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# Exploring the Two-Year College Faculty Work Experience: The Active Job, the Evolving Institution and the Changing Effort-Reward Bargain

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Exploring the Two-Year College Faculty Work Experience: The Active Job, the  
Evolving Institution and the Changing Effort-Reward Bargain

By

Jacobs Hammond

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Sociology

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

May 2012

Exploring the Two-Year College Faculty Work Experience: The Active Job, the Evolving  
Institution and the Changing Effort-Reward Bargain

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## **ABSTRACT**

While significant research describes the occupational experiences of four-year college and university faculty, two-year college faculty have received little attention from scholars. This study enters the existing void. Fourteen two-year college faculty members from a variety of institutions in Minnesota were interviewed utilizing a semi-structured depth interview technique. Questions were derived from sociological and interdisciplinary literature pertaining to the higher education faculty experience. Two-year college faculty were found to hold active jobs, work in evolving institutions and face a decreasing effort-reward bargain. Faculty were also found to be susceptible to experiencing role strain, stress derived from group-decision making processes and person-environment misfit. Consistent with prior research, female faculty indicated experiencing considerably more strain than male faculty. Highly satisfied faculty expressed they derived their greatest pleasure from pedagogical innovation, interaction with students, student diversity, occupational autonomy and the ideals of the two-year college mission. This study adds to research in the areas of higher education institutions, hiring practices, relationships between gender and work stress in higher education and participatory occupations.

## **CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER**

For many of us, our occupations play a significant role in shaping who we are. We spend much of our time engrossed in our various work activities and in interaction with our coworkers. But what relevance does the study of work have for mainstream sociology? When one searches the literatures of the various established subfields, this most social of experiences is sometimes difficult to locate. Of course, because work and modes of organizing are so interdependent, the ever evolving nature of the work we do plays a role in the formation and evolution of the types of organizations we inhabit. The opposite is true as well. As organizations evolve, our occupational roles are often forced to adapt. While occupational experience may be underrepresented in mainstream sociology, the study of work organizations and industries has become central. By the end of the nineteenth century, the shift from an agrarian economy to one dominated by factory and office work stimulated the growth of the bureaucratic organization. In response, organizational researchers, from Taylor to Blau, stepped in to analyze bureaucracies and their organized patterns of work (Barley and Kunda 2001). As a result, Weber's theory of bureaucracy made a sizable impact on organizational theory. However, the 1960's and 1970's saw the growing influence of systems theory and its focus on generalization, as well as an emphasis on macro and quantitative methods (Barley and Kunda 2001). Studies of work processes were cast aside, and instead settled in fields such as industrial psychology (Barley and Kunda 2001).

Today, some scholars claim we have entered into a post-bureaucratic economy and question the continued dominance of classical bureaucratic theory. According to Barley and Kunda (2001), detailed studies of particular work organizations combined with theories of bureaucracy to greatly benefit the theory of organizations up until the 1960's. Barley and Kunda argue organizational theory was at its best when it was tied closely to empirical work studies, and is currently in need of an influx of such empirical studies to update and re-conceptualize modern work. The authors believe the marginalization of detailed studies of work has led to petrification of concepts and theories. According to Barley and Kunda, old classifications such as blue and white collar marginalize the booming service industry, and traditional ideal-type images of occupations, such as the farmer, have become outdated and detached from contemporary realities. In addition, the impacts of the internet and other digital technologies could not have been foreseen by Weber. It is here where more narrow analyses of particular occupations, such as higher education faculty, can shed light on how roles, work processes and experiences have changed in a way sprawling, macro depictions of industries cannot. According to Barley and Kunda (2001), more qualitative research is needed to update organizational theory's antiquated images of work and offer new conceptual ground, e.g., the emotional labor of service workers. This study addresses this void in sociological inquiry.

It has been argued people are driven by desires for things such as survival, comfort, security and satisfaction. In modern society, paid work is central to satisfying such desires, which requires us to spend much time engaged in our given occupations. In the vast majority of cases, paid work requires direct contact with one or more individuals on



a semi-regular or regular basis. For many adults, work therefore constitutes a majority of their daily social activity. This aspect of work deserves greater attention, as substantial social scientific research finds the quantity and quality of our social relationships may be among the most important ingredients to finding happiness in life (Carter 2010). Such recent research aligns with Durkheim (1897/1951), who finds weak social bonds to be associated with greater occurrence of suicide. Based on these arguments, work and its social requirements may help us avoid despair and even lead us to happiness. However, Randall Collins (1975) argues people, while inherently social, are also prone to create and experience social conflict when engaging in social interaction. Such interpersonal conflicts can be taxing or even overwhelming, and often result in feelings of mild to intense stress (Doyle and Hind 1995). In addition, even without interpersonal conflict being present, the interacting individual is exerting energies into various forms of dramaturgy, impression management and evaluation of reflected appraisals (Goffman 1959; Cooley 1922/1964). While work stress is often viewed to be an individual problem, it is the sociological imagination which allows us to reinterpret these experiences as strongly influenced by social and structural factors (Mills 1959). In support of this line of thinking, research has found organizational elements to be stronger predictors of individual stress than personality factors (Bacharach, Bauer and Conley 1986). This study finds a sizeable portion of individual faculty work stress can be directly attributed to interpersonal conflicts which arise in the work place and the evolution of higher education institutions.

While the experience of stress is omnipresent, and not inherently negative, stress experienced on a consistent basis without relief is less ambiguous in its effects. In fact, research has found chronic stress to be a risk factor leading not only to psychological harm but also to increases in the experience of ill-health (Grzywacz et al. 2004). Such findings have lent new urgency to the study of occupational stress. Once thought by many to be a position of relative comfort (Buckholdt and Miller 2008), research has found higher education faculty are experiencing relatively high levels of psychological distress (Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008; Michailidis 2008; Murray 2008). Specific findings have even declared higher education faculty to be under greater duress than other professional groups (Kinman 1998). However, most of what is currently known about higher education faculty work comes from investigations of four-year faculty and their institutions. Little research has been conducted on work experiences of two-year college faculty, despite this population representing approximately one-third of American higher education faculty (Huber 1998), and instructing nearly one-half of all college students (Chronicle of Higher Education 2002).

