

THE IMPACT OF FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION OUTSIDE OF  
CLASSROOM ON FACULTY SATISFACTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND RETENTION

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION OUTSIDE OF CLASSROOM ON FACULTY SATISFACTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND RETENTION

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This exploratory study investigated the impact of faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom on faculty members' perceptions of their engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Kurt Lewin's person-environment interaction model provided the conceptual framework for this study. Descriptive data from an internal and external evaluation of programs that promote faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom were the sources of data. The populations for this study were members of the Faculty Fellows Program, a stratified random sample of non-Faculty Fellows, and frequent users of the Faculty-Student Interaction Program at a large southwestern Research I university.

Interviews with faculty who participate in the Faculty Fellows Program, interviews with non-Faculty Fellows, and questionnaires completed by frequent users of the Faculty-Student Interaction Program were the primary sources of data. Interviews were transcribed and data were sorted and coded for major themes. Data compiled from the questionnaires were sorted for major themes and categories. The research questions guided the analysis of all data.

By Melissa M. Vito

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	9
Abbreviations.....	11
Delimitations.....	11
Limitations .....	12
Significance of the Study.....	12
Summary .....	14
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	15
Background .....	15
Faculty Satisfaction, Vitality, and Retention .....	16

To my sons

Anthony and Zach

All my love

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Higher education is now seen as an indispensable investment in creating a knowledgeable workforce, producing broad national benefits and increased personal fulfillment for our citizens” (Marchese, 1997, p. 1). The need for strong higher education institutions is undeniable. The impact of higher education on a person’s life is multifaceted, from personal growth to the increase in earning power and career success.

“The well being of the university depends on its ability to recruit and retain a talented professorate. Our national well being depends on our ability to develop a happy, emotionally healthy, and productive next generation” (Hensel, 1991, p. 3). Faculty are the heart of the student experience in higher education, and satisfied faculty are more likely to contribute actively to teaching and research, thereby providing students with a positive educational experience. “Colleges and universities must be willing to experiment, invest resources, accept criticism, and risk failure in order to stimulate genuine professional development” (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981, p. 608).

Research looking at faculty satisfaction and retention is not new (Hagedorn, 2000). However, broader public interest in these issues is only recently growing. “To the casual observer, faculty satisfaction is at best a trivial concern, easily superseded by the

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Most of the literature that looks at faculty issues focuses on faculty satisfaction, workload and burnout issues, motivators, faculty vitality, and ultimately retention in the profession (Baldwin, 1990; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Barnes, Agago, & Coombs, 1988; Blackburn & Bentley, 1993; Fjortoft, 1993; Hagedorn, 2000; Kalivoda, Sorrell, & Simpson, 1994; Neumann & Finlay-Neumann, 1991). The literature that looks at the impact of faculty-student interaction outside the classroom focuses on the impact of this interaction on student success (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Only one study indirectly discusses the impact of these relationships on faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). No research up to this point has studied the impact of faculty-student interaction outside the classroom on faculty.

#### **Background**

While there is now a significant body of research about faculty retention, satisfaction, and engagement, for many years there was not public support for pursuing these issues. On the contrary, Hagedorn (2000) documented that there was considerable criticism of higher education throughout much of the twentieth century. Hagedorn identifies many issues that gave rise to criticism of higher education, including the

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the proposed research design and methodology to be used in this exploratory study. The approach is descriptive and will look at the impact of faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom on faculty members' perception of their satisfaction, engagement, and retention at their institution. This study will be conducted at a large Research I university in the Southwest.

#### **Restatement of the Problem**

With a growing college-aged population and greater numbers of faculty leaving the profession (Smart, 1990), it is critical that research be conducted to explore new ways to positively impact faculty satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

Faculty satisfaction, engagement, and retention are critical to the future success of higher education in this country (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981, p. 598). Current research addresses job stressors, job satisfaction, career stages, and motivation. There is much research which substantiates the positive impact of student-faculty interaction outside the classroom on student success (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1998; Kuh & Hu, 2001). However, there is a dearth of research that looks at the impact of faculty-student interaction outside

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reports and summarizes the results of an exploratory and descriptive study identifying the effects of faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom on faculty members' perceptions of their engagement with their institution, satisfaction with their career, and their retention at their institutions. This study was conducted at a large southwestern public Research I institution and utilized data gathered as a part of a program review. This section describes the data-gathering process and the results of the qualitative analysis.

#### **Data Sources**

This investigator worked with the Dean of Students Office to have access to the program evaluations of the Faculty Fellows and Faculty-Student Interaction programs that were conducted in 2003-04 and 2006. This information includes the full transcribed interviews of the Faculty Fellows and the Faculty Satisfaction Experience Questionnaire (FSEQ) information from the frequent participants in the Faculty-Student Interaction Program. Also included are the 2006 follow-up interviews that were conducted with a stratified random sample of faculty who were not participants in the Faculty Fellows

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of the investigation, including the research methodology and design, literature review, and findings. A discussion of the implications of the investigation's findings and recommendations are also presented in this chapter.

#### **Summary**

##### **Statement of the Problem**

Research looking at faculty satisfaction and retention is not new (Hagedorn, 2000). However, the importance of the issue has grown as a concern for the broader public (Hagedorn, 2000). A combination of factors, including the pending retirement of the baby boom faculty (those born between 1946–1964) and the growth of the college-aged population has imposed a greater sense of urgency in looking at ways to increase faculty satisfaction and retention.

Longstanding research has documented the positive influence of informal faculty-student interaction on student success (Chickering, 1969; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978, 1991). However, there is a dearth of research that looks at

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**APPENDIX A**

**FACULTY FELLOWS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (FFIS)**

**APPENDIX B**

**FACULTY FELLOW 2002-03 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **FACULTY SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (FSEQ)**

**APPENDIX D**

**NON-FACULTY FELLOW INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2006 (NFFIS)**

**APPENDIX E**

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**