EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education faculty members undertake work across the domains of research, scholarship, and teaching. They also are engaged in the communication of their work to public, practice, and policy communities. The criteria, however, for faculty evaluation have not been reassessed in light of the dramatic changes in what faculty do and how institutions of higher education are transforming their roles in the 21st century.

This AERA report offers research-based guidelines for rethinking how to evaluate research, scholarship, and teaching by tenure-line faculty in the field of education, whether for hiring, annual evaluations, tenure and promotion, or post-tenure review. The guidelines are meant as a starting point rather than a one-size-fits-all solution; institutions along the spectrum from research intensive to teaching focused will find their own proper balance.

In 2013, based on the work of a task force, AERA Council approved the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:
To evaluate teaching, focus on student learning outcomes.

Recommendation 2:
To evaluate scholarship, go beyond the single-authored article.

Recommendation 3:
To evaluate outreach and modes of dissemination, develop valid indicators of quality.
Introduction

The basic work for this report was undertaken by the Task Force on Evaluating Education Research, Scholarship, and Teaching in Postsecondary Education. The Task Force was established by AERA Council in February 2012, based on the recommendation of AERA’s then President Elect William G. Tierney. The Task Force Members were James Fairweather (Chair), Ana Martinez Aleman, Estela Bensimon, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, David Labaree, and Christine Stanley.

The Task Force was charged with the following six tasks:

• To suggest transparent ways to evaluate a scholar’s teaching, including evaluations that recognize the use of new media.
• To suggest versatile definitions of scholarship that enable reward for work that is beyond the single-authored article or monograph.
• To consider ramifications of new media as vehicles for publication and dissemination.
• To recommend how community engagement might be used as a criterion for tenure.
• To consider best practices on how to design and carry out transparent processes that lead to equitable evaluation systems for faculty research and scholarship, with particular attention to gender and racial equity.
• To recommend best practices for departments, schools, and AERA for supporting early career faculty so that they receive adequate guidance in their careers.

The present document focuses on recommendations pertaining to the first five tasks.

Task Force members examined research and policies related to their charge. The members met in person in September 2012 and communicated by email and conference calls. All members contributed to the document produced by the Task Force. The references used by the Task Force are listed at the end of this document.

This report reflects the contributions of the Task Force and input from a subgroup of the AERA Council and AERA leaders. AERA Council approved the report and recommendations in April 2013.

Background

Higher education in the United States is undergoing major structural change, and education faculties are hardly immune. The recession, coupled with a long-term decline in state funding, has led many colleges and universities to aggressively seek new revenue through funded research (Basken, 2012; Heller, 1999; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002; Zumeta, 2006). Other changes include the growth in part-time and non-tenure-track faculty (Baldwin & Wawrynski, 2011). These transformations have important repercussions for faculty use of time and for the types of outcomes faculty are expected to report every year to university administrators.

The push for external funding, in conjunction with institutional pursuit of greater prestige, has increased the pressure on education faculty at many four-year institutions of all types to conduct research and produce scholarship, often at the cost of time spent on teaching and service (Fairweather, 2005).

Yet faculty members also feel pressure to teach well and to grow as teachers. Concern about the quality of college teaching and learning reaches all the way to the White House, which has called on U.S. academic institutions of all types to produce better educated graduates (Association of American Universities, 2012; President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 2012). Many and perhaps most institutions now count teaching quality among the criteria for making personnel decisions.

Moreover, in a professional field like education, faculty members feel the urge—indeed, the responsibility—to put their research and expertise to work by connecting with policy makers, practitioners, and the community. In addition, some states are now requiring schools of education to partner with local districts for teacher education and leadership preparation, requiring faculty time and commitment (Astin & Astin, 2000; Ellison & Eatman, 2008). As the nation debates fundamental changes in early childhood, K–12, and higher education alike, this sort of outreach grows increasingly important.

Technology has also changed the way we teach, the way students learn and access information, and the way faculty disseminate research. To meet changing student expectations, universities increasingly need to offer online courses and degree programs, diversifying
the course development demands on faculty. Faculty members are communicating through new media and teaching through channels that in some cases were unknown even a decade ago (Calavita, 2002; Lasson, 1990; Willinsky, 2001, 2006).

All of these trends create uncertainty about “what matters” when it comes time to evaluate faculty work and identify broader standards. Moreover, many of the new demands affect untenured faculty through the tenure process. As untenured faculty are more racially and ethnically diverse than other faculty, faculty of color are disproportionately affected by these trends. As the professoriate grows increasingly diverse, a deep concern for racial and gender equity compels us to reexamine the forms of scholarship we evaluate and the sources of evidence we require, as we seek to achieve sensitivity, balance, and authenticity (American Political Science Association, 2011, p. 1; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008; Stanley, 2006).

