Section 1: Communication and implementation of guidelines for good practices

We encourage departments and other academic units to make this guide accessible to faculty and students and to hold open discussions of the issues discussed herein. Some departments have already found it useful to discuss sections of previous drafts of this guide during departmental meetings, using this as an occasion to share ideas and information about issues discussed in the guide. Such discussions can be more than informational, however. The governing idea of guides of this kind is that it is not enough simply to affirm certain values or goals—there must be a continuing commitment to developing and implementing policies and procedures that can enhance their realization. Since faculty, student population, and staff change over time, and since new challenges arise and improved research emerges, periodic revisiting of the issues discussed in this guide is recommended, as is the monitoring of policies and practices for effectiveness. Departmental and committee chairs can contribute to the effectiveness of such meetings by making it clear that participation in such meetings is as much a responsibility as participation in meetings for hiring, promotion, and graduate review—indeed, good practices for the conduct of hiring, promotion, and graduate review are among the central concerns of these guidelines. Thought should also be given to the representation of various groups—faculty, staff, students, etc.—who might not normally be present at department or committee meetings, but who would be affected by such practices and whose perspectives and participation are important for the development, implementation, and success of the practices. Discussion of the guide and subsequent decision-making can model the central values of inclusion, transparency, and mutual respect, as well as manifesting recognition of the importance of process.

The issues with which the guide is concerned are often difficult to broach and awkward to discuss, and for this reason they may fail to be discussed in the usual array of departmental or committee meetings. Thus, posing the question of explicitly reviewing existing practices in light of the recommendations of guides such as this as can afford an opportunity for discussions and decision-making that otherwise would not have occurred. Moreover, planned discussions of this kind make it possible to raise difficult issues in a setting independent of any specific incident, grievance, or crisis, and without attributing any fault. Once such an incident has occurred or a crisis is underway, it will be more difficult to achieve open reflection and frank discussion of how existing practices might better address persisting concerns or serve underlying values. Moreover, it should not fall upon those who are most concerned with these issues, or most likely to be adversely affected by them, to raise such questions—the departmental or committee chair can do so as part of the regular course of events.

As this guide will discuss below, structure is important for effective and inclusive processes and discussions. If there is to be a departmental or committee meeting, or several such meetings, at which a review of practices is to occur, it is recommended that copies of this guide or other such guides be circulated in advance, along with links to existing departmental, college, or university policies or standard practices. One recommended practice is to have the various sections of this guide reviewed and discussed first in the relevant departmental committees or in ad hoc representative groups, which then can bring recommendations to the department as a whole. This may permit a more thorough examination of issues as
well as better adaptation of recommendations to specific unit circumstances and resources. Department and committee chairs can encourage attendance at meetings, and make available agendas in advance that help insure that there will be space both for structured and open discussion, that there will be a chance for those with minority views to make themselves heard, and that action items can be introduced. It is also considered a good practice that, where possible, significant policy changes are not be adopted at the first meeting at which they are discussed, so that there can be time for reflection and wider discussion. Another recommended practice is to designate a chair or facilitator for such meetings other than the existing departmental or committee chair (see SECTION 7: COMMUNICATION for further suggestions about how to structure discussions to promote full and open participation). Departments and committees may also benefit from inviting a college or university ombudsperson, legal counsel, or others with relevant expertise or experience to make presentations to the group, prior to or during deliberation.

If a vote is taken on affirming, revising, or adopting guidelines, this should be recorded in the meeting’s minutes, and a copy of the guidelines voted upon should be kept along with the minutes and archived by the department, whether the vote is favorable or not. Being able to refer back to such discussions and guidelines can play an important role in subsequent deliberations and in contending with incidents as they occur.

If adopted, guidelines should be made readily available to all members of the department, and newly arriving members should be given copies. Orientation of new students and faculty is an important occasion for making sure that all members are aware of unit guidelines—again, before a crisis or controversy arises of the kind such a guide is intended to help prevent. For example, a departmental Good Practices Guide can help newcomers to gain a reasonable idea of what they should expect from others—colleagues, staff, and students—and what others will expect from them. Becoming aware of the guide can also enable newcomers to contribute more effectively to the ongoing process of developing departmental practices.

Should an incident or accusation occur, all parties should be reminded of the existence of unit guidelines and given access to them. In such cases, guidelines may be of significant value in providing structure and focus for the discussions that follow.

This Good Practices Guide is itself a work in progress, and experience is an important source of information about how to improve it. The APA has therefore sought ways of drawing upon this experience in the ongoing development of the guide through a series of public consultations via the APA Blog and discussion sessions at APA meetings. The task force hopes that the APA will continue to create opportunities and forums for members to convey relevant comments and suggestions to the APA (along with a durable record of comments and suggestions received). 2

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2 Members are encouraged to send comments and suggestions on this guide, or on related matters, to the APA at info@apaonline.org, where an archive of such suggestions will be kept for future review.