

Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee

March 29, 2016

Present: Mark Reinitz (Chair), Geoffrey Block, Kurt Walls, Garrett Milam, Kris Bartanen, Matt Warning, Jennifer Neighbors, Julie Nelson Christoph

The meeting was called to order at 2:02 pm.

The minutes from the March 11, 2016 meeting were approved.

Professor Julie Nelson Christoph was invited to speak to the committee regarding gender bias in student evaluations of faculty. The invitation was extended due to her experience with a group on campus addressing implicit gender bias toward female faculty in light of the Senate charge before the committee regarding such bias. The chair greeted our visitor and provided her with a summary of the Senate charge to the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) regarding evidence regarding gender bias in course evaluations.

A committee member observed that evaluations are likely subject to multiple sources of bias in addition to gender and raised a question regarding why we are only considering gender. The member went on to acknowledge that the gender bias restriction was the result of the specific Senate charge and that the focus on gender represented a sufficient challenge to take on by itself.

Professor Christoph summarized for the committee the impetus for the group seeking to address gender bias, arising from the most recent Campus Climate Survey. Though there are multiple dimensions to gender bias the group decided to focus on gender bias in student evaluations due to recent literature in this area. She then went on to summarize for the group findings from this literature and provided examples from individual evaluations indicating bias. In addition, she raised issues regarding the implications of such bias, given how course evaluations are used in faculty evaluation and promotion.

A committee member inquired regarding potential remedies for this, once the University has acknowledged such patterns of bias. Professor Christoph suggested a relatively informal approach, aimed at raising awareness of faculty participating as evaluators in the faculty review process.

Another committee member raised the potential for a modification providing direction within the Faculty Evaluation Procedures and Criteria document regarding how evaluations are considered in light of the likely presence of gender bias toward female faculty. Professor Christoph suggested that perhaps the PSC could address this at the departmental level when departmental evaluation standards are up for periodic review by the committee. She further suggested a campus wide effort for inclusive discussion and education regarding these issues. Within this discussion it was suggested that faculty evaluators be directed to familiarize themselves with the state of current research regarding gender bias. It was noted that another possible approach

would be to include training regarding gender bias in mandated Title IX sexual harassment training.

A committee member suggested that alternatives to student evaluations be considered such as increased reliance on direct observation of teaching or use of outcome based measures of faculty performance. In the discussion that followed, multiple concerns were raised regarding the feasibility and challenges associated with these approaches.

The committee proceeded to discuss how best to identify the highest-quality research in the area of gender bias. A brief discussion followed regarding the sources for this research and which metrics might be used to evaluate relative quality.

A member pointed out that there are a number of studies which undertake a meta-analysis and suggested that faculty evaluators might be directed to this research.

Another member suggested that perhaps a role analogous to that of the diversity liaison in human resources might be created within faculty reviewers to address gender bias.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Garrett Milam