

**Faculty Senate Issue Item
Submitted March 25, 2021**

Submitted by:

Mona Danner, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
 Avi Santo, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Communicate Studies and Theatre Arts

Title of Issue: Eminent Scholar Awards Process – College and Gender Disparities in Eminent Scholar Awards

Description of Issue:

We submit this issue item because of dramatic college and gender disparities in the awarding of Eminent Scholar designation. Table 1 presents a breakdown of current Eminent Scholars by college as compared to full professors by college. (Eminent Scholars must be full professors.)

The points to note include:

- The College of Arts & Letters and the College of Health Sciences have no Eminent Scholars even though together they have 23% of full professors at ODU.
- The College of Sciences has 61% of the university’s Eminent Scholars even though they have only 31% of full professors on campus.
- The two Eminent Scholars named in 2021 are both from Sciences; one is from Physics.
- The Department of Physics, with 6% of all full professors on campus, alone has 27% of Eminent Scholar designations.

Table 1. Eminent Scholars by College as compared to Full Professors by College

	Eminent Scholars by College		Full Professors by College	
	N	%	N	%
A&L	0	0%	40	18%
Business	6	18%	29	13%
Education	2	6%	25	11%
Engineering	4	12%	49	22%
Health Sciences	0	0%	11	5%
Sciences	20	61%	68	31%
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	33		222	
Physics	9	27%	14	6%

Table 2 presents the breakdown of Eminent Scholars by gender and college. The points to note include:

- The College of Arts & Letters and the College of Health Sciences comprise 38% of women full professors but have no Eminent Scholars of any gender.
- The largest percentage of women Eminent Scholars is in the College of Sciences, and it is the only college to have more than one woman Eminent Scholar.
- While women comprise 25% of full professors at ODU, they are only 18% of Eminent Scholars.

Table 2. Women Eminent Scholars by College as compared to Women Full Professors by College

	Women Eminent Scholars by College		Women Full Professors by College	
	N	%	N	%
A&L	0	0%	14	25%
Business	1	3%	4	7%
Education	1	3%	14	25%
Engineering	0	0%	3	5%
Health Sciences	0	0%	7	13%
Sciences	4	12%	14	25%
	6	18%	56	25%

Rationale for Submission: Together, the data in tables 1 and 2 suggest that the process for awarding Eminent Scholar designation is broken as the results suggest significant bias in terms of college and gender. This has resulted in the privileging of science research over all other types of research and is not in either the language or the spirit of the policy as noted below. We note two sections from the *Faculty Handbook* and include the pertinent portions of the Eminent Scholars section from the *ODU Faculty Handbook*

<http://ww2.odu.edu/ao/facultyhandbook/index.php?page=ch02s15.html>

From *Faculty Handbook*, The Committee

Because the Colleges of Arts & Letters and Health Sciences did not have an Eminent Scholar, they were advised to select a representative from the Eminent Scholars list. It happened that both selected scholars from the College of Sciences resulting in fully one half of the committee being comprised of faculty from the sciences. While we assume that these faculty operated in good

faith, the result remains that both of this year's Eminent Scholars are from the College of Sciences.

Eminent Scholars

The eminent scholars designation has been established in order to recognize faculty members of unusual merit and service to the university....

A. The Committee

1. The Eminent Scholars Committee shall be comprised of one eminent scholar from each college, selected by the college promotion and tenure committee, plus one eminent scholar chosen by the Faculty Senate in order to reflect the affirmative action goals of the university. If a college has only one eminent scholar who is ineligible to serve due to a conflict of interest, then the dean and full professors of that college can select a representative from among the eminent scholars from any college....

Suggestion: Rewrite the highlighted section to read:

If a college **does not have an eminent scholar or** has only one eminent scholar who is ineligible to serve due to a conflict of interest, then the dean and full professors of that college can select a representative from among the full professors in their college to serve on the committee.

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From *Faculty Handbook*, The Criteria

The designation of Eminent Scholar is to "recognize faculty members of unusual merit and service to the university" who have a "scholarly publication record or stature in the creative arts which will have clearly established a national reputation as a scholar in the nominee's discipline."

More specifically, the criteria identify two separate areas of consideration in terms of designating eminence (excluding rank and minimum service time at the University):

Eminent Scholars

The eminent scholars designation has been established in order to recognize faculty members of **unusual merit and service to the university**....

