

# Enabling possibility: Reform of faculty appointments and evaluation

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## Summary

With good reason, we often focus on the problems inherent in how faculty are recruited, appointed and evaluated. Current appointment and evaluation systems are especially problematic as they relate to diversity and inclusion, student-centered teaching, and community engagement missions. The focus of this paper, however, is on success. My goal here is to consider how faculty appointment and reward systems can support distinctive institutional missions, goals and objectives, and enable a diverse faculty to flourish.

This work begins with a view from the balcony and considers the broader goals of reform in faculty appointment and reward systems, including: (a) improving transparency, clarity, and consistency; (b) aligning reward systems and missions; (c) expanding measures of impact; (d) improving access and equity for a more diverse faculty; (e) enhancing flexibility; and (f) strengthening accountability. Three types of reforms—multiple pathways to tenure, a tenure by objectives system, and strengthening the employment conditions of non-tenure track faculty—show promise to achieve these goals and more. To illustrate these reforms, three case studies are reviewed, including interviews with the institutional agents who initiated and implemented them. The paper concludes with discussion of the three reforms and how institutions might apply similar strategies to simultaneously advance both institutional missions and faculty careers.

## Key takeaways

- Higher education leaders can reimagine faculty appointment and reward systems as critical enablers of institutional missions and faculty careers.
- Generally, reforms of such systems aim to improve transparency, clarity, and consistency; align institutional mission and reward systems; expand measures of impact; and enhance flexibility, accountability, and equity. Strategies to accomplish these goals will differ depending on institutional mission and type, resources, local constraints, and opportunities.
- Three types of reforms of faculty appointment and reward systems are emerging that accomplish these goals simultaneously in creative ways: multiple pathways to tenure, tenure by objectives, and stronger employment conditions for non-tenure track faculty.
- Case studies of these reforms being put into practice show that key institutional goals such as teaching excellence, diversity, equity and inclusion, and academic leadership were effectively supported by the reforms. Moreover, faculty careers at these institutions improved with greater flexibility, recognition for mission-critical work, transparency, and expanded measures of faculty impact.

Most of the time, when we talk about how faculty are recruited, appointed, retained and promoted, we are discussing a problem.

I have studied faculty evaluation systems for over 20 years and worked with many colleges and universities as they revise their systems of evaluation. A good portion of that time has involved talking to faculty, academic leaders, and other stakeholders about what their current system of hiring, and promoting faculty, is *preventing*.

Such conversations, and corresponding research studies, emphasize how faculty appointment and evaluation systems constrain advancement opportunities for community engaged scholars (O'Meara, 2002; 2011b; 2016; O'Meara, Eatman & Peterson, 2015) and minoritized groups (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; O'Meara, 2014; O'Meara, 2011a; O'Meara, Templeton & Nyunt, 2018; O'Meara, Culpepper, Misra & Jaeger, 2020). The remedy is equity-minded reform, which requires homing in on very particular faculty evaluation policy language and practices that reproduce inequality through narrow definitions of excellence and conditions that invite implicit bias (see Gonzales and Griffin, 2020; O'Meara & Templeton, 2022; Posselt, Hernandez & Villarreal, 2019).

Advancing diversity and inclusion is a stated goal of most higher education institutions. Therefore, understanding how to reform policies and practices to become more equity-minded and supportive of a diverse faculty is critical (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; O'Meara & Templeton, 2022), but not the main focus of this paper. Rather, the focus of this paper is how colleges and universities are enabling their distinctive institutional missions, goals and objectives to flourish through reform in their overall faculty appointment and evaluation systems. Most institutions have goals related to diversity and inclusion, and teaching excellence, community engagement, and research prominence as well. I am interested in how faculty appointments and evaluation systems can enable distinctive institutional missions and goals.

The tenure model enacted by AAUP has been amended, but not substantively changed, since it was enacted in 1940. Yet, what a faculty member needs to do to earn tenure has always differed by institutional type (Chait, 2002; O'Meara, 2011a; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The significant growth in non-tenure track positions and decline in tenure track positions is well established (AAUP, 2018). There are many non-tenure track faculty who build 30+-year careers at the same institution, fulfilling institutional missions and making critical contributions. Because most higher education institutions have different kinds of appointment systems running concurrently, this paper centers humane, mutual agreements between faculty and institutions that synergistically advance individual faculty careers and institutional missions across tenure, non-tenure track, and hybrid type appointments.

We begin on the balcony, considering the goals of reform in faculty appointments and evaluation. The intention here is to encourage bigger questions than the tenure debates in the news tend to produce. Rather, I hope trustees, presidents, provosts, faculty and unions will reflect on the organizational conditions that can be put in place through faculty appointment systems so that faculty can build careers in higher education and institutional missions can be powered simultaneously. I tell the stories of three types of reforms that have emerged in higher education that might enable greater possibility—for both faculty and institutions. These three types of reforms are: multiple pathways to tenure, a tenure by objectives system, and strengthening the employment conditions of non-tenure track systems.

The paper concludes with discussion of each of the three reforms in light of the goals noted earlier. The notation of “might” is important because in most cases, there is not yet data on outcomes. Rather, these are promising experiments aiming toward a set of goals that could be achieved through different kinds of arrangements. No one reform is in and of itself “the answer.” However, if we begin with the goals of reform, we can see different ways to arrive at those goals that are most relevant to different institutional types.

### The goals of reform

Table I below outlines six goals of reform in faculty appointments and reward systems, and provides illustrations of policies and practices that have been adopted to achieve these goals.

