

## Observations and Possible Discussion Topics from Spring 2021 RPT Guiding Policies Document

### Introduction

This document was prepared for the Engineering College Advisory Committee’s (ECAC’s) meeting with Provost Woodruff on 10/29/2021. It uses short excerpts from the Provost’s Spring, 2021 memorandum on *University Philosophy and Guiding Policies on Faculty Tenure and Promotion* as conversation starting points to offer observations and possible discussion topics supplemental to the ECAC’s letter to the Faculty Senate dated August 4, 2021. Some of these observations were discussed during the ECAC’s meeting with the Provost.

### Observations and Possible Discussion Topics

Page 2: *“The cultural antagonist to a great institution is homophily. To resist this homophily, **systems must be developed that enable scholarship and teaching to be viewed through the widest possible lens by the widest group of narrators.**”*

Observation 1: The stated ideal is compelling, but some faculty may wonder if it is consistent with the observation that “political persuasion”, which is included in the list of traits protected under MSU’s Anti-Discrimination Policy (left column of the table below), has been excluded from the MSU DEI Plan’s list of traits for which diversity is valued (right column). That would seem to indicate that diversity of political persuasion is not encouraged at MSU.

<b>MSU Anti-Discrimination Policy</b> <a href="https://trustees.msu.edu/bylaws-ordinances-policies/policies/02-03-01.html">https://trustees.msu.edu/bylaws-ordinances-policies/policies/02-03-01.html</a>	<b>MSU President’s Letters</b> <a href="https://president.msu.edu/initiatives/dei-plan/dei-committee-charge.html">https://president.msu.edu/initiatives/dei-plan/dei-committee-charge.html</a>
age	age
color	color
gender	gender
gender identity	gender identity
disability status	disability status
<b>height</b>	
<b>marital status</b>	
national origin	national origin
<b>political persuasion</b>	
race	race
religion	religion
sexual orientation	sexual orientation
veteran status	veteran status
<b>weight</b>	
	<b>socioeconomic level</b>
	<b>ethnicity</b>

Observation 2: Some messages from the MSU President have reinforced the perception that diversity of political persuasion is not encouraged at MSU. An example is the President's April 20, 2021 statement on the Minneapolis trial verdict, which was sent as an Email to the MSU Community and is posted on the MSU President's website.

[https://president.msu.edu/communications/messages-statements/2021\\_statements/2021-04-20\\_impact\\_of\\_minneapolis\\_verdict.html](https://president.msu.edu/communications/messages-statements/2021_statements/2021-04-20_impact_of_minneapolis_verdict.html)

- Use of the collective “our” before a controversial viewpoint suggested that MSU community members are expected to share that viewpoint: *“calls for justice following our anger”*.
- A second use of “our” before a controversial viewpoint, together with inflammatory rhetoric, reinforced the perception that MSU community members are expected to share that viewpoint.
  - **“our** awareness of systemic and structural racism”, “killings of Black Americans by police”, “dozens of people have been killed by police”, “conviction can never bring back the life that was so tragically and senselessly lost”, etc.
- A discrepancy between viewpoints expressed on this controversial topic by faculty members being evaluated for RPT action and RPT evaluators’ perception of what MSU faculty members’ viewpoints should be concerning this topic could reasonably be interpreted by evaluators as poor DEI effort and/or bad conduct and trigger low scores on these proposed new RPT standards.
- Low scores on DEI effort and/or conduct standards due to statements faculty members made that differed from evaluators’ perceptions of what MSU faculty members’ viewpoints should be on this topic could be viewed as discrimination based on political persuasion.
- Faculty concerns that their expression of viewpoints inconsistent with perceptions of what MSU faculty members’ viewpoints should be could lead to low scores on DEI efforts and/or conduct could effectively repress their academic freedom and voice in academic governance.

Page 3: *“Our tenure structure holds levels of accountability or duties. The first duty is of the Institution to establish clear values upon which policy rests. **If we are what we value, we must be able to measure that value and use those values in our decisions.**”*

Observation: The ECAC’s letter makes a similar point and expresses a concern that validated methods to accurately and consistently measure the value associated with the proposed new RPT standards DEI efforts and conduct may not exist and may be difficult to develop based on the ECAC’s literature review.

Page 4: *“Because recommendations for reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) are among the most important decisions made by great universities, **clarity and transparency are essential components of an effective process.**”*

Observation: There does not yet seem to be clarity and transparency regarding how to measure the new RPT standards DEI efforts and conduct with accuracy and consistency.

Page 7: *MSU's institutional goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Contributions to DEI will be acknowledged, evaluated, and recognized in the reappointment, promotion, and tenure process, as well as in annual reviews of faculty accomplishments. The **University acknowledges that contributions to DEI have largely comprised "invisible work"...***

Observation: The description of DEI contributions as "invisible work" seems to reinforce the ECAC letter's concerns regarding the challenges of measuring these contributions accurately and consistently.

Page 7: *The first responsibility for chairpersons or school directors is to ensure the **development of a set of fair standards and evaluative criteria for use in making RPT recommendations.***

Observations:

- It isn't clear that chairpersons (and deans) will be able to develop a set of fair standards and evaluative criteria for the new RPT standards of DEI efforts and conduct; the ECAC's literature review indicated that extensive efforts to develop fair standards and evaluative criteria for collegiality as a fourth RPT standard were not entirely successful.
- Chairpersons (and deans) may not yet know the implementation timeline for the new fair standards and evaluative criteria.
- Chairpersons (and deans) may not yet know the degree of flexibility for grass-roots development of fair standards and evaluative criteria at the department and college levels, as opposed to a top-down specification of such standards and criteria.