Before endeavoring to investigate the work lives of two-year college faculty, it is important to note some general descriptors of this population. Two-year college faculty are 88% white, 53% male and average 51 years of age (Huber 1998). For the majority of two-year faculty, their highest degree earned is a Master's (63%), followed by a Ph.D. (16%) and Bachelors (15%) (Cohen and Brawer 2003). Approximately fourteen percent of two-year faculty are working towards another degree (Huber 1998). As of 1998, only 38% of two-year faculty held a full-time position (Cohen and Brawer 2003).

Working conditions for higher education faculty are socially patterned according to a hierarchy of positions and institutions. Most two-year college faculty obtain positions according to five academic ranks, in ascending order of status: instructor, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor and full professor. As of 1998, 46% of two-year college faculty held assistant, associate or full professor rankings, while 38% held the rank of lecturer or instructor (Huber 1998). For sake of comparison, 80% of four-year faculty report holding one of the top three ranks, with just 10% as lecturer or instructor (Huber 1998).

Significant economic disparities exist across rank, as demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Average Two-Year College Faculty Salaries by Rank. AAUP (2010), p. 4**

|                      |          |
|----------------------|----------|
| Full professors      | \$73,961 |
| Associate professors | \$60,571 |
| Assistant professors | \$55,495 |
| Lecturers            | \$52,681 |
| Instructors          | \$45,909 |

At the same time, salaries for two-year college faculty are considerably lower than faculty at other institution types. According to the American Association of University Professors (2010), average salaries by institution type from highest to lowest are the following: doctoral universities (\$91,060), master's universities (\$70,807), baccalaureate colleges (\$67,232) and associates colleges (\$59,400).

Very little research has been conducted regarding the work experiences of faculty at two-year institutions (Townsend and Twombly 2007). Most literature on higher

education faculty work experiences has examined the perspectives of those at four-year institutions. Therefore, there remains a very unclear picture regarding the work experiences of two-year faculty.

Much of the research which addresses two-year faculty also presents data on four year faculty for the purpose of comparison. This phenomenon suggests it may be difficult to understand data on two-year faculty without placing the results in a larger context. For example, a finding which demonstrates two-year faculty are quite dissatisfied with the quality and work ethic of their students changes in complexion when data from four-year institutions is added, showing four-year faculty espouse nearly equal dissatisfaction (Valadez and Anthony 2001).

Though there are major differences between two- and four-year institutions, particularly in regard to faculty roles and institutional mission, there are also similarities in faculty activities, such as instruction, evaluation, tutoring and committee work. Therefore, in order to provide a deeper understanding of faculty work than the scant research on two-year faculty will allow, the literature reviewed herein also includes a brief review of the more substantial research regarding four-year faculty and the work experience they encounter. This literature possesses limitations for the topic of two-year faculty, and findings cannot be haphazardly cross-applied. However, research on four-year faculty provides direct assessments of faculty work stress which are not included in the literature on two-year faculty. Research which is available regarding two-year faculty tends to emphasize measures of job satisfaction. Therefore, analysis in this study will attempt to

combine understandings of both work stress and satisfaction of two-year college faculty in order to illuminate the nature of their experience. While one might imagine these concepts to be inversely related, findings suggest this is not necessarily the case, and a more nuanced picture of stress and satisfaction is needed.

Though little research has directly studied the work experiences of two-year college faculty, significant literature exists regarding broader notions of occupational characteristics which lead to satisfaction and dissatisfaction. While there has always been economic and technological change, work stress and dissatisfaction has gained increased attention due to scientific documentation of the impacts of chronic psychological and emotional duress and their connection to increased ill-health (Grzywacz et al. 2004). With the increasing awareness of negative impacts of undesirable working conditions, investigations into the emotional and psychological well being of workers are becoming more commonplace.

This study endeavors to understand the work lives of two-year college faculty members. Prior research has explained worker satisfaction according to degree of individual/job fit, existing effort-reward balance, degree of autonomy and extent of social support (French, Caplan and Harrison 1982; Siegrist 1996; Karasek 1979). These insights provide a framework for this study, which questions two-year college faculty directly regarding the rewards, challenges, interpersonal dynamics and processes they routinely experience in their work lives. Additionally, previous research regarding higher education faculty has explained worker stress and satisfaction as varying in accord with demographic variables.

This study examines differentiation in experience by sex, educational background, tenure status, experience and work history. Finally, sociological insights provide both an interpretive lens for the author and illuminating imagery capable of further illustrating emergent patterns in subject responses.

## **CHAPTER TWO: WORKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The following section presents a review of the literature pertaining to the higher education faculty work experience. Specific categories include a sociological overview of work and higher education, an interdisciplinary examination of work and higher education faculty experience, and a theoretical framework of work experience constituted by three occupational stress and satisfaction models.

### **SOCIOLOGICAL LITERATURE**

While experiences such as job stress or satisfaction are often viewed as individual issues, sociologists assume much of our experience derives from connections with other individuals and groups, the structure of the organizations we inhabit and the larger social structures present in our society. Organizations where individuals work often demand social interaction, and thus produce a multitude of individual and group power dynamics and as well as established norms of behavior. Sociological literature determined most relevant to the study of higher education faculty includes research which focuses on work, bureaucracy, organizations and recent changes in higher education.