**Table I. Goals of reform in faculty appointments and reward systems**

Goal of reform	Description	Examples of Reforms
Improve transparency, clarity and consistency	Improve faculty experience within their faculty appointment and evaluation system so that the institution can best attract talent, improve retention, performance, advancement and morale.	Modifications to improve transparency, clarity, consistency, agency and representation; longer-term contracts for non-tenure track faculty; greater voice in shared governance
Align with institutional mission and objectives	Align mission-critical faculty work and appointment and reward systems.	Alternative pathways to tenure; revision of faculty contracts and/or tenure and promotion to include and/or give greater weight to mentoring, teaching, campus service and DEI contributions
Expand measures of Impact	Change the criteria and methods of assessment of faculty teaching, scholarship and service.	Holistic assessments of teaching; expansive definitions of scholarship, and impact; measures of public engagement
Build a more diverse and equitable institution	Remove barriers to full participation; improve experiences of organizational justice and inclusion.	Training on implicit bias and inclusive hiring, evaluation and retention strategies; COVID impact statements
Create greater flexibility	Redesign to account for varied faculty life trajectories, career interests, talents and institutional needs.	Part-time tenure tracks; stop the tenure clock; family leave; parental leave; differentiated workloads; modified criteria to tenure
Ensure greater accountability	Add measures to ensure faculty are meeting key benchmarks; reporting to stakeholders.	State-mandated faculty workload policies; post-tenure review; annual faculty reporting systems

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive; some reforms have sought to accomplish multiple goals simultaneously.

A few notes regarding the table will be helpful. First, the most obvious shift that has occurred in faculty appointments and reward systems in the last 30 years is the shift from tenure track to non-tenure track appointments. In most cases, this shift involved “unbundling” the faculty role from one of full-time faculty focused on teaching, research and service to part-time and full-time faculty focused on teaching (Rice, 1996). In some cases, decision-making to shift from one appointment type to another was intentional and cost savings could be considered a goal of reform, much like corporate decisions that have shaped the “gig” economy (Kezar, DePaulo & Scott, 2019). However, in other cases, the decision to appoint a non-tenure track faculty member where a tenure track faculty member had been was made quickly and somewhat arbitrarily, because it was easier for a department to hire a non-tenure track faculty member than to get a tenure track faculty member appointment approved, and so the path of least resistance and

a lack of long-term planning and intentionality explained the shift (Lounder, 2015). Because the shift from tenure track appointments to non-tenure track appointments over time is a complex issue covered well by other scholars and research (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Sam, 2013; Kezar, 2021), it is not addressed in Table I as a formal goal of faculty appointment reform.

Second, note that the six goals of faculty appointment and reward system reform overlap. Multiple goals are often intended by a single reform. For example, stop the tenure clock policies for childbirth and/or adoption were put in place to attract and retain faculty talent as a competitive benefit, and to add flexibility for individual faculty as they navigate work-life integration (ACE, 2005; Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007).

The third note relates to the agents initiating, and the constraints surrounding, reform. In many cases, reforms across institutional types were initiated by actors inside higher education, such as provosts, deans and faculty. In other cases, reforms were initiated by external stakeholders and constituents that were concerned with accountability. On unionized campuses, reforms to faculty appointments and evaluation systems were part of collective bargaining and became part of faculty contracts.

Most reforms went through formal shared governance processes, such as through university senates, to be put in place. Some reforms required approval by Board of Trustees, and state systems of higher education. In public institutions, reforms of faculty employment and evaluation systems also had to be consistent with rules governing state employees. On unionized campuses, many aspects of faculty appointments and evaluation systems are negotiated as part of contracts. As such, sometimes needed changes to faculty appointments and reward systems have not been made for reasons related more to institutional organization, charter, and geography than to a lack of “will” on the part of faculty or leaders. In all cases, the process by which a reform is initiated, negotiated and implemented by relevant stakeholders is critical to its success (Birnbaum, 1990; Kezar, 2021).



## Goal I. Improve transparency, clarity and consistency

The fact that higher education institutions compete for faculty and want to retain their talent has led to many reforms that seek to improve faculty experience of their evaluation system (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007; Laursen & Austin, 2020; O’Meara & Rice, 2005; O’Meara, Terosky & Neumann, 2008). For example, the tenure system has long been critiqued for keeping faculty in the dark about what will matter in their evaluation (Rice, 1996; O’Meara, 2011a; Trower & Chait, 2002). Foucault (1991) observed that the tenure system is in many ways like a panopticon, in that a candidate knows their work is being observed at all times, but not what other candidates are doing. Pre-tenure candidates often experience the faculty evaluation process as a goalpost that keeps moving but suspect that their tenured colleagues like it that way because it keeps them working harder (Chait, 2002; O’Meara, 2011a; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008). Non-tenure track faculty often feel like too much of their job is “other duties as assigned” and feel vulnerable in approaching contract negotiations because of a lack of clarity in their job description and annual evaluation process (Kezar, 2013; O’Meara, Templeton & Nyunt, 2018).

Such ambiguity can contribute to dissatisfaction and invite implicit biases into evaluation. Banerjee and Pawley (2013) wrote about the “foggy climate” that permeates faculty evaluation, and observed that environments where there are ambiguous standards are more likely to be places that disadvantage faculty who have been

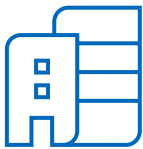
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traditionally marginalized and minoritized, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Women.

Responding to these and other concerns, one set of reforms seeks to improve the transparency, clarity, and consistency of the faculty appointment and evaluation process, so as to provide faculty guidance and to ensure faculty agency and due process rights (O'Meara & Templeton, 2022). For example, some institutions add a stage in the evaluation process where the candidate can meet with the personnel committee and ask questions, or respond to a negative decision with their own appeal letter earlier in the process. Some institutions allow pre-tenure faculty, though not voting, to sit in and listen to tenure decisions. Many institutions have revised their policies to ensure non-tenure track faculty are involved in the evaluation of other non-tenure track faculty to add context and representation to the evaluation.

There is a balancing act between having clearer criteria and still meeting the goal of flexibility. For example, if a department or university requires that a faculty member receive a particular NIH grant before they can be promoted to full professor, and the grant has tended not to reward a particular kind of research, that is not a flexible system. However, if the language is made broader to suggest the person must show "intellectual leadership as a scholar," that broadness could be interpreted differently by different evaluators. To balance clarity and flexibility, those writing policy reform try to establish a general expectation, with multiple examples of how someone might meet that expectation (O'Meara & Templeton, 2022; Stewart & Valian, 2018). These are just some examples of reform to improve transparency, clarity and consistency in faculty appointments and evaluation systems.

