

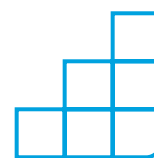
New workplace agreements create opportunities for a more diverse faculty

The extraordinary events of the last two years have forced new flexibility into the higher education workplace. For years before the pandemic, higher education staff asked for more telework opportunities, yet most staff were required to go into the office five days a week. Faced with the great resignation and realizing how much higher education work could be done well at home, many higher education institutions have shifted to allowing staff to telework one, two, or more days a week.

A similar phenomenon is occurring in faculty appointments and workplace arrangements. Over the last two decades, awareness has increased that minoritized faculty and women faculty face differential treatment and implicit bias in classrooms, peer review, hiring, and faculty evaluation. Institutions have adopted interventions to mitigate and remove bias from hiring, workload, tenure, and award decisions, with some success. (See, for example, the University of Michigan's [STRIDE](#) program.) However, efforts to address racial justice and make systems, policies, and practices more inclusive have shifted the conversation from differential treatment (e.g., preferring John over Maria even when they have the same qualifications) to rethinking the role of "default characteristics."

Cheryan and Marcus (2020) explain that default characteristics are evaluative criteria, rules, and policies that may seem neutral or objective but in fact advantage majority groups and make it harder for minoritized faculty and women faculty to earn coveted positions and promotions, establish a work-life balance and, ultimately, achieve long-term financial success and security. These default characteristics live in one-size-fits-all policies, practices, and systems that make it harder for a diverse faculty to fit and belong.

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One-size-fits-all criteria and policies make it harder for a diverse faculty to fit and belong.

For example, higher education institutions often disproportionately ask minoritized faculty and women faculty to engage in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) work. However, during tenure review, often a one-size-fits-all model is applied and DEIJ work is not considered. White and male faculty, who are often less involved in DEIJ work, have an advantage in this system because more of their contributions are evaluated. Encouraging DEIJ work and then not rewarding it creates what scholars have referred to as “closure” of opportunities for those engaged in DEIJ work (Gonzales, 2022).

Fortunately, some colleges and universities are seeking to better understand the default characteristics in policies and practices that create unintentional closures for particular groups of faculty (Mickey, Misra & Clark, 2022; O’Meara, 2022). These institutions are adding greater flexibility and opportunities for a diverse faculty with different experiences, talents, and needs (see Table 1).

Entry: Types of appointments and on-ramps

Most tenure track appointments promote faculty based on research, teaching, and service, with the emphasis on each component varying by institutional type. Although many institutions have offered lecturers, who focus on teaching, the opportunity to earn longer contracts (e.g., three, five, or even 10 years in some circumstances), scholars who emphasize teaching generally have not been offered greater opportunities to earn tenure. One exception is the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), which created one of the first teaching-to-tenure tracks in response to an institutional imperative to incentivize and reward teaching excellence. These new appointments allow faculty to work toward tenure while emphasizing excellence in the scholarship of teaching. In launching this program, WPI could have decided to conduct national searches for its new teaching-to-tenure track appointments. However, WPI recognized teaching excellence within its own ranks by first allowing lecturers to apply internally for these positions. With this approach, WPI removed the common barrier facing non-tenure track faculty in national searches for tenure track roles. In short, WPI created a new opportunity where it did not exist before.

Catalyzed in part by the National Science Foundation AGEP (Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate) program, which seeks to recruit, prepare, and advance historically minoritized groups in STEM fields, several higher education institutions have created postdoc-to-tenure conversion programs. (See, for example, the University of California’s [President’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#).) Such programs hire recent graduates into postdoc positions that can automatically be converted into tenure track positions after one or two years. This reduces the number of years a faculty member has to serve in a postdoc position to get on the tenure track, making an academic career more feasible for faculty with financial concerns (such as significant loans) and for whom possibly moving three times is not viable.



Flexibility creates new opportunities for a diverse faculty to enter and advance in academic careers.

Time to advancement

Over the last 30 years, most higher education institutions that award tenure have added some type of stop-the-clock provision to their tenure policies, allowing, for example, a one-year stop for the birth or adoption of a child. Recognizing the effects of the pandemic on faculty scholarship and teaching, as well as additional service burdens, many colleges and universities also provide faculty the option to add a year or two to their six-year tenure clock. Some institutions have taken this modification a step further by recognizing default characteristics that could disadvantage those using it. For example, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, similar to many higher education institutions, has allowed faculty to delay tenure because of pandemic-related disruptions. However, UMass Amherst leaders and faculty also recognized the pandemic’s disproportionate effect on women parents of young children and minoritized faculty, and that delaying the tenure decision also meant delaying the pay increase that came with it—further disadvantaging those who delayed and negatively affecting their retirement savings. In response, UMass Amherst adopted a policy that would back-date faculty pay to their initial tenure decision year so that faculty could take advantage of the time without being harmed

financially (Mickey, Misra & Clark, 2022). This kind of equity-minded systems approach created flexibility where it was needed while also recognizing that faculty have differences in career interruptions and experiences that require different supports to succeed.

