

# Model policy for DEI evaluation

## Berkeley Initiative for Free Inquiry

In recent years, all tenure-track faculty searches at UC Berkeley have required candidates to submit [statements](#) about their “past experience and activities, and future plans to advance diversity, equity and inclusion” (DEI), and some have required DEI talks and interviews as well. While such practices are not required by the university, many academic units first adopted them in response to administrative pressure, and with scant deliberation among their faculty.

These practices [have provoked growing concerns](#) that they pressure applicants to signal conformity with prescribed views. A [recent nationwide survey](#) by the civil liberties group FIRE found that 50% of all faculty, including 58% of STEM faculty and 90% of conservative faculty, believed that DEI statements “function as ideological litmus tests that violate academic freedom,” and 71% of MIT faculty in another survey said requiring them was inappropriate.

In view of a memo last August [reaffirming faculty authority](#) over search procedures, it is an opportune moment for Berkeley faculty to revisit these policies and address their drawbacks. This document proposes a policy to help units build communities that welcome scholars of all backgrounds and viewpoints, including those with divergent views about DEI issues.

## Our policy recommendations

Our proposal is grounded in our university’s Academic Personnel Manual (APM) [Section 210-1-d](#), which sets policy for appointment and promotion of faculty:

Contributions in all areas of faculty achievement that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging should be given due recognition in the academic personnel process, and they should be evaluated and credited in the same way as other faculty achievements.

The APM defines DEI contributions not as a separate area of evaluation, but as a category of achievements cutting across the three areas of research, teaching and service, to be credited the same way other achievements are. Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

1. In lieu of requesting standalone DEI statements, instruct candidates to discuss any DEI-related achievements in research, teaching, and/or service statements.
2. Rather than evaluating such achievements as a separate DEI rubric item, credit them toward holistic evaluations of candidates’ research, teaching and service records.
3. Give candidates substantial credit only for substantial achievements. Give minimal credit for token efforts or unrealized plans, and none for statements of opinion or belief.

## Advantages over separate DEI evaluation

Our proposal enjoys several advantages over a competing approach that requires all candidates to discuss DEI and assigns them numerical scores: First, it is more consistent with written university policy because it treats contributions to DEI the same as other achievements.

Second, it better recognizes candidates with significant achievements by reducing the demand for hiring committees to engage in “DEI grade inflation” for token achievements and opinions. Third, and most importantly, it avoids compelling candidates to opine about sensitive social and political issues.

#### Consistency with APM 210-1-d

Treating DEI contributions as a separate rubric item outside of the three core areas of research, teaching and service contravenes the APM’s definition of DEI contributions as a cross-cutting category of achievements falling within these three areas, as well as its direction that they should be credited “in the same way” as other achievements in those areas.

No other category of faculty achievement is commonly assessed using dedicated statements or rubric items. Candidates with achievements that advance other cross-cutting priorities such as defending freedom of inquiry, ensuring research transparency and reliability, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, or improving sustainability and environmental stewardship are expected to highlight these contributions within their statements on research, teaching, or service, as appropriate, where they are evaluated holistically as part of their overall record of accomplishment.

Drawing an artificial boundary in candidate evaluation between DEI contributions and the three core areas raises confusing questions about whether achievements should be credited toward a candidate’s DEI score or their score in the relevant core area. This is especially true for achievements that advance DEI but also have other unrelated benefits. Suppose a candidate created additional supporting resources for an introductory course that benefited students in a variety of ways, including by helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds get up to speed. This achievement might be one of the candidate’s most significant contributions to DEI, but classifying it as “DEI” instead of “teaching” would fail to recognize its general-purpose benefits.

The same artificial boundary also contributes to a misapprehension that DEI evaluation should include factors outside of candidates’ research, teaching and service records. For example, [our administration’s model rubric](#) for assessing DEI statements assigns only 5 out of 15 total points to a candidate’s “track record;” the remaining 10 points are evenly split between “knowledge about DEI” and “plans for advancing DEI.”

#### Crediting achievements, not rhetoric

Evaluating every candidate on their DEI contributions creates an implicit expectation that any candidate who is hired must receive a strong DEI score. This expectation, combined with faculty’s well-founded reluctance to eliminate candidates on DEI grounds, creates pressure for “DEI grade inflation” that artificially compresses the scale of evaluation at the top, to the detriment of candidates with outstanding contributions.

For example, in the model rubric referenced above, a candidate whose track record consists only of “limited participation at the periphery” in DEI activities can receive a score of 3 in the track record section. If they receive high scores in the other two sections by expressing the desired opinions, empirical beliefs and plans, they can score up to 13 out of 15 total points. Evaluating candidates with minimal contributions so generously leaves little room for candidates with the most impressive achievements to distinguish themselves from the field.

