

# **Oh, Won't You Stay?**

## **Predictors of Faculty Intent to Leave a Public Research University**



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# Introduction

- **Studies of faculty work life in colleges and universities represent a substantial segment of higher education research (pay equity, performance, impact on students, etc.)**
- **Competition among private and public universities - and with industry - is particularly intense among “very high research activity” institutions**
- **Future economic, social and cultural well-being in the United States will require a strong professoriate to boost educational attainment and skills among the U.S. population as well as create research-based innovations**

# Purpose of the Study

- **Extend the range of research on faculty intent to leave**
- **Integrate critical factors identified in the existing literature into a single model**
- **Examine whether or not there are different predictors between leaving academe and leaving for another institution**

# Theoretical Bases for Examining Employee Intent to Leave and Turnover

- **Decision-making: March and Simon's (1958) concepts of bounded rationality and "satisficing" with incomplete information**
- **Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory – extent to which employee's beliefs or expectations about effort, work and outcomes or rewards are confirmed**
- **Price and Mueller's (1986) theory of employee turnover (satisfaction, commitment, fairness of rewards)**

# Review of Literature

- **age, the characteristics of institutional governance, gender, scholarly productivity, years at an institution, and organizational and career satisfaction (Smart, 1990);**
- **commitment, sense of community, job stress, encroachment on an individual's personal time, and institutional fit (Barnes, Agago, & Coombs, 1998);**
- **professional priorities and rewards, administrative relations and support, job satisfaction and the quality of benefits and services, personal well-being, institutional commitment, and engagement in work (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002);**

## Review of Literature continued...

- **support and collegial communication (Dee, 2004);**
- **seniority, job security and satisfaction, compensation, institutional quality, gender, and ethnicity (Zhou & Volkwein, 2004);**
- **satisfaction, full-time status, length of service, administrative and technical support, and professional development (Rosser & Townsend, 2006);**
- **autonomy, communication, openness, distributive justice, role conflict, satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Dee & Daly, 2006)**

## Review of literature continued...

- **disciplinary context (Xu, 2007)**
- **tangible aspects of the work environment (such as facilities) and intangible aspects of the work environment (such as peer and department leader relationships, research opportunities, quality of peers and institution) (Matier, 1990)**

# Research Questions

- **Which predictors are most salient when considered simultaneously and for different types of intent to leave?**
- **Do more targeted measures of explanatory factors within larger constructs such as stress and satisfaction lead to a more precise understanding of the roles these factors play?**
- **Does faculty scholarly productivity appear to play a role in determining intent to leave? (empirical results unclear Smart,1990; Zhou and Volkwein, 2004)**
- **What are the potential benefits and implications of this line of inquiry for the research agenda, institutional leaders, and the long-term challenges that the academy faces in the presence of faculty retirements, demands for increased quality and access to higher education, cost pressures, and competition for faculty?**

# Data Source

- **2005 HERI Faculty Survey**
- **Census of tenured/tenure-track faculty at a large, public research university**
- **Response rate of 37.4%**
- **Excluded faculty reporting primarily administrative responsibilities**
- **Sample (n=587)**
- **Weighted cases for rank and gender (under-represented in the respondent pool)**

# Methods

- **Conducted exploratory factor analysis on item clusters for stress, satisfaction, scholarly productivity and faculty perceptions of various aspects of the work environment – principal components, varimax rotation**
- **Identified three stress (work, family, publishing) and three satisfaction factors (job, institution, peers), a productivity factor, and two factors for the environment, “fit” and “support”**
- **Demographic control variables: gender, rank, ethnicity, years at institution, married/partner, discipline type - Biglan’s (1973) typology “hard/soft” and “pure/applied”**
- **Cronbach’s alphas for all factors were adequate: most around .70, some lower, some higher**
- **Binary logistic regression employed for two models: considered leaving for another institution and considered leaving academe**