#### *Work*

Sociologists have examined trends in worker stress and satisfaction. While the experience of stress is often characterized as an individual issue, Bacharach, Bauer and Conley (1986) find organizational elements to be stronger predictors of work stress than individual personality factors. Examining job satisfaction, Voydanoff (1978) finds both

extrinsic and intrinsic job characteristics contribute to personal evaluations of satisfaction. In related research, Kashefi (2005) finds extrinsic rewards must meet an individual's basic needs before intrinsic rewards of a position become salient. Women are found to provide similar job satisfaction ratings to men (Firebaugh and Harley 1995; Banerjee and Perrucci 2010), while nonwhites rate their satisfaction lower than whites (Banerjee and Perrucci 2010), and older workers rate their satisfaction higher than younger workers (Firebaugh and Harley 1995; Jiang, Hall, Loscocco and Allen 1995). However, the positive relationship between age and satisfaction is more ambiguous for professionals, managers and clerical workers (Firebaugh and Harley 1995). Attempting to identify job characteristics which create satisfaction for individuals, Zeffane (1994) finds task variety and involvement in decision making the strongest predictors of positive ratings. Banerjee and Perruci (2010) find supportive coworkers improve job satisfaction, while also noting this social support appears to be more characteristic of female workers than male.

### *Bureaucracy*

Weber (1924/1968) documents historical trends in the evolution of administration systems, moving society towards an emphasis on rationality, and finds modern societies to be based on formal rules which are carefully planned, documented, and apply to everyone. Weber saw this as the growth of bureaucracy, which he defined as a hierarchical system dominated by written rules. In business, this means that each employee is given particular responsibilities, and hiring is done on the basis of formal



credentials, training and job performance. Though recognizing the benefits, particularly in regard to fairness, Weber was disconcerted by the feeling that the modern individual had become much like a part in a machine.

### *Organizations*

The sociology of organizations deals largely with understanding the birth, evolution and death of organizations. Four theories predominate in the subfield: the evolutionary theory of organizations, resource dependency theory, population ecology theory and the institutional theory of organizations.

According to Aldrich (1999), the evolutionary theory of organizations developed due to the influence of the biological evolutionary theory of Darwin. Aldrich explains how the evolutionary theory of organizations posits the organizational life cycle can be explained by the simultaneous machinations of four processes within and across organizations:

variation: change from current routines, competencies, organizational forms

selection: differential elimination of certain types of variation

retention: selected variations preserved, duplicated, reproduced

struggle: contest to obtain scarce resources

However, contrary to common interpretations of evolutionary theories, Aldrich argues the organizations we witness today are not the most fit, but instead the result of an ongoing process of trial and error. Aldrich goes on to explain how evolutionary theory applies to multiple levels of analysis, including groups, organizations, populations and communities. Finally, evolutionary theory is capable of explaining both organizational

adaptation and inertia, and analyzing both internal organizational dynamics and external pressures.

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), resource dependency theory examines the relationship between resources and the dependence of organizations on these resources. Pfeffer and Salancik explain how desired resources are often possessed by other organizations in the environment. Therefore, legally independent organizations are in actuality interdependent and resources possessed are a source of power. Therefore, the power of organization A over organization B can be understood as proportional to organization B's dependence on organization A's resources. However, Pfeffer and Salancik explain how organizations can implement strategies to alter their environment and increase their power, such as business mergers and playing a role in public policy creation. Therefore, resource dependency provides an image of the organization as active and adaptable, but focuses on the exchange of material resources, and thus is not capable of explaining internal organizational dynamics.

According to Baum and Powell (1995), population ecology theory seeks to explicate the life cycle of organizations by examining the environment in which organizations compete. A popular theory fragment is density dependence, which states growth or decline in organizational populations within certain geographic boundaries can be interpreted as representative of the degree of cognitive legitimation, or taken for grantedness of that organization type. According to Baum and Powell, while population ecological theory is capable of explaining birth and death of organizations, it is less able

to explicate organizational adaptation due to its reliance on quantitative methods and macro level analysis.

According to Selznick (1996), the institutional theory of organizations is primarily concerned with what creates orderly patterns of action in institutions and organizations. Selznick explains how institutional theory emphasizes the pressure to conform applied to organizations by cultural characteristics, such as norms and values. According to Selznick, old institutionalist theory focused on processes by which structures such as schemas, norms, rules and routines became established as guidelines for behavior, while new institutional theory focuses on organizational mimicry, quests for legitimacy and resultant isomorphism.

The major theoretical perspectives deriving from the sociology of organizations attempt to explicate the life cycle of organizations at three junctures; birth, evolution and death. Each theory presented above has potential applications for higher education institutions. Population ecology theory may help explain macro trends in institution type, such as the recent growth in for-profits. Resource dependency theory, with its emphasis on material exchange and power dynamics, could potentially aid in explicating the complex relationships which exist between institutions and individuals and groups in control of funding sources. However, the evolutionary theory of organizations holds particular relevance for this topic of study, due to its focus on scarce resources (higher education funding) and the relationship of scarcity to adaptations in internal organizational activities, such as administrative policies and faculty roles.

### *Higher Education*

Recent sociological research has examined changes in modern higher education administration practices. Abbas and McLean (2001) describe the changing nature of higher education as moving towards increased access, accountability and institutional competition. According to the authors, increasing pressure on institutions combined with decreasing government funding leads to an increase in part-time faculty in order to create a cheaper, more flexible work force capable of reacting to fluctuations in the market. Abbas and McLean's findings include a marginalized part-time labor force without basic amenities such as office space, who are excluded from department activities and not taken seriously when allowed to participate. The authors recommend increased support for part-time faculty in order to improve morale and to enhance the image of disciplines damaged by the incorporation of low-status part-time faculty.

Benmore (2002) finds managerial attempts to intensify work and reduce autonomy in higher education. These efforts are met by faculty through 1) exit, 2) reinterpretation of the effort-reward bargain (exerting less effort unless there is evident reward), 3) self-development (consulting, working on another credential) and 4) conformity (emphasizing positives). According to Benmore, higher education is moving towards private sector administrative practices. This move includes a new emphasis on managerialism, defined by increased quality control, accountability measures, outside accreditation and reductions in faculty discretion. Nixon et al. (2001) agree administrations are moving

towards managerialist policies. Once revered and allowed to primarily self-regulate, the authors view higher education faculty as a profession in need of a new identity.

