

**INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WORKING GROUP**

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Recommendation Title: Making Faculty Awards Processes and Decisions Inclusive and Equitable

Problem Statement/Issue:

This proposal seeks to make **faculty awards**—as well as the system within which awards are conceptualized, valued, granted, and celebrated—more transparent, inclusive, and equitable. As Bumpus (2020) wrote in *Nature*, “Too many people resist recognizing racism because they want to say, ‘We are all good people.’ I say, being good means learning to recognize racism and exclusionary culture, and then taking action. That means seeking out those who are often overlooked or actively excluded, nominating Black [colleagues], including students and postdocs, for awards.” The spirit of this statement, among similar sentiments voiced by JMU faculty, motivates this recommendation.

Background: Instructional faculty at JMU are eligible for awards that honor exceptional teaching, research, service, leadership, and/or other contributions. Such awards may:

- Be granted by the unit, the college, Academic Affairs, or the university;
- Be sponsored by internal funds or external sources (e.g., donors);
- Require self-nomination or nomination by a student, peer, or administrator;
- Require candidates to submit materials (e.g., narrative statement, reference letters);
- Be decided by a committee or other decision-makers;
- Provide the awardee with a financial benefit.

Problem Statement and Recommendation continue on next page.

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Problem Statement Continued:

Motivating Questions: Though such awards are intended to celebrate exceptional achievement, there are fundamental issues that raise questions:

- At a Predominately White Institution (PWI) that centers whiteness by default, how are BIPOC faculty *mentored*, *supported*, and *nominated* in support of awards? With whom—and through what means—are BIPOC awardees and their supporters *celebrated* and *honored*
- Given the well-documented service burdens shouldered by BIPOC faculty, and by BIPOC women especially, what is the “cost” of requiring self-nominations or lengthy materials submissions?
- Are BIPOC faculty disproportionately nominated for, and recipients of, diversity-related awards? Hughes (2014), among other scholars, notes that people of color receive more diversity awards; this may tokenize their work, or serve to hide prowess in other domains (e.g., research).
- Are equity-minded awards committees (with diverse representation) assembled? Do they actively seek diverse pools? Do members’ implicit biases favor white awardees?

Recommendation:

Our recommendation and its specific steps align with the [Academic Affairs Anti-Racist and Anti-Discrimination Plan](#) (est. fall 2020), which documents the need to “identify and correct practices, structures, and policies that contribute to oppression and that reflect structurally racist or discriminatory practices.” In our own conversations as a working group, and through informal discussions with BIPOC faculty at JMU, we sought to prioritize the need to explore and remedy practices affiliated with faculty awards processes, procedures, and outcomes (to include the ways in which awards ceremonies, for instance, can be exclusionary). Already, reform processes to certain awards are underway via the work of Dr. Besi Mujonja in her role as Associate Vice Provost of Research and Scholarship (R&S). Such efforts need to be scaled up to ensure a thorough audit of processes, procedures, and outcomes associated with departmental, College, Foundation, and other University awards.

The significance of equity-minded reform is reflected in the fundamental issues and motivating questions expressed in the problem statement above; the statement of rationale details supporting literature. Specifically, we suggest directing explicit, intentional efforts toward reforming faculty awards processes and outcomes. This may be achieved by:

- 1) Promoting greater transparency, to include timelines and equitable inclusion criteria affiliated with each award;
- 2) Conducting a thorough, equity-minded audit of faculty awards, procedures, and outcomes;
- 3) Developing processes through which BIPOC faculty are *mentored*, *supported*, and *nominated* in support of/for such awards;
- 4) Evaluating whether self-submissions of materials are necessary, which augments inquiry into how, institutionally, JMU might embrace a broader culture within which peers submit nomination packets on behalf of nominees; and
- 5) Forming equitable, culturally competent award selection committees that actively seek diverse pools (i.e., similar to search committees) and engage in anti-racist, anti-oppressive selection processes.

Personnel resources, coordinated from the Office of the Provost, are required for successful implementation of this recommendation. Specifically, we recommend that two members of the Provost’s leadership circle, representing different sub-divisions of Academic Affairs, serve as implementation co-champions. Dr. Besi Muhonja, whose voice and perspectives focalized all stages of this proposal, would be an astute choice. Together, the implementation co-champions will coordinate mechanisms within and across the Colleges, with the support of the academic Deans and DEI liaisons, to remedy practices that historically and presently disenfranchise BIPOC faculty in awards processes and outcomes. Working directly with the individuals responsible for chairing and/or coordinating awards processes is paramount; we also recommend close liaising with the faculty assistance committees, in each college, that grant educational leaves, summer grants, etc. Further, the co-champions will also advise changes to the systems and structures around which awards are celebrated and honored.