Incorporating DEI achievements into holistic evaluations of the three core areas is more compatible with the reality that candidates' accomplishments in DEI, as in most other subcategories of faculty achievement, follow a right-skewed distribution. Our proposal rewards the candidates who have significantly advanced DEI and encourages the others to focus on showcasing their other achievements, rather than pressuring them to inflate token DEI achievements or employ performative rhetoric during their interviews.

### Respecting divergent views

The most severe drawback of DEI procedures as implemented at the University of California is the pressure they place on candidates to comment on matters of political controversy, and to endorse and evangelize for specific prescribed viewpoints and narratives. The goal of purging candidates with the wrong beliefs or values is sometimes made explicit: for example, one [tenure-track search advertisement](#) from the 2023-24 cycle stated:

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core values at UC Berkeley and in MCB. Our excellence requires faculty who share our commitment to these values. Successful candidates for our faculty positions will demonstrate evidence of a commitment to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion.

In this environment, candidates with misgivings about one or more dimensions of DEI ideas or practices, or who are unfamiliar with the cultural and political landscape around DEI at American universities, will be alert to the danger that expressing unorthodox ideas might sink their job interview – [as happened recently at UCLA](#) to a candidate named Yoel Inbar, who was eliminated from consideration for a partner hire position after the psychology department discovered podcasts in which he had expressed skepticism about requiring DEI statements in hiring.

Our administration's [rubric](#) is similarly prescriptive regarding candidate viewpoints and priorities. It penalizes a candidate who declares an intention to "treat everyone the same," who discusses issues of nationality or disciplinary emphasis instead of race or gender, or who doubts the value of identity-based affinity groups, while rewarding a candidate who declares an intention to advocate for DEI "as core values that every faculty member should actively contribute to."

This rubric has been widely discussed [online](#) and in [national](#) media [outlets](#), making it perhaps the best-known document describing the way DEI statements are evaluated at Berkeley. It is also substantially similar to rubrics used at other universities including [Yale](#), [Columbia](#), [Ohio State](#), and [other UC campuses](#). To our knowledge, no unit at Berkeley has publicly distanced itself from this rubric, so candidates may reasonably expect that their DEI statement or interview will be scored in this way. They may also expect, correctly, that their statements will be read by administrators who could raise objections if they find the statement unorthodox.

Unless a unit credibly signals that it rejects the administration's approach to DEI evaluation, and that it has the authority and the will to fight administrative intrusions into its search process, candidates are unlikely to believe they are at liberty to deviate in their statements or interviews from the administration's prescribed views. As such, the best remedy is simply not to ask candidates to discuss their beliefs or values, and not to offer them an incentive to do so.

### A path forward

After discussing DEI statements with many colleagues, we have found that even many faculty who are passionate about advancing diversity, equity and inclusion complain that DEI statements, interviews and talks have devolved into performative exercises in which understandably risk-averse candidates say only what they believe evaluators want to hear.

We are also unaware of any evidence that the practice is effective at achieving its goals, and Berkeley's Office for Faculty Equity and Welfare (OFEW) has found some evidence to the contrary. According to an [observational data analysis](#) of 220 Berkeley faculty searches from 2012-16, carried out and published by Berkeley administrators and posted on the OFEW website, requiring DEI statements was identified as a "not clearly promising" tool (the most pessimistic designation) for hiring female and URM faculty at a higher rate; see p.49. We have been unable to discover any empirical evidence about whether requiring faculty DEI statements contributes to creating a more welcoming climate at universities, but we find this doubtful for the reasons discussed above.

Momentum against DEI statements is building nationwide as well. Within the last month, both [MIT](#) and [Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences](#) have stopped requesting them from candidates. In the words of MIT President Sally Kornbluth, "We can build an inclusive environment in many ways, but compelled statements impinge on freedom of expression, and they don't work." The *Washington Post* editorial board has also recommended against them, writing that

The very purpose of the university is to encourage a free exchange of ideas, seek the truth wherever it may lead, and to elevate intellectual curiosity and openness among both faculty and students. Whatever their original intent, the use of DEI statements has too often resulted in self-censorship and ideological policing.

Despite widespread recognition among Berkeley faculty that the status quo is not working, there is less consensus about where to go next. While many colleagues are enthusiastic about abandoning mandatory DEI statements, others are wary of abandoning, or appearing to abandon, our university's important goal of creating a welcoming campus for students and faculty of all backgrounds. We believe that our proposal offers a balanced path forward that continues to recognize and value contributions to DEI while better protecting free inquiry.

In short, implementing our recommendations means crediting achievements that advance DEI in the same way as achievements that advance other important cross-cutting priorities: by integrating them into holistic evaluations of candidates' research, teaching, and service records. This approach is better aligned with APM, permits candidates to remain silent about DEI, and encourages them to discuss only genuine achievements. By removing the incentive for posturing, it simultaneously creates more room for candidates with the most impressive achievements to distance themselves from the field and avoids excluding candidates with divergent viewpoints.