Brehony and Deem (2005) find education in the UK to use non-hierarchical, teamwork-oriented language while, in reality, practicing a managerialist model. According to the authors, this trend has replaced an emphasis on finding higher education faculty with strong teaching qualities with an emphasis on finding those who excel in bureaucracy, documentation and paperwork. The authors also view market forces leading institutions to move towards two separate labor forces: a core force made up of full-time faculty, and a peripheral force of part-time and temporary workers.

Benmore (2002) identifies a changing relationship between the employee and worker. Where once there was an expectation that a worker who was loyal and worked well would be rewarded with job security, Benmore states the modern tendency is for organizations to seek efficiency through offering less wage/job security, and treating employees as disposable.

Thorne and Hochschild (1997) provide a descriptive insight into the life of the academic, and offer the analogy of departments as family units. According to the authors, academic departments, like families, share space, finite resources and have a long tradition of patriarchy. In an additional parallel, department members do not choose their peers, but are forced into close quarters with them anyway. Thorne and Hochschild conceptualize the parent-child dynamic in two ways, with either faculty as parents and graduate students as children, or with the department chair as the parent and the faculty as

children. In either case, the authors highlight the adolescent jealousy and infighting over finite resources by the dependents. Thorne and Hochschild see some faculty as focusing primarily on their own work and neglecting their children (students). Departments, like families, are sites of shared labor and the second shift, and some faculty refuse to do their share of housework (administration, advising). Finally, Thorne and Hochschild view departments as espousing a dominant ethos, or focus, which they describe as either feminine (emphasis on student support) or masculine (emphasis on publishing).

In general, sociological research examines general trends in work experience, bureaucratic organization, organizational life cycles and higher education. Sociological analysis of higher education emphasizes the growing influence of private sector administrative policies, in particular a move towards a more flexible, part-time work force and increased quality control measures. In addition, a number of theoretical perspectives of organizations are provided which may be applied to the changing nature of higher education.

#### INTERDISCIPLINARY LITERATURE

As noted in the introduction, Barley and Kunda (2001) find work studies like those conducted by Taylor and Blau have been displaced from mainstream sociology due to modern emphases on generalizability and macro level analysis. As a result, most studies of the work experience are conducted outside of the field of sociology. In this particular case, much of the literature examining the higher education faculty experience emanates from the field of education. In addition, models of work stress and satisfaction have been

developed in various subfields of psychology and medicine, as well as the sociology of work. These models serve as a helpful foundation in understanding the faculty experience, but one which is supplemented in this study by more generalized notions of higher education and organizations derived from mainstream sociology.

### *Work Stress*

Though stress is a growing concern for higher education faculty, and for workers in general, it is also a construct which is difficult to define. The following section reviews conceptual definitions of work stress cited by researchers of higher education faculty.

Research which principally addresses faculty work stress has focused on four-year faculty. Findings from this research has limitations when discussing two-year faculty. However, researchers of four-year faculty stress provide conceptual definitions of stress which are relevant to all occupations, including two-year faculty.

An examination of the literature pertaining to faculty work stress reveals relative consistency in the way stress is defined. Doyle and Hind (1998) and Smith, Anderson and Lovrich (1995) utilize Gmelch's (1984) Faculty Stress Index to measure levels of faculty stress. Gmelch develops this instrument in part by having subjects self-report what they feel their most stressful events of each day are without providing an objective set of parameters for what a stressor may be. These reports inspire items on the FSI. Therefore, the subjective nature of stress is apparent.

Smith et al. (1995) recognize and address subjectivity when defining work stress as:

an adaptive response registered by the individual that is a consequence of any workplace action, situation, and/or event that places unusual demands upon the individual; the nature of that response is heavily mediated by the individual's mind and body (P. 263).

Doyle and Hind (1995) follow a similar course, stating stress is “experienced when an individual is faced with situations they perceive as taxing or exceeding their resources, individual perception of stress (is) determinant of stress response” (p. 68). Hart and Cress (2008) are in agreement, stating in regards to stress that “perception and reality cannot be extricated from one another” (p. 177).

McGrath (1970) offers an understanding of stress as a process, not a response to a single event. This process is constructed in four stages: 1) demands embedded in the environment, 2) reception and subjective assessment of demands, 3) individual's physiological, psychological and/or behavioral response to subjective demand, and 4) consequences of response on individual and individual's environment.

In summary, stress is defined fairly consistently by researchers of faculty work stress as multi-dimensional, fluid and subjective in nature.

#### *Four-year college faculty*

While little research has been conducted on the work experiences of two-year college faculty, there has been considerable focus on that of faculty at four-year institutions. There are significant occupational differences between these populations, specifically in regard to research demands, tenure process and student enrollment philosophy. Yet faculty at two- and four-year institutions also occupy many similar roles. Both share work



activities such as preparing for classes, instructing, evaluating, tutoring, attending department meetings and serving on committees. Therefore, research findings on occupational stress of four-year faculty can suggest potential sources of stress in the two-year faculty population, with some limitations. This section presents research conducted on the work stress of four-year faculty, while cautioning that many differences exist between the work lives of two- and four-year faculty, and thus findings cannot be directly translated.

Four themes pertaining to four-year faculty work stress emerge during this literature review. The four themes are listed below, along with results of empirical studies which may help explain these general trends.

*a. Work stress*

Recent findings indicate relatively high rates of higher education faculty stress (Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008; Michailidis 2008; Murray 2008). Findings suggest explanations such as rising student numbers, administrative duties and decreasing autonomy (Kinman 1998), difficulty in balancing scholarship, teaching and service responsibilities (Hart and Cress 2008), frustrations pertaining to research and funding (Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008), working long hours, including nights and weekends (Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008), difficulty switching off at home (Hart and Cress 2008; Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008), work-family conflict and feeling institutions do little to help resolve it (Kinman 1998; Kinman and Jones 2008), vague tenure requirements (Hart and Cress 2008), new faculty entering without realistic

expectations of demands (Hart and Cress 2008), disconnect between graduate programs and institutions where faculty gain appointments (Hart and Cress 2008) and lack of congruence and/or experience with institutional mission (Trautvetter 2008).