Rationale:

Awards processes at PWIs—from award conceptualization to ceremonial rites—are erected upon legacies of favoritism, discrimination, exclusion, and colonization. Bumpus (2002) suggests that redressing such practices requires explicit, intentional focus on the contributions of BIPOC faculty—many of whom are overlooked for high-level awards. To add, BIPOC faculty are often recognized solely for their diversity-related achievements (Hughes, 2014); this can be experienced as a tokenizing practice, particularly when prowess in another domain (e.g., scholarship) is rendered invisible by peers.

Mehra's (2019) research, in part autoethnographic, joins a chorus of scholarly, first-person voices (e.g., Acker & Millerson, 2018; Alemán, 2019; Ashlee et al., 2017) who call attention to acts of bias in the academy. Specifically, Mehra documents the "layers of complexities shaping faculty interpersonal microaggressions, **perceived lack of equal/equitable recognition of contributions**, and limited comparable administrative growth/opportunities" (p. 198) for people of color. From a career development lens, a failure to recognize the achievements of BIPOC faculty members bears consequences later-on, job-related and psychological. A growing body of research describes the agonizing, antagonistic burdens that Black women face, reflected in the "systemic scarcity" of tenured Black women. This, says Rucks-Ahidiana (2021), is tethered to "microaggressions from faculty and students, invalidation of their research, and the devaluation of their service contributions in the tenure process" (n.p.). To add, Mehra concedes that the burden of non-white men entails "invisibility and limited recognition in professional circles, compared to whites" (p. 203-204) who contribute less.

What's more, academe is near famous in making futile attempts to rectify systemic inequities. With patronage models intact, white faculty and administrators "retain control over disciplinary boundaries, publication decisions, faculty hiring, and tenure and promotion" (Corrigan & Vats, 2020, p. 220). Awards processes are not excused from the litany of processes that are often whitewashed, handled without attention to practices that reflect equity-mindedness and cultural humility. Resituating awards processes is an intermediate to long-term step, as it should transpire in an overarching culture of transformation.

Success:

To be successful, this recommendation must be a priority response to the corrections called for in the [Academic Affairs Anti-Racist and Anti-Discrimination Plan](#). Ultimately, it will be the decision of the Provost, implementation co-champions, and their constituents to determine benchmarks for success with relevant key performance indicators. Systemically, institutional data that reflect BIPOC faculty belongingness and perceptions of equity, compared to data collected at baseline (e.g., climate study), should demonstrate significant gains. Reform to awards processes and outcomes, with many other factors, all contribute to a healthy institutional climate for BIPOC faculty.

Minimally, the success of this recommendation should ensure the following have been achieved:

- Awards committees have actively sought diverse pools and engage in anti-racist, anti-oppressive selection processes *that culminate in richer, more diverse pools of nominees*. (Said another way, such committees would recognize problems inherent in a pool of candidates that are mostly white, cishet, male, etc.) Further, the composition of such awards committees will represent rich, various lived experiences (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, rank, field, etc.).
- The majority of instructional faculty would agree that timelines and inclusion criteria associated with each award are accessible (via multiple modes), transparent, and equity-minded.
- Academic Affairs has engaged BIPOC faculty members in processes wherein they are mentored, supported, nominated, and honored (celebrated) by peers/leaders in support of/for awards.
- Academic departments, colleges, and divisions will have evaluated the extent to which (or when) self-submissions of awards materials are necessary. (In general, we recommend fostering a climate within which peers and leaders submit nomination packets on behalf of nominees.)

Proposed Timeline for success

Summer-Fall 2022: Provost appoints implementation co-chairs/co-champions; these individuals examine trends in past award winners to identify equity gaps in nominations and award winners. Implementation co-chairs discuss alternatives to a self-nomination or lengthy material submissions. Co-chairs/co-champions work closely with the stakeholders identified in the “recommendation” sub-section.

Fall 2022: In close coordination and collaboration with Academic Affairs stakeholders (e.g., Deans, DEI directors/liaisons), the co-chairs/co-champions create a review process similar to the review of diverse candidates in the hiring process. This could either be centralized within the Vice Provost for DEI’s office or evaluated at the college level by the DEI Director.

Fall 2022: Communicate any findings or proposed changes to the awards process before the announcement for the next set of AA awards.

Spring 2023: Examine awardee data compared to prior years to determine if equity gains have been realized. Structurally add this review process on an annual basis to make adjustments to the process.

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