Purpose

This report offers guidelines for rethinking how to evaluate research, scholarship, and teaching by tenure-line faculty in the field of education, whether for hiring, annual evaluations, tenure and promotion, or post-tenure review. We derive these guidelines from research-based evidence, although we must caution that the research base is considerably thinner in some areas than in others. The guidelines are meant as a starting point rather than a one-size-fits-all solution; institutions along the spectrum from research intensive to teaching focused will find their own proper balance.

The primary audience for this report consists of individual tenure-track faculty members; promotion, tenure, hiring, and evaluation committees; the deans, chairs, and provosts who must codify evaluation standards; and scholars who study faculty work and productivity.

Recommendations

The recommendations in this report span the areas of faculty work that were central to AERA Council’s charge to the Task Force: teaching; research and scholarship; and communication, outreach, and engagement. The aim of these recommendations is to encourage faculty and institutional consideration of each area in rethinking the criteria for faculty evaluation.

Recommendation 1:

To evaluate teaching, focus on student learning outcomes.

Ideally, a system to evaluate education faculty as teachers will do three things:

• Help institutions define “teaching quality” based on student learning outcomes;
• Help faculty members improve their teaching by identifying where they need professional development; and
• Help evaluators determine a faculty member’s relative strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.

The evaluation method we most often turn to—student ratings, sometimes supplemented by measures of teaching productivity such as the number of advisees—does none of these things well. Student ratings are easy to use, can be compared across disciplines, and can identify the very worst teachers (Baker, Jankowski, Provezis, & Kinzie, 2012). But they do not promote student-centered learning, and they do not identify and reward the most effective teaching practices (Healey & Jenkins, 2003; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Singer et al., 2012).

We recommend that evaluations of faculty teaching focus on what and how students learn, and that they use evidence-based criteria for assessment. The selection and weighting of particular approaches should reflect the institutional context, including program mission, teaching loads, and institutional resources.

Research suggests that four kinds of evaluation can help meet these goals. In each case, the evaluators themselves may need training to properly conduct and interpret the results.

• Teaching portfolios and artifacts can illustrate how instructors develop and teach their courses, including
details such as learning objectives, rubrics that tie those objectives to classroom activities and assignments, and tools to assess student learning (Linse, Turns, Yellin, & VanDeGrift 2004).

- Classroom observation using formal observation protocols can assess instruction and identify what kind of professional development a faculty member needs to improve his or her teaching (Murray, 1997; Walkington et al., 2011).
- Surveys and interviews with faculty members can measure how their teaching behavior changes over time and how well they understand teaching strategies (Brown, Abell, Demir, & Schmidt, 2006).
- Surveys and interviews with students can assess whether students have met goals for learning (Cabrera, Colbeck, & Terenzini, 2001).

Recommendation 2:

To evaluate scholarship, go beyond the single-authored article.

In many subfields of education, scholarship has been judged primarily through peer-reviewed, single-authored articles and monographs. These articles and monographs may appear either in print or online. Although online publication has brought some changes, the standards for evaluating these works remain reasonably clear.

But today’s educational research often requires multiple disciplinary perspectives and methodologies. Individual scholars cannot possess all of these perspectives and skills, so research and publishing are commonly group endeavors. Groups are also often better equipped to gain major funding. When we encourage our colleagues to seek large grants and to work with scholars from other disciplines, we must find ways to assess the value of their contributions to coauthored works. Valuing multiple-authored work, particularly when the roles of participating faculty members vary considerably, is not easily resolved by developing a common set of metrics. Instead, this valuing is best addressed locally by making members of promotion and tenure committees aware of the dilemma and helping them find ways to deal with the records of individuals they are required to assess. Committees might consider questions such as, Who contributed and what was the nature of the contribution? What criteria define legitimate and valuable scholarly topics and questions and epistemological frameworks? Where is valuable scholarship conducted and where is it published? How is scholarship conducted (e.g., using what theoretical and methodological approaches)?

Scholarly products beyond journal articles and monographs, including books, new research methods and measures, software for scientific analysis, and data sets, should also be considered. Scholarly work that is funded and published by foundations and national organizations may have different standards for review but broad dissemination and influence on policy and research. Extent of use, potential impact, and reach of these products may be assessed with citation and usage metrics (Calavita, 2002; Lasson, 1990; Willinsky, 2001, 2006).

Recommendation 3:

To evaluate outreach and modes of dissemination, develop valid indicators of quality.