*b. Tenure process*

Research also finds significant stress regarding the tenure process (Hart and Cress 2008; Kinman and Jones, 2008; Michailidis 2008; Murray 2008). Results suggest explanations such as unclear tenure requirements and lack of communication from the department chair (Murray 2008), perceiving poor promotional prospects (Michailidis 2008) and feeling one's work is not valued (Michailidis 2008).

*c. Preparation of new faculty*

New faculty at four-year institutions report high levels of strain due to feeling underprepared for non-research activities (Eddy 2008; Murray 2008; Trautvetter 2008). Findings suggest explanations such as the challenges of teaching and teaching preparation (Eddy 2008; Murray 2008), a discrepancy between research-focused graduate study and the variety of demands placed on faculty (Murray 2008; Trautvetter 2008), a lack of graduate skill preparation in activities such as course development, teaching to a variety of students and advising (Murray 2008; Trautvetter 2008), inequities in mentoring received during graduate study (Eddy 2008), and vague expectations conveyed to new faculty upon hiring (Eddy 2008; Trautvetter 2008).

*d. Gender*

Female faculty consistently report experiencing more stress than male faculty (Doyle and Hind 1998; Hart and Cress 2008; O’Laughlin and Bischoff 1995; Smith et al. 1995). Results suggest explanations such as more female faculty members in low ranks (Doyle and Hind 1998), women experiencing higher work load in terms of teaching, independent studies, advising (formal and informal), service and committee service (Hart and Cress 2008), feeling undervalued and perceiving poor promotional prospects (Michailidis 2008), and a lack of female role models and collegiality (Hart and Cress 2008).

While one might suspect that female faculty experiencing more strain than male faculty can largely be explained by their greater prevalence in lower ranks, there is evidence that this explanation is not complete. Findings suggest female faculty continue to experience unequal strain even as they move higher in rank (Doyle and Hind 1998; Hart and Cress 2008; O’Laughlin and Bischoff 2005; Michailidis 2008). Explanations for this phenomenon include the prevalence of female faculty in new research areas (feminist studies, race/ethnic studies, sexuality studies) and feeling this work is marginalized (Hart and Cress 2008), fewer female role-models at higher ranks (Doyle and Hind 1998), female faculty reporting greater work-family conflict than their male colleagues (Doyle and Hind 1998) and female faculty perceiving less institutional support for work and family balance than male faculty (O’Laughlin and Bischoff 2005).

While there are many differences between the occupational demands of two- and four-year faculty, four-year faculty stressors such as instructional and student demands, clarity

of tenure requirements, gaps in graduate preparation and gender inequities may also possess relevance for two-year faculty. The following section details a review of the literature pertaining to two-year faculty work stress, including research on part-time vs. full-time faculty, stressors, job satisfaction, and faculty participation in institutional decision making.

### *Two-year college faculty*

Though research regarding the two-year faculty experience is not extensive, there have been some significant findings which aid in the differentiation of the two-year and four-year experience. These findings largely derive from national surveys of higher education faculty, and analyze topics such as job satisfaction, instructional autonomy, faculty decision-making, work-life balance, stressors and minority and female faculty perspectives. The research on two-year faculty has been sorted according to four themes: part-time vs. full time faculty, stressors, job satisfaction, and faculty participation in institutional decision making.

#### *a. Part-time vs. full-time faculty*

Approximately 60% of two-year faculty hold part-time positions (Cohen and Brawer 2003; Huber 1998). Part-time faculty tend to make considerably less money (even when considered on a per-course basis), receive fewer benefits and possess less job security (Cohen and Brawer 2003). According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), the number of part-time faculty can be interpreted as an institutional reaction to decreases in government

funding, which has caused an adoption of the modern business model of cost control, providing fewer benefits, and retaining more labor force flexibility.

The number of part-time faculty complicates an analysis of either job satisfaction or faculty stress. Wagoner (2007) finds part-time faculty to be less satisfied than full-time. Paramount in this discrepancy appears to be a divide in job security, with full-time faculty feeling more secure. While this result might appear intuitive, Wagoner finds increasing nuance when faculty are disaggregated. Part-time faculty in vocational and training areas are found to be more satisfied than part-time faculty in the arts and sciences, while full-time arts and science faculty are found to be more satisfied than full-time vocational and training faculty. In addition, arts and sciences faculty are found to be more committed to an academic career. In response to these findings, Wagner theorizes those with skills marketable in the private sector (such as vocational and training faculty) are more satisfied when they are able to use their skills in both arenas to maximize salary, while those with skills most marketable in colleges (such as arts and sciences faculty) are most happy with a full-time position in a college.

#### *b. Stressors*

Significant differences between two- and four-year faculty arise in the area of work stressors. These differences can largely be encapsulated by the degree of focus on research and teaching respectively. Cohen and Brawer (2003) examine four national surveys of higher education faculty and find thirteen to fifteen hours of classroom instruction each week to be the norm among at two-year colleges, a number considerably

higher than at four-year institutions. Yet, Cohen and Brawer also find little to no research and publishing requirements for two-year faculty. Valadez and Anthony (2001) find strain to be apportioned accordingly, with two-year faculty tending to focus on concerns with teaching, and four-year faculty strain largely stemming from research.

Huber (1998) finds community college faculty to be less stressed than their colleagues at four-year institutions, stating only 33% of two-year faculty view their job as a source of considerable personal strain. Huber also finds less than 33% of community college faculty view the review process as stressful, which is less than the author's findings for four-year faculty. Concurrently, Cohen and Brawer (2003), find the review process to be less stressful for two-year faculty than four-year faculty. According to the authors, this discrepancy is likely due to tenure at the community college level approximating the model followed by secondary schools. According to Cohen and Brawer, tenure is usually awarded after one year or a probationary period of two to three years.

