

CAL POLY HUMBOLDT
University Senate

Resolution to Address Bias in the Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness Process

12-22/23-FAC —December 13, 2022 — Second Reading

RESOLVED: That the University Senate of Cal Poly Humboldt recommends the following changes to Appendices J, K, and M be forwarded to the General Faculty for a vote of acceptance or rejection; and be it further,

RESOLVED: That these changes become effective at the beginning of the 2023 - 2024 Academic year upon approval by the General Faculty; and

RESOLVED: That these updates address bias in the Student Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness (SETs) process to mitigate bias in the RTP process; and

RESOLVED: That the University Senate of Cal Poly Humboldt acknowledges that bias exists in the process of gathering student feedback as well as in the collegial evaluation of student feedback and that this be acknowledged in the Faculty Handbook; and

RESOLVED: That the University Senate of Cal Poly Humboldt defines bias as “a conscious or unconscious attitude or stereotype that affects our understanding, actions, and decisions. Implicit, or unconscious, biases often contradict our openly-held beliefs or attitudes, undermining our intentions”;¹ and

RESOLVED: That departments should acknowledge that bias exists in the teaching evaluation process; and

RESOLVED: That the naming for SETs be changed to ‘student feedback on teaching effectiveness’; and

RESOLVED: That the faculty handbook should be revised to include instructions on how candidates can object to biased content in their personnel file, including collegial and student evaluations (in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement); and be it further

RESOLVED: That faculty personnel committees should have support and training in understanding how to recognize and deal with bias when evaluating faculty files.

¹ Cheryl Staats et al., “STATE OF THE SCIENCE: IMPLICIT BIAS REVIEW” (Kirwan Institute, 2016), <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/2016-state-science-implicit-bias-review>.

RATIONALE:

Research demonstrates that bias in the SETs process exists and disproportionately impacts faculty of color and faculty who identify as femme, trans, women, or non-binary. The evidence also has found bias against faculty with other identities and characteristics, including sexual orientation, age, rank, disability, accent, pregnancy or parental status.² These biases add to the myriad of circumstances that make it difficult for faculty from marginalized groups to advance through the RTP process and take on leadership roles in the University.

The [2021-2022 UFPC End of Year Report](#) recommends developing “guidance to address student and collegial biases in evaluating the teaching effectiveness of women faculty and faculty of color.”³

These proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook appear modest, but are a significant first step in acknowledging and addressing bias, which is currently not reflected in the handbook. Faculty evaluations are directly related to hiring, range elevations, retention, promotion and tenure. Acknowledging bias in student evaluations is a major step in mitigating bias in the entire evaluation process: it opens discussion about bias, creates opportunities for bias awareness, and demonstrates that bias needs to be addressed in faculty evaluation processes. The proposed changes also aim to clarify the process by which faculty can address bias in their SETs, which currently exists, but is not well-known.

This proposal institutes widely recognized internal and interpersonal bias mitigation strategies, including promoting self-awareness, understanding the nature of bias, discussing bias, and implementing bias literacy trainings. It also includes institutional strategies, including the

² Lillian MacNell, Adam Driscoll, and Andrea N. Hunt, “What’s in a Name: Exposing Gender Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching,” *Innovative Higher Education* 40, no. 4 (August 1, 2015): 291–303, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-014-9313-4>; Peterson, David A. M., Lori A. Biederman, David Andersen, Tessa M. Ditonto, and Kevin Roe. “Mitigating Gender Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching.” *PLOS ONE* 14, no. 5 (May 15, 2019): e0216241. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216241>; Rebecca J. Kreitzer and Jennie Sweet-Cushman, “Evaluating Student Evaluations of Teaching: A Review of Measurement and Equity Bias in SETs and Recommendations for Ethical Reform,” *Journal of Academic Ethics* 20, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 73–84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09400-w>; Anne Boring and Kellie Ottoboni, “Student Evaluations of Teaching (Mostly) Do Not Measure Teaching Effectiveness,” *ScienceOpen Research*, January 7, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1>; Friederike Mengel, Jan Sauermann, and Ulf Zölitz, “Gender Bias in Teaching Evaluations,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 17, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 535–66, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvx057>; Anish Bavishi, Juan M. Madera, and Michelle R. Hebl, “The Effect of Professor Ethnicity and Gender on Student Evaluations: Judged before Met,” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 3 (2010): 245–56, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020763>; Bettye P. Smith and Billy Hawkins, “Examining Student Evaluations of Black College Faculty: Does Race Matter?,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 2 (2011): 149–62; Dana A. Williams, “Examining the Relation between Race and Student Evaluations of Faculty Members: A Literature Review,” *Profession*, 2007, 168–73. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25595863>

³ The University Faculty Personnel Committee (UFPC), “2021-2022 UFPC End of Year Report,” April 29, 2022, <https://hraps.humboldt.edu/2021-2022-ufpc-end-year-report>.

development of clear, concrete, objective indicators and standardized criteria for faculty evaluation.⁴

Changes to mitigate bias in the RTP process and creating transparency in how faculty can address bias in their files arguably also protect the university from lawsuits. Our current lack of documentation in addressing bias and the lack of acknowledgement of bias does not insulate us from this well-documented phenomenon, but arguably leaves us open to liability.⁵

This resolution does not address certain aspects of the SETs process that require more extensive work (such as changing the evaluation instrument itself) and it does not address aspects that must be changed through the Collective Bargaining Agreement. However, the Faculty Affairs Committee plans to continue working on this, with more extensive revisions perhaps in spring 2023.

[Proposed changes to Appendix J](#)
[Proposed changes to Appendix K](#)
[Proposed changes to Appendix M](#)

⁴ “Unconscious Bias Training | Office of Diversity and Outreach UCSF,” accessed November 17, 2022, <https://diversity.ucsf.edu/programs-resources/training/unconscious-bias-training>; “Implicit Bias Module Series,” accessed November 17, 2022, <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training>.

⁵ Ann Owen, “The Next Lawsuits to Hit Higher Education,” Inside Higher Ed, June 24, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/06/24/relying-often-biased-student-evaluations-assess-faculty-could-lead-lawsuits-opinion>.