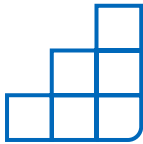


## Goal II. Align with institutional mission and objectives

Faculty reward systems are critical enablers of institutional mission and objectives (Birnbaum, 1990; O'Meara, 2011a). As in any organization, incentives matter to motivate employees. Yet too often, mission-critical work—such as student learning outcomes, community engagement, and/or diversity and inclusion initiatives—are not included in the faculty evaluation process or given adequate weight in advancement (O'Meara, 2011b; O'Meara and Templeton, 2022).

In order to align mission and reward system and to update the reward system to reflect current institutional priorities, institutional agents have revised faculty evaluation policies to be inclusive of such areas as diversity, equity and inclusion, student access and retention, mentoring, and teaching innovation. For example, many colleges and universities center community engaged scholarship as a key goal and objective. Yet the definition of scholarship in faculty evaluation policies is narrow and not inclusive of scholarship that is community engaged, interdisciplinary, and crafted for lay audiences. Faculty and academic leaders addressed this issue by writing more inclusive and expansive definitions of scholarship into their faculty evaluation policies (O'Meara, 2005; O'Meara & Rice, 2005; O'Meara, Eatman & Peterson, 2015). A survey of Chief Academic Officers several years after definitions of scholarship were revised showed dual benefits; provosts felt the reforms had catalyzed work in the scholarships of teaching and community engagement, and that scholars involved in teaching scholarship and community engagement were more likely to be advanced (O'Meara, 2005; O'Meara & Rice, 2005).

Although less common, some universities created alternative pathways to tenure, with each approved pathway emphasizing a different area of mission-critical work. Some reforms took the approach of allowing a faculty member to be promoted based on excellence in one category (e.g., teaching) and strength in the other two (research and service). Additionally, during the pandemic, as higher education institutions pivoted to virtual learning, there has been discussion of how to ensure that institutional goals and objectives related to student support were embedded in faculty evaluation (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020).



### Goal III. Expand measures of impact

Another goal of reform is to rethink how higher education assesses faculty teaching, scholarship, campus service, and community engagement. Perhaps the greatest expansion has been in the assessment of teaching and mentoring. For example, although there is some variability, most studies of student teaching evaluations point to several reasons why they should not be the primary means to evaluate teaching. First and foremost, student evaluations tend to focus more on student experience and satisfaction with a course, rather than student learning (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2021). Second, student teaching evaluations often contain implicit biases that are gendered and racialized (Eidinger, 2017; MacNeill et al, 2015; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). Finally, student evaluations do not account for advising and mentoring outside formal classrooms.

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Student teaching evaluations often contain implicit biases that are gendered and racialized.

Reforms have been underway to expand how teaching and mentoring is evaluated. Many institutions now require teaching portfolios, which include peer observations of teaching, teaching philosophy and reflection statements, examples of grading or feedback provided to students, and evidence of student learning. Faculty are encouraged to include professional development they undertook to improve teaching and learning, efforts to help students find jobs and careers after graduation, and efforts to broaden participation in their field as relevant. This more expansive approach allows faculty to show the varied impacts they are having as teachers and mentors, and to tailor that evidence to their distinct contexts.

Efforts are also underway to document and reward the broader impacts of faculty scholarship. It is common for faculty to document the impact of their scholarship by showing the quality of the book press or the acceptance rate of a journal where work was published, and the number of times a publication was cited (Mitchneck, 2020). Yet many engaged scholars publish scholarly blogs, public-facing websites and podcasts, and engage in policy-focused work. The main audience for their scholarship is not other scholars but the public, policy-makers, and professionals (O'Meara, 2016; 2018). As such, both disciplinary associations (see American Educational Research Association, 2013; American Sociological Association, 2016) and individual institutions (see Able & Williams, 2018; Blanchard & Furco, 2021) have provided guidance and enacted policy changes so that scholars can show the impact of their work on practice, legislation, and/or public opinion. For example, the American Sociological Association provides guidance on how personnel committees might evaluate public communication as relevant to its content, groundedness in theory and research, and the rigor and quality of communication (ASA, 2016). Similar discussions have been underway with regard to assessing the impact of entrepreneurial work, and digital work in the humanities (American Historical Association, 2015).



## Goal IV. Build a more diverse and equitable institution

As the recent American Council on Education (ACE) race report (Espinosa et al, 2019) revealed, most postsecondary faculty are not representative of the student communities and publics they serve. In some disciplines and institutional types there has been no progress at all in increasing the number of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous faculty, and women of color are especially under-represented in tenured faculty appointments. Inspired by the work of Estela Bensimon (2006), and colleagues working through the USC Center for Urban Education (Bensimon, Dowd & Witham, 2016; Kezar & Posselt, 2020; Posselt et al 2020), efforts have been made to reform faculty hiring and faculty evaluation processes to “walk the equity talk” (McNair, Bensimon & Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020).

One strategy to build a diverse and equitable institution that has been successfully employed and studied by the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, and Montana State University, among other institutions, is to educate members of search committees and promotion and tenure committees about implicit biases and how to mitigate them (Carnes et al, 2015; Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Smith et al, 2015; O’Meara et al, 2019). In addition, some universities have formed adhoc committees to study their faculty evaluation policies to see if there are particular expectations of candidates associated more with White or male faculty and, if so, to rebalance those criteria and/or reduce their use in evaluation (Posselt et al, 2019). Other reforms consider if their faculty appointment and evaluation systems have been set up as “rankist” (Fuller, 2008), that is, privileging some faculty over others without any rationale for those privileges and/or differentiation of roles (Kezar, 2021). Whether through training to become aware of implicit biases, or revision of policy criteria to remove barriers for scholars focused on minoritized communities (Settles, Buchanan & Dotson, 2019), higher education institutions are taking a hard look at their faculty hiring, appointment, and evaluation systems with the goal of recruiting, appointing, retaining and advancing a more diverse faculty.