While providing a relatively positive outlook when compared with four-year institutions, Huber (1998) notes considerable strain in community college faculty regarding red tape, work/family conflict, teaching load, committee work, student demands and faculty governance. Wolf-Wendel, Ward and Twombly (2007), examining female community college faculty with young children, find stressors including a perception of not having enough time, concerns about gaining tenure, and inequity at work.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) find that for two-year college faculty, the transition from grad school can be difficult, as new faculty experience a significant drop in the academic orientation in students. The authors note strain regarding the lack of control over which students are admitted to classes, along with the low skills, low preparation, and low motivation of many community college students, a finding which aligns with that of Townsend and Twombly (2007).

There is a sense that two-year college faculty are increasingly being asked to do more with less (Cohen and Brawer 2003; Levin and Wagoner 2006). Cohen and Brawer (2003) declare decreases in government funding to be a driving force behind community college faculty taking on more administrative duties and teaching additional students via alternative methods. The authors describe a growing tension between student centered teaching and the economic interests of institutions. In a similar finding, Murray and Cunningham (2004), examining rural community college faculty, find dissatisfaction with rigorous teaching loads.

*d. Job satisfaction*

Research conducted on two-year faculty measures satisfaction overall as well as on a number of aspects of the faculty experience. Findings have been organized according to satisfaction regarding instructional autonomy, salary and benefits, students and job satisfaction (overall).

#### d1. *instructional autonomy*

Many studies find instructional autonomy to be a source of great fulfillment for two-year college faculty, and higher education faculty in general. Kim, Twombly and Wolf-Wendel (2008) find 95% community college faculty are satisfied or very satisfied with their instructional autonomy, and note four-year faculty show even higher satisfaction in this area. Isaac and Boyer (2007) also find high satisfaction with instructional autonomy in their investigation of minority two-year faculty, as do Valadez and Anthony (2001) upon examining national survey data of two-year faculty. Valadez and Anthony offer the caveat, however, that satisfaction with autonomy among two-year faculty can be diminished by union membership and larger institution size.

#### d2. *salary and benefits*

Research regarding two-year faculty satisfaction with salary is inconclusive. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), when compared with four-year faculty, two-year faculty are more satisfied with their salary, a finding collaborated by Huber (1998). Rosser and Townsend (2006) find benefits and security are not an important source of dissatisfaction for full-time faculty. Conversely, Outcalt (2002) finds two-year faculty *have* become dissatisfied with their pay in recent years.

#### d3. *students*

The mission of the two-year college is to provide nearly unfettered access to college for many students who would not otherwise be able to attend. A number of studies find



tension among two-year faculty regarding this student enrollment policy. Murray and Cunningham (2004) find community college faculty are disappointed by students with low abilities, low skills and low motivation. However, the authors find relatively high satisfaction among community college faculty, and state those who are most satisfied with their positions enjoy the challenge of working with this student population. Cohen and Brawer (2003) find two-year faculty are less satisfied than four-year faculty with their students, a result seconded by Valadez and Anthony (2001). Offering some discord, Huber (1998) finds two-year faculty to be generally satisfied with students.

#### *d4. job satisfaction (overall)*

Studies focusing on the job satisfaction of two-year faculty for the most part show high levels of satisfaction. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), two-year faculty desire more professional development opportunities, sabbatical leave, grants for summer study, release time, travel allowances, better students, better instructional materials, yet are generally satisfied and do not wish to move from the community college level or from an academic career. In comparison with their colleagues at four-year institutions, the authors find community college faculty are more satisfied with reputation, family time, collegiality, and teaching load, but less satisfied with rigidity of work schedule, scholarship opportunities, and professional recognition.

Like Cohen and Brawer, Higgins et al. (1994), Huber (1998), Kim et al. (2008) and Outcalt (2002) also find two-year faculty to be generally satisfied with their jobs. Kim et al. find two-year faculty to be more satisfied with their jobs than their colleagues at four-

year institutions, a finding which is not collaborated by Valadez and Anthony (2001), who find no difference between two- and four-year faculty in overall job satisfaction. Huber (1998) finds 51% of two-year faculty more enthusiastic about work now than when they started and 40% feel they have been reviewed fairly (a number higher than found for four-year faculty). A unique analysis by Wagoner (2007) finds two-year faculty who earned doctorates were less satisfied than those with lower credentials.

Isaac and Boyer (2007) examine the attitudes of minority two-year faculty at rural and urban institutions, finding faculty in both categories somewhat satisfied with their job overall, though many do not feel minority faculty are being treated fairly. The authors find minority faculty in rural areas are more satisfied with their workload, but less satisfied with benefits and instructional duties.

Wolf-Wendel et al. (2007), examining female community college faculty with young children, find most are fairly satisfied, content people. The authors state experiences of faculty with K-12, four-year college positions or other jobs leads to contentment with the level of flexibility two-year colleges offer. According to Wolf-Wendel et al., most were able to grade and prep during office hours, and few brought work home, achieving a goal of defining a boundary between work and family time. Additionally, many of the women stated they made a conscious choice to teach at two-year colleges (approximately a quarter of the sample had Ph.D.s) in a search for work-life balance.

An indirect measure of job satisfaction involved assessing how committed faculty are to their careers by asking if they would make similar career choices if given a chance to

start over. Higgins et al. (1994) find 90% of community college faculty surveyed, given the opportunity to work in a non-educational setting or a four-year college, would remain at the community college level. In a related finding, Valadez and Anthony (2001) find nearly 90% of community college faculty are committed to an academic career, meaning if starting over, they would not leave academia.