# Results

## Considered Leaving for Another Institution

## Considered Leaving Academe

### Model Summary

**Sample Size** n=587  
**Nagelkerke  $R^2$**  .207  
**-2 log likelihood** 561.941  
**% correctly classified** 77.6%

**n=587**  
**.358**  
**504.829**  
**79.5%**

### Odds Ratio

### Odds Ratio

**StrsWork** 2.115\*  
**StrsPublish** 0.893  
**StrsFamily** 1.298  
**DisSatJob** 1.465  
**DisSatInst** 1.158  
**DisSatFac** 0.809  
**Fit** 1.243  
**Support** 0.933  
**ScholProd** 1.640\*\*\*  
**Gender** 0.836  
**Rank** 1.002-1.242  
**Ethnicity** 0.657  
**Biglan Type** 3.739\*\*\*  
 (soft/pure)  
**Years at Inst** 0.944\*\*\*  
**Married/Partner Status** 1.794

**1.079**  
**1.553**  
**2.026\*\***  
**1.872\***  
**1.006**  
**0.847**  
**0.646\*\*\***  
**0.649\*\***  
**1.031**  
**1.498**  
**0.666-0.918**  
**1.880**  
**0 .272\*, 0.035\*\*, 0.372\*\*\***  
 (non-hard/applied)  
**0.983**  
**0.316\*\*\***

# Results for Leave for Another Institution Model

- Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .207$
- fewer years at institution
- higher scholarly productivity
- higher work-related stress  
faculty meetings, “red tape”, committees
- being in a soft/pure discipline
- gender, rank, ethnicity, married/partner not significant

# Results for Leave Academe Model

- **Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .358$**
- **being in a hard/applied discipline**
- **not being married/having partner**
- **lack of perceived “fit” and “support”**
- **family stress**
- **dissatisfaction with aspects of the job**  
total compensation, teaching load, opportunity to pursue creative/scholarly work, career advancement, autonomy
- **not married/partner**

# Recommendations

- **Actively seek out ways decrease faculty research productivity**
- **Give all faculty a lie detector test and put all those in the arts and humanities who thought about leaving for another institution into the engineering college**
- **Remove faculty from all committees**
- **For single faculty members, provide a free subscription to [match.com](http://match.com) or [eharmony.com](http://eharmony.com) until they find a partner...**

**OK, seriously...**

# Discussion and Implications

- **Two completely different sets of predictors for each model**
- **Measurement of specific dimensions of stress and satisfaction appears to be beneficial**
- **Scholarly productivity important for inter-institutional competition – supports Smart (1990)**
- **“Fit” and “support” more important predictors for leaving academe**

# Discussion and Implications

- **Results confirm yet clarify more specific dimensions within broader constructs**
- **Engaging faculty on ways to reduce work stressors that reflect “non-academic” aspects of faculty work – yet affect academic work life – as well as differential strategies by discipline appear warranted**
- **There may be differential effects based on family role and support/stress**
- **Thinking creatively about flexibility of options and tracks, including balance of professional/academic opportunities and roles within and across stages of academic career appears warranted**

# Discussion and Implications

- **Future research could benefit from institution-specific studies that:**
  - **lead to a formal meta-analysis**
- **employ more precise and consistent measures**
  - **focus on distinct type of leave intent**
- **Institutions should engage faculty on understanding and addressing issues – could be a strategy in and of itself to address stress, satisfaction, fit and support issues**

# Limitations

- **Sampling (actually a census) and missing data**
- **Generalizability – institutional context and characteristics**
- **Factor reliability adequate, but not optimal**
- **Lack of consensus and consistency in defining constructs, composition of scales**

# Conclusions

- **Different factors predict different types of leaving**
- **Productivity and non-research stressors predictive of inter-institutional leaving**
- **Fit, support, and family situation predictive of leaving academe**
- **Discipline matters for both, although differently**
- **Potential impact of research-based reforms is substantial given current environment and future needs**

# Questions and Discussion

# Contact Information

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