## Goal V. Create greater flexibility

We might think about flexibility in two ways—flexibility of the appointment and evaluation system for an individual faculty member, and flexibility of the appointment and evaluation system for the institution (O’Meara, 2015). Flexibility is important from both perspectives, as the up-or-out aspect of tenure systems does not account for career interruptions and work-life integration. Indeed, the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic only reinforced the need for more flexibility in time to earn tenure (ACE, 2005; Butler, 2021; Gonzales & Griffin, 2020). Many feel the one-size-fits-all aspect of tenure systems does not recognize a multitude of realities of different types of work, which may take longer to complete than the six- or seven-year time frame allows (Butler, 2021).

Higher education institutions interested in adding flexibility to faculty appointments and evaluation have focused on the timelines toward promotion, faculty evaluation criteria, and work-life integration policies. For example, some higher education institutions have automatically extended timelines to tenure when a child joins a family, and others do so automatically upon request.

Likewise, efforts to create a part-time tenure track and, more recently, COVID-19 Impact statements, were scripted into college and university reward systems to enable scholars to progress in career while balancing work and life (ACE, 2005; Gonzales & Griffin,



2020). The University of Massachusetts Amherst, for example, has such a [Family Leave program](#) to support faculty in work-life integration. The University of Maryland has a [Back-Up Care benefit](#) as well.



## Goal VI. Ensure greater accountability

In response to public critiques of higher education and faculty tenure systems as protecting “deadwood,” many higher education institutions adopted accountability measures in their faculty appointment and evaluation processes in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Chait, 2002; Licata & Morreale, 1997). The goal was to ensure that faculty were meeting goals for teaching, scholarship and service. Campus leadership wanted to be able to provide evidence to trustees, state legislators, and other interested parties of the continued productivity of faculty. The desire for accountability increased in 1994 when colleges and universities could no longer enforce the mandatory retirement age of 70 (Ashenfelter & Card, 2001). Interestingly, a number of studies have shown that overall faculty performance does not decrease as faculty age, but rather for the majority stays constant, even if contributions change in shape (e.g., shift from articles to books, more mentoring and co-authored work) (Fox & Nikivincze, 2020; Way et al, 2017).

Institutions also have created annual review procedures for tenure track and non-tenure track faculty and post-tenure review, wherein faculty are reviewed every five or seven years after tenure to ensure their level of performance is high (Licata & Morreale, 1997; O’Meara, 2004). Today, most annual faculty reporting programs are digital and used in annual reviews, merit review, and post-tenure review, and act as a formal accounting for awards and advancement systems. In some cases, faculty have been able to advocate for resources for professional development and for increased salaries as they move through post-tenure review (Licata & Morreale, 1997; O’Meara, 2004). Given that most faculty evaluation processes operate with significant faculty discretion and judgment, for an accountability reform to succeed it must be negotiated with the faculty. Otherwise, the reform is likely to become a management fad and be “virtually adopted” (Birnbaum, 2000) and not advance either the goal of accountability or professional growth.

In the next section, I explore three reforms that were proposed and/or enacted to achieve one or more of these six goals and enable compelling institutional objectives. These reforms include multiple pathways to tenure, tenure by objectives, and extended contracts.

## Multiple pathways to tenure and promotion: Three examples

### Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI): Balanced-Integrative DEI tenure track

Although faculty evaluation guidelines already mentioned diversity, equity and inclusion work as a value, IUPUI faculty and academic leaders wanted to do more. Responding to the national conversation about systemic racism in higher education, Chancellor Nasser H. Paydar charged IUPUI’s academic affairs leadership to examine promotion and tenure guidelines for ways to make them more actively anti-racist. Dr. Margaret Ferguson, Professor of Political Science and Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Rachel Applegate, Associate Professor of Library and Information Science and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs, shared information with me about the DEI pathway. IUPUI guidelines already allowed candidates to be promoted based on excellence in one area and satisfaction in two, or a balance of highly satisfactory work in research, teaching, and service. IUPUI faculty and administration worked with

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Candidates for the Balanced-Integrative DEI Case submit both a diversity philosophy statement and identify areas on their CV that contribute to IUPUI's diversity mission.

this existing option and “recrafted it into an integrative case allowing for an argument about DEI work across areas of responsibility (Ferguson, 2021 communication).” Their proposal for a “Balanced-Integrative DEI” tenure case was approved through a joint effort between academic affairs and faculty governance, and there was a “broad base of support among faculty and leadership.” Although the policy currently applies just to tenure track faculty, discussions about applying it to other types of faculty lines in the future are ongoing. IUPUI schools are developing guidelines for candidates and those who will review cases now, allowing for candidates to go up under the new DEI pathway in 2022. IUPUI guidelines describing the pathway can be found [here](#).

Candidates for the Balanced-Integrative DEI Case submit both a diversity philosophy statement and identify areas on their CV that contribute to IUPUI's diversity mission (Source: IUPUI, 2021). In addition to articulating how their teaching, research and service advance DEI, a central part of IUPUI's mission, candidates must demonstrate “independence, innovation and initiative” as well as “scholarly impact, local impact, and development over time.” In an article covering this new DEI pathway in *Inside Higher Education*, IUPUI faculty and administrators observed that the new DEI pathway is intended to contribute to a larger DEI effort at IUPUI in at least three ways—adding accountability to “talk” about valuing diversity, providing faculty deeply engaged in DEI work “credit,” and sending a signal that IUPUI wants to attract and retain a more diverse faculty (Flaherty, 2021a).

Dr. Ferguson observed that it only took one year from initial idea to adoption of the DEI pathway, which is “lightning speed” compared to many previous initiatives, and in higher education shared governance generally. There was a very intentional process to create room for those who were against the idea to speak at open forums, and present alternatives. Dr. Applegate observed that some faculty worried that the DEI pathway might lower standards or diminish the research mission of the campus, wondering if there might be another way to reward DEI work, such as through “course releases.” Yet it was clear to leadership that such efforts to recognize faculty DEI contributions had not worked, nor were equitable given the magnitude of effort and excellence there. Dr. Ferguson also observed that Dr. Applegate had served for many years in leadership roles in faculty governance, and played a key role in presenting and translating the policy to faculty audiences across campus. In the end, the DEI pathway was overwhelmingly supported in an open voting process.