Faculty communicate the results of their peer-reviewed scholarship in a variety of ways, some of them quite new, to reach policy makers, practitioners, and the public. They also draw on their peer-reviewed scholarship to engage directly with various communities, in partnership with schools, practitioners, and other organizations, and encourage students to do likewise through service learning. To evaluate outreach and engagement, we need to develop valid measures of their academic quality.

Outreach

In a professional field like education, supporting the work of practitioners, offering research evidence and advice to policy makers, and communicating research-based ideas to the public constitute a central part of the faculty’s role.

Many ways of disseminating the results of sound, peer-reviewed scholarship, in both new media and old, might count in evaluating a faculty member’s work; we list some of them below. Assessments of quality should be based on the research, scholarly, and scientific underpinnings of the products and should emphasize the impact or use of the information. We propose the following attributes to consider in assessing quality, but acknowledge the need for more research to establish
the best approaches to operationalizing these attributes (Astin & Astin, 2000; Ellison & Eatman, 2008):

- **Policy reports.** Potential impact and reach.
- **Presentations for practitioners and policy makers.** Potential impact and reach.
- **Writing for practitioners.** Potential impact and reach.
- **Op-eds.** Visibility, prestige, and reach of outlet.
- **Media interviews.** Visibility, prestige, and reach of outlet.
- **Social media.** Citation and usage statistics.
- **Blogs.** Status and credibility of sponsor; number of hits, subscribers, and links; geographic distribution. All else equal, institutionally sponsored blogs should carry more weight than self-published blogs.

### Engagement

Community-engaged scholarship consists of research activities that faculty formulate and carry out collaboratively with external partners. Scholarship is community engaged when university researchers, community-based organizations, state and local education agencies, and (often) policy makers work jointly to design research, disseminate findings, and make recommendations for change. This kind of scholarship is shaped by theoretical and practical understandings of community-based problems, and responds to problems of educational policy and practice (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013, “Classification Description”; O’Meara, 2008).

Community-engaged scholarship is based on three principles that can form the foundation for evaluating faculty work in this area:

- Reciprocity;
- Recognition of and respect for mutual expertise and knowledge; and
- Doing research for the public good.

Schools and departments of education should take these foundational principles as a starting point for evaluating community engagement. But they must be clear about what kinds of activities count as community engagement, what criteria these activities must meet for quality and impact, and how the activities should be documented.

### Notes

1. The literature focuses on two primary areas of concern with regard to early career or junior faculty (the historical term junior is used extensively throughout the profession). The first area is professional development programs, particularly those that develop skills deemed institutionally successful for achieving tenure (Yun & Sorcinelli, 2007, 2008); in recent years, institutions have added a focus on instructional technology, along with developing student learning assessment practices to meet accountability mandates (institutional or externally imposed) (Graf, Albright, & Wheeler, 1992). The second area of concern is work-life balance, which also dots the landscape of professional development literature for early career faculty (Austin, 2011). In addition, many institutions have attempted to make the process of tenure “transparent” through revised faculty statutes and tenure policies and requirements (Gillespie, Robertson, & Associates, 2010; Gillespie, Hilsen, & Wadsworth, 2010; Robertson & Nilson, 2010; Graf, Albright, & Wheeler, 1992).

2. Concern about the potential adverse effects of the promotion and tenure process on the success of women and faculty of color is generally expressed in terms of categories of faculty work: research, teaching, and service. For research the concerns include (a) being more inclusive in the types of journals valued in the assessment of scholarly impact and productivity (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), and (b) making tenure and promotion guidelines explicit and open to a broader range of research and creative works that contribute to diversity and equal opportunity (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). For teaching the concerns include being attentive to how race and gender affect the experience of faculty of color and women in the classroom environment. These factors should be taken into consideration in the review of teaching evaluations for formative and summative purposes (Basow & Silberg, 1987; Moore, 1996; Stanley, Porter, Simpson, & Ouellett, 2003). Peer review of teaching for formative and summative purposes should include peers who are current and familiar with developing, assessing, and documenting inclusive teaching and learning practices (Chism, 1999). For service, the concerns include being mindful of the disproportionate service expectations placed on women and faculty of color and promoting balance in mentoring activities and in formative and summative evaluations of performance (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008).
References


President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. (2012). Report to the President: Engage to excel. Washington, DC.


The American Educational Research Association (AERA) is the national interdisciplinary research association for approximately 25,000 scholars who undertake research on education and learning. Founded in 1916, AERA aims to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good. AERA is dedicated to strengthening education research by promoting research of the highest quality, undertaking education and training programs, and advancing sound research and science policy. The Association publishes six peer-reviewed journals and research and methodology books central to the field. It also offers courses, small grants, and dissertation and postdoctoral training initiatives supported by federal research agencies and private foundations.