

American University

Tenure, Promotion, and Reappointment Guidelines Updates

Resource 4

TEACHING

This resource offers suggestions for updating teaching guidelines with a focus on three dimensions: teaching portfolios, inclusive teaching practices, and open educational resources.

Teaching Portfolios

Goal 3 of AU’s Plan for Inclusive Excellence recommends that existing policies be reviewed “for potential disparate impact and treatment on faculty of different identities” so that plans can be developed to remediate such impacts. A literature review undertaken for the 2019 [Faculty Senate “Beyond SETs” Task Force](#) found growing evidence from other colleges and universities that one such practice—survey-based student evaluations of teaching—may be prone to biases based on faculty race, gender, age, accent, and other characteristics.

Faced with this challenge, AU has adopted the Beyond SETs Task Force’s recommendation to deemphasize the unidimensional survey tool known as the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and embrace a multi-dimensional portfolio approach to teaching evaluation in which SETs are only one of several essential components.

Units are asked to include in their TPR guidelines a requirement for teaching portfolios (as defined by the Beyond SETs report) in all files for major faculty actions, which means tenure, promotion, third-year review, and initial multi-year term appointment. Guidelines can include a link to the many [teaching portfolio resources](#) offered by CTRL.

Guidelines committees also may want to include language that encourages faculty to take active steps toward increasing their SETs response rates since SETs are one component of the teaching portfolio.

The spirit of the portfolio approach aims to recognize multiple pathways to excellent teaching and move away from past practices that disadvantage colleagues of color, women colleagues, LGBTQ+ colleagues, and others. Teaching portfolios also offer opportunities to acknowledge various forms of invisible labor, including, for example:

- Formal or informal advising of students from diverse backgrounds
- Special efforts to examine one’s teaching praxis with respect to international students and students from historically underrepresented groups

- Mentoring of faculty peers in inclusive teaching practices such as Universal Design for Learning and antiracist pedagogy (see below).

Multi-dimensional portfolios are intended to stimulate a fairer, truer, and more collegial process of assessing teaching while also supporting continuous teaching innovations and improvements.

Inclusive Teaching Practices and Student Belonging

The AU Plan for Inclusive Excellence calls upon AU faculty¹ to “demonstrate cultural competence and racial literacy by building critical knowledge and skills to use inclusive and antiracist practices” (Goal 1 Vision), including “inclusive and antiracist teaching strategies to enhance classroom climate” (Goal 1, Action Step 2). Such strategies aim to stimulate, inspire, and challenge all students in developmentally appropriate ways while actively helping all students feel included and supported as full members of the learning community.

Inclusive classrooms can be described as those that accommodate students’ backgrounds by employing evidence-based praxes that work for all learners, as outlined, for example, by [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL). A core element is the use of multiple instructional and assessment approaches, including:

- Content/resources from diverse perspectives, especially those of marginalized or underrepresented groups, and, where relevant, resources that address issues of power, privilege, inclusion, and exclusion; and
- Multiple representations of content through videos, articles, podcasts, etc. to ensure all students can access and use the information.

The AU College of Arts and Sciences’ [Initiative on Antiracist Curriculum Development](#) offers a helpful definition and examples:

“Antiracist pedagogy challenges systems that perpetuate racism and categorical exclusion. This can involve:

- discussing political, historical, and economic contexts of one’s discipline and its conventions
- critical examination of the persistence and impact of racism and racist policies
- diversifying course readings and materials to include historically marginalized authors and authors with an antiracist perspective
- creating an inclusive classroom environment addressing diverse learning styles
- critiquing the “hidden curriculum” of lessons that are absorbed through the experience of school: that meritocracy is impartial, that failure is merely the student’s fault, etc.

¹ Staff, students, alumni leadership, administrators, and the Board of Trustees are also called upon to meet this goal.

- openness to other epistemologies, traditions, cultures, and languages to reduce Eurocentrism’s narrowing of the human experience and knowledge development
- self-reflection and professional development by faculty
- campus and societal engagement as part of the learning experience.”

Visit the Library website for [USC’s Anti-Racist Pedagogy Guide](#) for many useful teaching and community discussion materials.

Note: inclusive excellence in teaching may be applied not only in the classroom, but also in office hours, independent studies, student research supervision, recommendations of students for merit awards, career advising, and other teaching-related settings.

Adopting Open Education Resources (OERs) into Teaching

(From *Resource 10*, with thanks to the AU Library and CTRL’s Open Access Team)

OERs are educational materials that can be accessed by anyone. Adopting classroom materials that are available free of charge promotes an equitable learning environment by eliminating financial barriers for students.

There are several approaches to making teaching materials more accessible or universally accessible, including:

- Adopting OER materials (e.g. textbooks) in your courses: explore [OER Commons Hub](#);
- Using materials provided by the library, including print and electronic reserve copies, streaming videos, articles available through library databases, or other materials students can access independently; and
- Adopting older editions of textbooks, making copies easier to obtain (though this often reduces rather than eliminates the cost).
- Creating your own OER materials for classroom use is ideal. We urge departments to include OER material creation as a form of scholarship in tenure and promotion guidelines.

The library is ready to help! Email open-l@listserv.american.edu to contact OER specialists on campus. We will assist individual faculty as well as present on these issues to departments/schools, as well as collaborate on incorporating these principles into tenure, promotion, and reappointment guidelines.