The process of external review for the DEI pathway will include scholars who have expertise in the relevant contexts of DEI work, while also meeting requirements for an “arms-length review.” Dr. Applegate described several possibilities under consideration for the assessment of candidate DEI work, including the creation of DEI portfolios, similar to teaching portfolios, and restricting the external review to work that can be appropriately evaluated by colleagues off campus. Dr. Ferguson observed that “even within the DEI integrative case, all candidates for promotion and tenure must have peer reviewed work. But the integrative case also welcomes, values and credits some work that is not peer reviewed and disseminated.” Since in the DEI integrative case, the “teaching, research and service aspects of the work are highly interwoven,” IUPUI is being thoughtful in helping candidates present case materials for external review.

With regard to lasting impacts of the IUPUI DEI pathway, Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Applegate described both local and national impacts. Dr. Ferguson noted that there were faculty doing excellent DEI work, but that they had been encouraged to leave it aside because it might distract them from publishing the more traditional scholarship needed for promotion and tenure. This pathway allows faculty to excel in such DEI work and still be

promoted. Also, “revolutionary” for IUPUI (and perhaps elsewhere), was allowing faculty to present their tenure case holistically, showing how previously separated buckets of work (teaching, scholarship, service and DEI) were interwoven, rather than requiring them to separate their work into different pieces of their portfolios.

### **Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI): Teaching tenure track**

WPI has broken new ground by creating a category of tenure-eligible faculty called assistant, associate, and full professors of teaching (Burns, 2021; Flaherty, 2021b). After three years of deliberations between President Laurie Leshin, Provost Wole Soboyejo, and faculty leaders, WPI announced a [group of 15](#) current WPI non-tenure track faculty who will be eligible for tenure based on teaching excellence. WPI [teaching track tenure policies](#) emphasize that teaching is the main expectation, as well as demonstrating professional growth and currency. Over the next three years an additional 30 faculty, for a total of up to 45 faculty, will be offered the opportunity to move into the teaching track to tenure positions (Burns, 2021).

To understand the origin, purposes, and mechanics of the new WPI policy, I interviewed WPI Provost Wole Soboyejo. Provost Soboyejo explained that the new WPI policy, which went into effect in August 2021, emerged from listening to WPI non-tenure track faculty who were committed to teaching innovation but wanted greater job security and the ability to speak their minds through shared governance. Furthermore, Provost Soboyejo looked at faculty attrition and found that WPI was losing up to 16.5% of teaching focused non-tenure track faculty each year but only 4.5% percent of tenure track faculty. Such attrition was not good for WPI’s teaching mission and the stability and progress of education and innovation. Provost Soboyejo observed that a commitment to excellent teaching and innovation in the undergraduate curriculum, including all WPI undergraduates participating in interactive project-based learning, is a “hallmark of a WPI education.” Therefore, WPI leaders and faculty realized that they needed to do something to honor their very best teachers.

Realizing that they could not provide tenure to all faculty for financial and other reasons, WPI pursued a two-pronged strategy: a new tenure track pathway emphasizing teaching, and a system of extended term contracts for non-tenure track faculty discussed later in this paper.

WPI created a system whereby current non-tenure track faculty could apply for a teaching track to tenure or extended contracts. Interested faculty discussed what was required for each position and their own interests and qualifications with department chairs, and submitted dossiers. Deans created committees to evaluate cases and submitted their best candidates for the teaching to tenure track to the provost’s office for review. WPI’s NSF-funded ADVANCE team, which had been supporting academic affairs policy reform in multiple areas, was instrumental in supporting this process.

WPI received about three times the number of teaching tenure track applications than they had the ability to grant in the first year, though faculty can apply again over the next two years. The 15 teaching track professors chosen in the first cohort have up to six years to earn tenure through a pathway of teaching accomplishments clearly identified in the policy. One important aspect of the teaching tenure track is having visibility in the area of study as a scholar of teaching and learning. Therefore, professional development funds have been made available for each of the 15 faculty on the tenure track to attend conferences and connect with scholars who focus on innovations in teaching and learning.

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All teaching track to tenure candidates will submit dossiers documenting teaching excellence for external review as part of the tenure process. After the initial phase of this effort, when up to 45 faculty have been placed on the teaching track to tenure, WPI plans to build these appointments into their hiring process.

In an article covering the launch of the new WPI teaching track to tenure policy, journalists spoke with newly appointed faculty who observed that despite prior years working at WPI, they only now felt comfortable buying a house and/or letting families know they could safely settle there (Burns, 2021, p. 2).

In reflecting on the ways in which WPI has broken new ground, it is important to recognize that there are institutions that have considered similar policies but decided they needed to initiate such appointments through new, open searches, and not with current employees. In this regard, Provost Soboyejo observed, “WPI is a place that wants to value folks who are here.” The local benefit to WPI is substantial, as the new policies have already created greater job security and loyalty to the institution while strengthening WPI’s teaching mission and community.

Provost Soboyejo also observed that WPI is trying to do something “important for the country.” For some time, he observed, American higher education institutions have emphasized research to the exclusion of teaching. He is not “persuaded that is the best thing” given we need faculty who are engaged in the scholarship of teaching to “prepare students for the future.” Provost Soboyejo said we need to do more than just “stay where we are, but also identify where we want to go.” He said to truly innovate in higher education we need to incentivize the teaching, as well as the research and service components of faculty work.

