AVOIDING BIAS IN READING & WRITING EVALUATIONS

evaluations may differ systematically based on gender or race/ethnicity

Descriptive words may be used differently in evaluating members of different social groups:

- **Grindstone adjectives** - (hardworking, conscientious, dependable, meticulous, thorough, diligent, dedicated, careful) – are sometimes used more for women, implying that women succeed more through effort than ability.

- **Ability traits** – talented, smart, able, capable, brilliant

- **Standout adjectives** – best, superior, excellent

**Descriptive phrases** can unintentionally influence a reader.

1. **Using first names for women** or minority faculty and titles for men (Joan was an asset to our department.” –vs.- “Dr. Smith was an asset to our department.”)

2. **Gendered adjectives** (“Dr. Sarah Gray is a caring, compassionate physician” –vs.- Dr. Joel Gray has been very successful with his patients”)

3. **Doubt raisers** or negative language (“although her publications are not numerous” or “while not the best student I have had, s/he”)

4. **Potentially negative language** (“S/he requires only minimal supervision” or “S/he is totally intolerant of shoddy research”)

5. **Faint praise** (“S/he worked hard on projects that s/he was assigned” or “S/he has never had temper tantrums”)

6. **Hedges** (“S/he responds well to feedback”)

7. **Irrelevancy** (“S/he is an avid skier and stamp collector”)

8. **Unnecessarily invoking a stereotype** (“She is not overly emotional”; “He is very confident yet not arrogant”; or “S/he is extremely productive, especially as someone who attended inner city schools and a large state university”

Based on: Trix & Psenka, 2003; Schmader, Whitehead, & Wysocki, 2007; and Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Initiative (WISELI), University of Wisconsin, Madison, Handout on Reviewing applicants: Research on Bias and Assumptions.