Rosser and Townsend (2006), examining intent to leave amongst two-year faculty, find feelings towards administrative support, facilities and technical support have a strong effect on satisfaction and intent to leave, with administrative support and facilities as most important and technical support next. The authors find older faculty are more satisfied overall and less likely to voice intent to leave. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the authors find the longer faculty are at an institution, the less positive they are about work life (administrative support and facilities, technical support, professional development). Unsurprisingly, part-time faculty voice greater intent to leave their institution or career. The authors also find prior work at a four year institution to be related to a lower degree of satisfaction.

Murray and Cunningham (2004), examining new faculty at rural two-year colleges, find high satisfaction overall, with faculty deriving their greatest satisfaction from working with students. The authors find those faculty most satisfied are comfortable with living in a rural setting, enjoy the challenge of teaching underprepared students and find pleasure in student accomplishments.

*e. Faculty participation in institutional decision making*

In recent years, private and public firms are adopting more participatory management models in hopes of happier and more committed employees (Thaxter and Graham 1999). Miller (2003) finds 72% of colleges have a governance body meant to include faculty opinions, though different institutions use many different labels including such names as faculty senate, faculty association and college council. The author notes his findings indicate governance bodies may not be as prevalent as other researchers had estimated. According to Miller, most are composed of an elected leadership team derived from the spectrum of academic departments. While some governance bodies focus almost entirely on curriculum and academics, others cover a wider range of topics relevant to the college community.

Thaxter and Graham (1999), surveying two-year faculty to ascertain how they perceive their involvement in institutional decision making, find faculty generally rank their involvement as low. The authors find little difference in ranking of involvement in institutional decision making based on the personal characteristics of faculty such as discipline, experience, institutional classification (rural, urban, suburban) and union participation. In addition, most faculty describe their administration as autocratic.

According to Levin and Wagoner (2006), decreased government funding is causing community colleges to seek external funding and revise use of faculty, which is leading administrators to involve faculty more, not to increase shared governance, but to solicit their aid in management duties.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) find faculty desire more input, yet also declare a dislike for committee time and administrative work. According to the authors, these desires and dislikes are conflicting, and "instructors will not easily attain their goal of participation in decision making as long as they shun the mechanisms through which decisions are made." (p. 94)

This section has examined literature pertaining to two-year faculty work experience. The next section lays out a theoretical framework of the occupational experience, focusing on characteristics which determine fit and satisfaction.

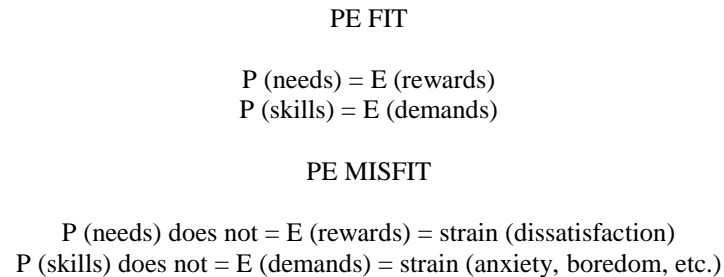
## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There exist several widely used theories of stress and satisfaction in work and health research. The following section provides an overview of three theoretical models which describe relationships between characteristics of an occupation and individual outcomes.

### *Person-Environment Fit*

The PE Fit model, developed by French, Caplan and Harrison (1982) states that misfit between worker and occupation can create strain leading to increased morbidity. The PE Fit model depicted by French et al. explicates two potential outcomes: fit and misfit. Fit occurs when rewards and resources of the environment, or job, match the needs and preferences of the person, or employee. However, when the demands of the environment, or job, do not match the skills and abilities of the person, or employee, a misfit exists. Resulting potential strains include dissatisfaction, boredom, anxiety and depression.

**Figure 1. Person-Environment Fit Model, French et al. (1982)**



According to Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2006) scholars have previously described four dimensions of PE Fit. First, person-vocation (PV) fit discusses vocational choice and proposes matching workers with compatible career options. Second, person-job (PJ) fit is defined as the relationship between a worker's abilities and the demands of a particular job. Third, person-organization (PO) fit matches the individual and the entire organization, and discusses to what degree the worker and organization share similar characteristics and meet each other's needs. Fourth, person-group (PG) fit examines the skills and interpersonal compatibility of individuals and their co-workers.

#### *Demand-Control*

Karasek (1979) developed the Demand-Control Model, which claims job stress results from the interaction of decision making latitude and psychological demands. According to the model, decision making latitude and psychological demands can be described as high or low, resulting in four occupational classifications: *job strain*, *active*, *relaxed* and *passive*. Positions with high psychological demands and low decision making latitude are termed *job strain*. Theorell and Karasek (1996) theorize that job strain positions lead to increased psychological distress and poor health. Jobs which combine high psychological

demands and high decision making latitude are termed *active*. According to Theorell and Karasek, these positions are thought to lead to desirable forms of stress, high motivation and opportunities to learn new skills. The authors also hypothesize that active jobs can lead to a sense of mastery which may suppress feelings of strain in times of particularly high demand. Low psychological demands and high decision making latitude and low psychological demands and low decision making latitude are termed *relaxed* and *passive* positions, respectively.

Karasek (1979) tests his proposed model utilizing data from two national data sets, one from the United States and the other Sweden. Karasek's finds job strain positions to be associated with both increased strain and job dissatisfaction.

**Figure 2. Demand-Control Model, Theorell & Karasek (1996)**

|  |      | Psychological Demands |   |
|--|------|-----------------------|---|
|  |      | Low                   | High  |
| Control<br>(Decision<br>Making Latitude) | High | <i>Low Strain</i>     | <i>Active</i><br>desirable stress, learning<br>opportunities, high motivation |
|  | Low  | <i>Passive</i>        | <i>Job Strain</i><br>increased distress, poor health                          |

The Demand-Control Model is extended by Johnson and Hall (1988) to include the social support dimension. Based on past research, Johnson and Hall hypothesize support

from colleagues and supervisors buffers stressors resulting from high psychological demands and low control.