#### **West Virginia University (WVU): Administrative leadership tenure track**

West Virginia University also has an [alternative track](#) wherein faculty may be promoted from associate to full professor, this one based on extraordinary and extended administrative service to WVU. The impetus for WVU’s policy, according to Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Culture and Professor of Sociology Dr. Melissa Latimer, was that associate professors—often women—were being asked to provide administrative leadership, such as in department chair or associate dean roles, and while they provided exceptional service, their promotions to full professor often were delayed as a result. That is, their administrative work, which could be focused on such issues as curricular transformation and student retention, took crucial time away from the scholarship critical for their promotion. This meant that any salary increase associated with a promotion to full professor also was delayed. WVU formed a taskforce to study the issue and consider multiple alternative pathways and possibilities. Both faculty and academic leaders supported the administrative pathway to promotion under the circumstances written into the policy.

Dr. Latimer explained that the process begins when a faculty member takes on a new administrative post. The associate professor/administrator can develop an MOU with their dean and/or provost that sets goals for their time in that position. The MOU outlines how the work the associate professor/administrator will do during their administrative term can “count” toward a case for promotion to full professor. The faculty/administrative candidate understands that they will, like other candidates for promotion, need to submit a portfolio making the case that they have achieved those agreed-upon goals, and done so in ways that show excellence and impact. Their work will be internally and externally reviewed.

Thus far, one faculty member has been promoted via this new track. Several additional faculty members are on the same track; their reviews for promotion to full professor will come up in the next three to five years. Dr. Latimer points out that this policy, while not perfect, allows an alignment of workload with institutional “asks” of faculty, faculty talents, and the reward system. It also adds flexibility for both individual faculty and the institution as needs change over time. The administrative track cannot be forced on a faculty member, but rather flows from a shared agreement. It serves to create viable options for the faculty and for the institution, and allows optimization of local talent in administrative roles without requiring personal sacrifice of forgoing timely advancement (Gee, 2021).

### Tenure by objectives

In 1998, Professor Richard Chait proposed that higher education institutions reduce the “archery in the dark” (Rice, 1996, p. 31) aspects of the traditional tenure process by creating a “tenure by objectives system.” Under such a system, at the point of hire, a department chair and faculty member would develop a performance agreement. A work plan would be created and signed off on by the chair and personnel committees that carefully established how the faculty member could demonstrate competency, or “certification” in each required area of work to earn tenure (Chait, 1998). For example, the research part of the performance agreement might say that to earn tenure the candidate must demonstrate that their research has made significant impact in their field, been disseminated to relevant audiences, and/or received awards. The teaching part of the agreement might say that the candidate showed a clear pattern of excellent teaching and mentorship of graduate and/or undergraduate students. For service, the objective might be contributions to one’s academic program and some service to the field.

Unlike the traditional tenure track wherein a candidate must achieve all research, teaching and service objectives by a particular date (usually six years from first appointment), in a tenure by objectives agreement the candidate might achieve particular objectives and “check them off” at different times in their journey toward tenure. This more flexible schedule would allow some faculty to achieve tenure in four years, while others might take 10, with objectives achieved along the way. Notably, every pre-tenure, tenure-track and non-tenure track professor would also have academic freedom codified in shared governance procedures, so that issue is taken off the table (Byrne, 1997; Chait & Trower, 1997; Chait, 1998).

I applied Chait’s idea of tenure by objectives soon after it was published to the plight of community engaged scholars (O’Meara, 2001). Given that the community engaged scholar often faces a lack of clarity about which of their scholarly products will “count” for tenure and promotion, it seemed that tenure by objectives might be a way to add some clearer signposts to tenure for candidates involved in engaged, interdisciplinary and newer forms of scholarship.

Tenure by objectives performance agreements would spell out the kinds of peer review, dissemination, and impact expected of candidates, and do so in new ways for those involved in participatory action research, and/or public scholarship (O’Meara, 2001). For example, a community engaged scholar who will work closely with a school system on closing the achievement gap might create an MOU with their department that notes that evidence-based, empirical reports written for the school superintendent would “count” as scholarly products. If the tenure by objectives MOU states that demonstrating excellence in scholarship will require the scholar to create eight to 10 scholarly products

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that have had demonstrated impact, the community engaged scholar would then submit the reports and evidence of how they were used to shape policy and practice in the school district. Once the engaged scholar submits eight to 10 such scholarly products, they could submit their portfolio to certify completion in the area of scholarship.

The idea of “scripting” evaluative processes (Correll, 2017) is familiar in higher education. Sometimes the scripts relate to the content of work, and sometimes to its timing. Differentiated workload agreements, for example, allow faculty members to adjust their level of effort from some norm to meet institutional needs and take advantage of faculty talents and interests (O’Meara & Rice, 2005; O’Meara, 2015). Likewise, many higher education institutions create “modified criteria” for tenure when a faculty member enters a new tenure track position under special circumstances. For example, such agreements can be created when a faculty member requires certain lab equipment to do the research they need to get tenure, or when someone enters a tenure track position with a 50% administrative appointment and thus expectations for teaching and research needed to be adjusted. Sometimes new faculty will ask that their appointment letter state that they can bring a certain number of years from a previous position into the tenure track at the new institution, and thereby go up earlier for tenure than would have been the norm. In such cases these contingencies or individualized criteria and contexts are spelled out to remove ambiguity (O’Meara, 2015). In a recent essay considering reforms needed through and post pandemic, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Washington State University, Todd Butler (2021), argued for something similar to tenure by objectives in suggesting “individualized tenure and promotion timelines.”

I recently interviewed Dr. Chait to explore why he thinks there has not been significant adoption of his tenure by objectives idea since he introduced it nearly 25 years ago. We agreed several obvious critiques could be raised about a tenure by objectives system. First, is that such a system diminishes faculty careers and achievements by reducing them to transactions, such as “if you complete five articles you get tenure,” without an explicit measure of quality. What if someone did not write the five articles but wrote a best-selling book instead? Second, there is the possibility that a tenure by objectives system could reduce the discretion of the faculty to review and deliberate over a tenure case and use flexible, informed judgment. Third, there are questions of fairness: if work agreements are highly individualized, some tenure candidates could be held to higher standards than others, especially since those standards would be determined by different decision-makers.

