and a distinguished professor of psychology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, said IUPUI’s new pathway to tenure seemed to “recognize varieties of excellence,” in that “an academic’s knowledge, research and scholarship can have a significant positive impact in a number of ways.”

Scholars’ activities can “enlarge their field, their university” or “the larger community,” she added.

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Teaching and Learning [12]

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Links

[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/29/book-argues-faculty-members-color-going-tenure-are-judged-different-standard-white>

[2] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/22/two-black-scholars-say-uva-denied-them-tenure-after-belittling-their-work>

[3] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/04/whos-doing-heavy-lifting-terms-diversity-and-inclusion-work>

[4] https://academicaffairs.iupui.edu/Strategic-Initiatives#RMPTMC?utm_source=10-promotion-tenure-pathway-enhancing-diversity-equity-

[inclusion&utm_medium=email&utm_content=a+change+to+faculty+promotion+and+tenure+guidelines&utm_campaign=ag](https://academicaffairs.iupui.edu/Strategic-Initiatives#RMPTMC?utm_source=10-promotion-tenure-pathway-enhancing-diversity-equity-inclusion&utm_medium=email&utm_content=a+change+to+faculty+promotion+and+tenure+guidelines&utm_campaign=ag)

[5] <https://facultycouncil.iupui.edu/Committees/Subcommittee-on-DEI-Work-Metrics.html>

[6] <https://diversity.iupui.edu/initiatives/anti-racism-initiatives/index.html>

[7] <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6510/1440.2.full>

[8] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/21/scholars-talk-about-being-black-campus-2020>

[9] <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/inclusive-academy>

[10] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/diversity>

[11] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/news-sections/faculty>

[12] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/teaching-and-learning>