Conversations also are occurring about creating windows, or ranges of years, within which a faculty member might go up for tenure or promotion, and about reviving the idea of achieving “tenure by objectives,” wherein a faculty member could certify accomplishments in different years or stages rather than all at one time (Chait, 1998; Mickey et al, 2020; O’Meara, 2022). Revisiting the six-year up-or-out tenure model and the logic behind it also helps faculty involved in community-engaged work, given that strict time parameters disadvantage faculty involved in scholarship with communities, publics, and government, and others whose trajectories differ from the six-year standard. The University of West Virginia (WVU), for example, acknowledges that candidates will have different career trajectories in its policy that allows flexibility in the time for promotion from associate to full professor.¹ More flexible timelines for tenure and promotion create new openings for faculty whose life trajectories and work require more flexibility to meet criteria for promotion.

Terms of advancement

As described above, WPI added flexibility by creating a new tenure track, a type of appointment that emphasized teaching. Another way to add flexibility in faculty appointments is to add to the terms of advancement for existing faculty. For example, WVU is among several institutions that make it possible to emphasize academic leadership in the promotion process from associate to full professor,² and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) has created a [DEIJ track to tenure](#). Such reform in criteria for advancement recognizes the many different talents and contributions faculty make to institutional missions. (See O’Meara, 2022, for interviews with policy leaders at these institutions.)

Two additional developments are worth noting: First, Monash University [evaluates faculty based on their achievements relative to their opportunities](#). Similar to the rise of COVID impact statements, but more of an overall framework for evaluation, this approach doesn’t hold faculty to rigid standards (e.g., they must win a

particular research grant or award to be deemed worthy of promotion), but rather assesses achievements within a backdrop of constraints and opportunities particular to that scholar during the time under evaluation.

Second, institutions like the University of Denver and WPI are rethinking their faculty contracts to address the significant problems that can arise for both professional track faculty and institutions from employing faculty on year-to-year contracts. Both Denver and WPI are providing greater job security and career ladders for professional track faculty, and likewise have created new possibilities for those faculty and their families to settle into their communities, and for the institution to better plan for courses and programs. These investments in faculty and student success have been acknowledged by the [Delphi Project](#).

Conclusion

Colleges and universities are recognizing the need for greater flexibility in their workforce. One of the common concerns one hears from faculty or institutional leaders considering such reform is a fear that they will “water down standards” by making it too easy to be hired and promoted. In each of the examples provided here, the new work arrangements are quite the opposite. The criteria established for hiring and promotion are rigorous. These policies, however, do offer faculty more paths to meet rigorous standards by being inclusive of the greater mosaic of talent and contributions faculty make. Further, these new arrangements in types of appointments, time to promotion, and terms of advancement recognize the constraints and opportunities that surround faculty as they strive to achieve high standards, creating new openings for a more diverse faculty to flourish.

1 See [West Virginia University Procedures for Faculty Appointment, Annual Evaluation, Promotion, and Tenure 2014-15](#), p. 7.

2 *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

Table 1. Work agreements that expand opportunities

	Policies or practices that can close out opportunity...	New openings
<i>Entry: Types of appointments and on-ramps</i>	<p>One-size-fits-all tenure track that emphasizes one institutionally mandated balance of teaching, research and service</p> <p>Valuing external candidates for tenure track roles over local candidates</p> <p>Aspects of the academic career track that require geographic mobility and foregoing salary</p>	<p>Teaching to tenure track</p> <p>Offering current non-tenure track faculty the opportunity to compete internally for new positions before opening to a national search</p> <p>Postdoc to tenure-track conversion programs</p>
<i>Time to Advancement</i>	Single-year parameters for advancement	More flexible windows for advancement
<i>Terms of Advancement</i>	<p>One-size-fits-all tenure and promotion criteria</p> <p>Limited career ladders and single-year appointments for professional track faculty</p> <p>Default assumptions built into practices that everyone has the same opportunities to achieve criteria for advancement</p>	<p>Tenure tracks emphasizing teaching, DEI work, and academic leadership</p> <p>Longer contracts for non-tenure track positions</p> <p>Achievement relative to opportunity and COVID impact statements</p>

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