These are all real concerns. However, Chait observed that tenure by objectives agreements do not have to identify specific quantifiable metrics codified in advance. Rather he offered that performance criteria could be overall thresholds, such as showing a pattern of research excellence. Candidates could be provided examples of what is meant by this threshold and of how the candidate might meet it, balancing clarity with flexibility. When the candidate is ready, a committee could review and agree that the person has done enough and met the threshold in that area to be certified. The personnel committee could look at the portfolio and just as easily not certify that the criteria has been met. The idea would simply be to allow the faculty candidate an earlier judgment. Faculty discretion would remain at the heart of the evaluation process.

In order to ensure high standards and fairness across candidates, a centralized body such as a Provosts’ office or centralized faculty personnel committee could approve all tenure by objective performance agreements. Guidance could be created for departments crafting these mutual agreements so as to avoid overly quantified and

time dependent metrics (e.g., productivity) and instead focus on quality, impact, and the demonstration of patterns indicating that a competence has been achieved or exceeded. Feedback could be provided in one-on-one annual reviews so that candidates have an opportunity to ask questions and to submit material showing they have completed one of the objectives.

In our interview, Chait wondered whether this particular idea was less popular within some colleges and universities because it could diminish the power of already tenured faculty who did not want to “forsake the opportunity to render a judgment” and/or who felt that spelling out objectives in advance would curtail their discretion and oversimplify a necessarily subtle and complex process. Also, when tenure by objectives was first introduced, the idea was associated more with the model of a typical tenure track professor expected to complete work across teaching, research, and service. Today, the emergence of alternative tracks, such as WPI’s teaching track to tenure, accomplish some of tenure by objectives’ goals by providing very clear standards and benchmarks—in this example, for teaching. Also, as noted above, the tendency for new hires to negotiate particular individualized timelines and/or contexts into their appointment and evaluation process is another application of the tenure by objectives concept.

### Extended non-tenure track appointments

Unlike the corporate sector, wherein talented employees might be offered higher salaries, stock options, and other competitive benefits, most higher education institutions have limited resources to retain talent. Job security is a valuable resource. Without it, non-tenure track faculty have to worry whether they will lose their job from year to year and are incentivized to keep a constant eye toward securing positions elsewhere with greater financial security. This divided attention can have negative implications for student retention and institutional missions (Jaeger & Eagan, 2011; Kezar, 2021).

Beyond job security, one of the main currencies in colleges and universities is voice in shared governance. For example, if non-tenure track faculty have expertise in the teaching of a philosophy program, they want to have a say in how that program is delivered and assessed. Yet often non-tenure track faculty do not have voting rights or a voice in how their academic programs are delivered. Further, non-tenure track faculty want to have other non-tenure track faculty who understand the contexts of their workload involved in their evaluation. Yet in many higher education institutions, only tenure track faculty vote in non-tenure track faculty promotion decisions.

There is a trend across many higher education institutions to move from a standard one-year contract for non-tenure track faculty, to three, five, and even in some cases, 10-year contracts. Often such appointments begin with a probationary year, and based on performance, faculty can apply for a longer contract with more job security. For example, WPI’s Provost Soboyejo explained that as of July 2021, non-tenure track faculty are hired into a one-year contract and based on performance can then be given a three-year contract, followed by another three-year contract, followed by a five-year contract. Based on exceptional teaching, and with the approval of the Provost, it is possible in some circumstances for a WPI faculty member to have an even longer contract.

Higher education institutions are also working to ensure that their non-tenure track faculty have greater voice in shared governance. Campus policies are being rewritten to allow non-tenure track faculty to vote in college and university senates, and on personnel and curricular decisions. For example, the University of Denver has made big

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strides in both recognition and allowance of privileges for professional track faculty, including the creation of a [model](#) for onboarding and mentoring new professional track faculty. A “policy shift made six years ago converted 222 full-time lecturer positions to longer contract positions (up to seven years) with greater employment stability, a defined role in faculty governance, and a clear pathway to promotion (Kafka, 2021, p. 8).”

Another concern about the growth of non-tenure track roles has been the greater presence of women and Black, Hispanic and Indigenous faculty in these ranks compared to their representation in tenure track faculty ranks (Finkelstein, Conley & Schuster, 2016). For example, while minoritized faculty held 13% of faculty positions in 2013, they held only 10% of tenured positions, and women held 49% of all faculty positions but just 38% of tenured positions (Finkelstein et al, 2016, p. 1). This is an equity issue to keep in view for campuses that operate with both systems because tenure track positions typically have better pay, benefits and job security. Some institutions have found ways to create bridges between non-tenure track roles and tenure track roles, so that non-tenure track faculty are not disadvantaged when applying to such positions. The Delphi Project on Changing Faculty and Student Success project has been following these advances in the working conditions of non-tenure track appointments and provided awards to institutions changing their systems to offer better benefits and opportunities for advancement (see [www.thechangingfaculty.org](http://www.thechangingfaculty.org)).

## Discussion

In the examples just provided, institutional agents enabled institutional missions through their faculty appointment and evaluation system. Some of these reforms might be considered, “big plays,” others, small wins. However, they all accomplish one or more of the reform goals described above in ways that benefit the institution and faculty synergistically.

Creating multiple pathways to tenure provides higher education institutions flexibility to hire and reward faculty who accomplish mission-critical work, whether that be in administrative leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion, or teaching excellence. However, multiple tracks to tenure requires expanding how faculty can document their impact. WPI, IUPUI, and WVU needed to rethink the process of peer review to ensure it would be inclusive of the work done on the relevant track, and develop new systems to support and assess teaching excellence and administrative leadership. As higher education institutions continue to hire a more diverse faculty engaged in multiple forms of scholarship, teaching and service, multiple pathways to tenure has potential to better support the careers of a diverse faculty. Multiple tracks to tenure might also improve faculty working conditions by aligning institutional rhetoric and reward systems, and mitigating the practice of asking faculty to engage in work that will not allow them to advance.