C. Criteria

2. **A scholarly publication record or stature in the creative arts which will have clearly established a national reputation as a scholar in the nominee's discipline.**

Scholarly publications are recognized as those that have received peer review or have been otherwise recognized and critiqued by authorities in the discipline. A consistent pattern of scholarly contributions, invited chapters, scholarly books, invited lectureships, prestigious academic honors, officer positions in the individual's discipline, editor of multi-authored books, organizer or coordinator of symposiums and other similar examples would represent evidence that an individual is a contributing scholar of note to his or her discipline. It is expected that an individual meriting eminent scholar designation will have a long and consistent record of achievement in at least several of

the above-noted categories. Moreover, the individual should be one who is easily recognized by other eminent authorities in the discipline, with positive comments on his or her work. It is also important to note that new works in the discipline frequently cite the individual's contributions. His or her scholarly contributions or artistic achievements should at some time or other have been a benchmark, reflecting evolution of the discipline.

3. Substantial success in obtaining external funding for research - in those disciplines in which such success is expected; and positive evaluations by scholars external to the university who will have been solicited by the department/school chair.

The vast overrepresentation of the College of Sciences among Eminent Scholars suggests that the current Eminent Scholars are not able to fairly evaluate disciplines other than sciences or disciplines with publication records, statures, or funding comparable to the sciences.

Suggestions: We recommend the following courses of action:

- 1) Committee members serving on the Eminent Scholar committee should be rotated after serving for a maximum period of three years in order to ensure fresh perspectives on what constitutes eminence across different disciplines. Additionally, committee members stepping down from the committee must wait a minimum of three years before rejoining the committee
- 2) Committee members should be expected to complete mandatory training on what constitutes excellence within different disciplinary pillars of higher education, including the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, the hard sciences, health sciences, education, engineering, and business. The University should invest in creating this resource should it not currently exist
- 3) Committee members should evaluate candidates as they compare with others within their disciplines and should be mandated to ensure that disciplinary categories are not weighted in relation to one another. A scientist considered for the title of Eminent Scholar should be evaluated for their contributions to the science, not in comparison to the contributions of an artist, or vice versa.
- 4) The committee should establish transparent rubrics for assessing excellence within a discipline rather than across them.
- 5) The Faculty Handbook policy language for selecting Eminent Scholars should emphasize that the selection committee must consider disciplinary gaps in awarding faculty this designation and prioritize addressing those gaps in their consideration of candidates when they clearly exist. Specifically, Eminent Scholar designation should resemble the proportion of full professors by college. Given that the *Faculty Handbook* states that the award should go to full professor who have “a national reputation as a scholar in the nominee's discipline,” we see no reason why the proportional representation of Eminent Scholars should diverge from the proportional representation of full professors by college.
- 6) The *Faculty Handbook* policy language for selecting Eminent Scholars should emphasize that the selection committee must require that the proportion of Eminent Scholars from various colleges be proportionate to that of full professors in each college.

Beyond these procedural and policy language recommendations, we feel strongly that the degree of inequity that has developed among faculty selected as Eminent Scholars requires immediate

and directed intervention to correct course. Specifically, we believe that point 6 above should be enacted immediately beginning with the AY 2021-22 round of Eminent Scholar designations.

For the sake of full transparency, our concerns are motivated by multiple years where candidates from the College of Arts & Letters have been turned down for the title of Eminent Scholar without any clear explanation as to why and in spite of having distinguished careers at the tops of their fields as confirmed by external letter writers as well as their extensive CVs. The requirements for putting together a nomination packet for Eminent Scholar are substantial – as they should be – but they also require an expenditure of social and reputational capital in procuring external support letters from other preeminent scholars in candidates’ fields. While this alone should not guarantee a successful nomination, the cost is simply too high when it seems readily apparent that the Eminent Scholar committee is not fairly evaluating nominees in terms of their disciplinary standing. In turn, this dissuades accomplished scholars from wanting to repeatedly expend capital in going back year after year to their peers at other institutions for updated letters. Moreover, these types of continuous exclusions – even if they are the result of implicit biases and unintended oversights – contribute to senior scholars becoming disenchanted with the institution, less invested in championing it, and potentially looking for leadership roles elsewhere. Thus, we see this issue as more than just about how an Awards committee operates, but about the message this sends to current and future faculty in the arts, humanities, and social sciences about how Old Dominion University values research and creative scholarship in these areas.