But what could go wrong? Legitimacy is critical. Whereas in the for-profit sector, signing and performance bonuses, raises, and other competitive amenities might be used to recruit and retain employees, legitimacy and peer recognition are key currencies in higher education. By their nature, new tracks to tenure are juxtaposed to a “traditional track” wherein faculty engage in a bundled teaching, research and service role, and are reviewed by peers in their field. Once a faculty member has earned tenure, they are typically able to negotiate tenure if hired at another institution—it is a career marker, a major professional achievement well understood in the political economy of higher education institutions. This wide understanding is based on the certainty that each

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Creating multiple pathways to tenure requires expanding how faculty can document their impact.



person who is tenured or promoted to an associate or full rank has met high standards to get there.

Multiple pathways to tenure will achieve their intended goals only if each pathway is equally valued and recognized. The success of multiple tracks to tenure hinges on having high standards, similar levels of rigor and external review as the traditional tenure track, and appreciation for the difficulty and value of the work of each track to the institution and to the field of higher education.

The tenure by objectives idea also has the potential to achieve key goals. It could improve the transparency, clarity and consistency of faculty appointment and evaluation systems by replacing vague and ambiguous tenure criteria with clearer and more outcome-focused standards. Tenure by objectives could improve flexibility by allowing a faculty member to choose when they “certify” each agreed upon objective. Performance agreements could be reviewed at multiple levels and help translate faculty work to boards of trustees and state legislators. The tenure by objectives system might be considered more equitable in the long-run because the standards for tenure decisions are very clear and leave less room for bias in evaluation. There are reasons to believe that a tenure by objectives system might improve faculty experience of a just work environment, especially as it relates to experiences of procedural (e.g., is the process fair?) and distributive (e.g., are the outcomes fair?) fairness (Nyunt et al, 2022).

Again, what could go wrong? As noted earlier, if the enactment of performance agreements is highly transactional, emphasizing time-dependent metrics and/or specifics about particular journals and/or grants, teaching awards and numbers of students, it could be rejected by the faculty as not recognizing the professionalism inherent in the role. Likewise, tenure by objectives would be rejected by faculty if presidents and provosts, and/or boards of trustees and legislators started mandating specific objectives in the shared tenure objectives agreement. To be considered legitimate and consistent with academic norms, department faculty (and any external evaluators they appoint) would have to maintain discretion over identification and certification of tenure objectives.

Extended non-tenure track appointments achieve multiple goals of reform at once. For example, extended contracts make the faculty position more attractive to prospective talent, and as WPI Provost Soboyejo suggested, could improve faculty retention. Not unlike a business that needs to know it is staffed before it can extend its hours, departments with stronger faculty retention can apply for grants knowing there will be faculty there to run them, and can develop bridge programs with schools knowing that the director of the program will not drop in and out of the partnership. Job security allows a faculty member to invest in a community at a higher level and develop a stronger sense of belonging with the higher education institution, a loyalty and investment that has been found in many organizational studies to be tied to performance. Enhancing the role of professional track faculty in shared governance, especially in the areas where they work and are evaluated, means the organization is adding additional perspectives and judgment to decisions; in doing so, they are also recognizing faculty expertise and value to the organization.

With regard to possible negative effects of reforms, the increased cost of extended contracts and/or reduced flexibility are an issue. However, most of the reforms discussed here focus on existing full-time, benefited employees and extending their job security—going from a one-year to a three- or five-year contract, for example, after much evidence that the particular faculty position is needed. Opportunities for

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Faculty appointment and evaluation systems need not prevent mission-critical work or the recruitment and retention of diverse scholars.

raises associated with promotions from assistant to associate to full lecturer are indeed part of these models. There is a cost to these advancement opportunities, but they are not extravagant, and can be as small as \$3,000 to \$5,000 raises, twice in someone's career. Allowing faculty more agency and engagement in shared governance is more about sharing power between faculty than about resources. Although providing professional development opportunities has a cost, so too does not providing those opportunities. Such investments are often returned through improved student retention, the ability to plan for and enroll students with confidence about course offerings, and/or grant-writing. Although shifts in enrollment may require changes in faculty, they rarely occur in one-year increments, but can be anticipated and planned for with time for non-tenure track faculty to shift focus.

It is also important to recognize the process followed to arrive at these reforms. As described by academic leaders and faculty at IUPUI, WPI, and WVU, these agreements went through a deliberative process of engaging shared governance. Presidents and provosts held open forums, appointed task forces and ad hoc committees, and held discussions with boards of trustees, faculty senates, and, as relevant, faculty unions. There was also a careful accounting of whether institutions could afford each reform, and what it would take to implement them. Finally, IUPUI, WPI, and WVU achieved an interesting balance of reforms that affected their current employees, which had a huge benefit for morale, and developing reforms to attract new talent.

## Conclusion

C Wright Mills (1959) once said that “scholarship is a choice of how to live.” In a similar vein, faculty appointment and evaluation systems are choices made by higher education institutions and faculty about how they want to live, work, and regard each other (O'Meara, 2011a).

There are good reasons to reimagine faculty appointment and evaluation systems to improve transparency, clarity and consistency, align with mission, expand how we assess impact, improve access and equity for a more diverse faculty, enhance flexibility, and strengthen accountability. As the examples and ideas in this paper suggest, when faculty and academic leaders pursue reform with these goals in mind, they also change the narrative. Faculty appointment and evaluation systems need not prevent mission-critical work or the recruitment and retention of diverse scholars. Rather, faculty appointment and evaluation systems can be levers that enable institutional missions and faculty to flourish.

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## About the author

**KerryAnn O'Meara** (she, her, hers) is Professor of Higher Education and a Distinguished Scholar Teacher at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Her research examines faculty careers and academic rewards systems with a particular focus on equity-minded organizational practices that support full participation. Current NSF-funded projects examine equity in hiring, workload, promotion and tenure policy reform, and equity-minded reform of discretionary spaces in academic affairs. She consults with universities on promotion and tenure policy reform, faculty development programs, and organizational practices that sustain equitable workloads.

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