Significant research has been undertaken to link the dimensions of the Demand-Control model to health outcomes. There is noteworthy empirical evidence linking job strain to cardiovascular illness (Theorell and Karasek 1996). Associations between the Demand-Control-Support model and fatigue and musculoskeletal complaints are fairly consistent, and a higher number of mental health problems are found in high strain and iso-strain (high demand, low latitude, low support) jobs (Vanroelen, Leveque and Loucks 2009).

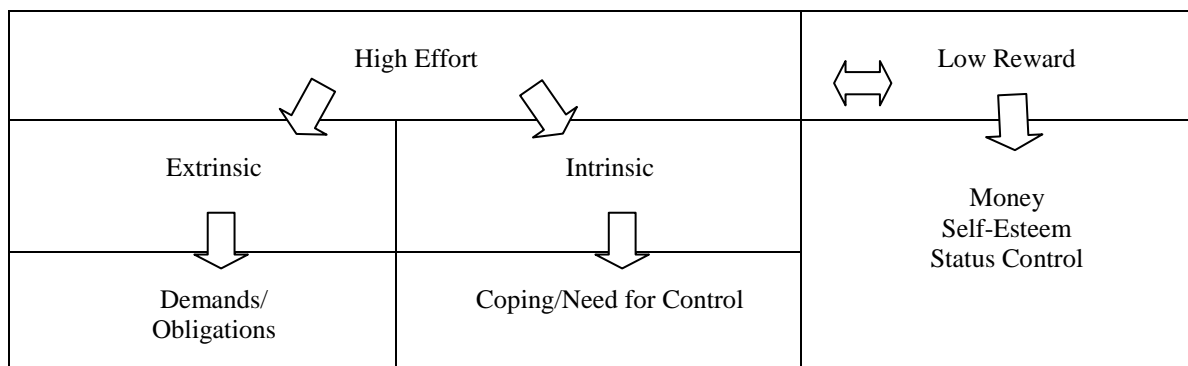
#### *Effort-Reward*

A third theoretical model addressing stress and satisfaction in the work experience is developed by Siegrist (1996). Siegrist terms this the Effort-Reward Imbalance model and states the individual's vision of work is based on the idea of social exchange, or reciprocity. By this, Siegrist means degree of work effort expended should remain in proportion with received rewards in the form of money, esteem, job security and opportunity for advancement. High effort is characterized according to extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions, with the former being represented by high job demands and the latter by a need for control and high effort expenditure in order to obtain this control. Siegrist hypothesizes when reciprocity is not evident, low self-esteem and high stress result. However, when reciprocity exists, high self-esteem and lower stress are the likely outcome. Siegrist claims the Type A personality may contribute and worsen the outcomes of effort-reward imbalance, resulting in what Siegrist terms overcommitment.



Van Vegchel et al. (2004) , in their review of forty-five empirical studies examining the ERI model published between 1986 and 2003, find that the negative impacts of high job demands has gained considerable support. However, studies addressing the intrinsic aspects of coping and need for control have been inconsistent.

**Figure 3. Effort-Reward Imbalance, Siegrist (1996)**



This section provides an overview of three widely utilized theoretical models regarding work and health. It is important to note these models depict an interaction between individuals and their work environment. Some may claim such theoretical models lead to a psychological analysis of individual work stress. However, aspects of the work environment such as demands, rewards and autonomy are structured by powerful individuals and the nature of organizations. Therefore, job stress and satisfaction can be understood as the product of individuals working according to the wishes of others and the evolution of organizational forms.

## SUMMARY

Research questions for this study emerged during a review of the literature relevant to the two-year faculty experience. While job stress and satisfaction are often characterized as individual issues, past sociological research emphasizes these experiences can be heavily impacted by organizational elements and occupational characteristics. Findings indicate higher educational organizations and faculty roles are evolving rapidly due to diminishing public funding, an increasingly bureaucratic nature and the invasion of private sector managerial practices. Sociological analysis of higher education has focused primarily on the growing prevalence of managerialism, characterized by work intensification, reductions in faculty discretion, increasing quality control measures and growing utilization of contingent faculty. Of late, educational research findings indicate higher education faculty members appear to be experiencing increasing strain, with female faculty portraying a particularly problematic picture. However, findings suggest two-year college faculty strain compares favorably to those at four-year institutions, perhaps due in part to diminished research requirements and a less rigorous system of awarding tenure. Finally, occupational satisfaction and strain models highlight organizational elements and job characteristics which impact worker experiences. These models demonstrate a nuanced understanding of worker experience requires accounting for demands placed on the worker as well as occupational characteristics which serve to moderate strain brought on by these demands, such as the presence of worker autonomy, decision making latitude, salient rewards, social support and person-occupation fit. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, two of the models argue high strain does not necessarily

have to be associated with low job satisfaction. Both the demand-control and effort-reward model indicate high strain positions can still be associated with high satisfaction if a) the worker possesses a high degree of autonomy or b) perceives a balance between the stress they experience and the subjective and objective rewards they receive. Additionally, past educational research findings suggest faculty stress and satisfaction may fluctuate in accordance with a variety of demographic factors, such as sex, experience, educational background and tenure status. Though I did not uncover research pertaining to the subject, I was also led to wonder whether past work experiences outside of academia could impact faculty experiences.

As a result of the literature review, the following four research questions emerged. These four questions dictate the focus of interviews conducted with two-year college faculty members.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the principal sources of work stress for two-year college faculty?
2. What rewards of the position are most valued by two-year college faculty?
3. How does work stress and job satisfaction differ according to sex, experience, educational background, tenure achievement and work history?
4. How does perception of administration affect faculty work stress and job satisfaction?

### **CHAPTER THREE: INVESTIGATING THE WORK EXPERIENCE OF A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER**

Research pertaining to higher education faculty tends to center on the experiences of those employed at four-year institutions, despite the fact two-year faculty constitute approximately one-third of American higher education faculty (Huber 1998) and instruct nearly one-half of all college students (Chronicle of Higher Education 2002). This study will seek to fill the knowledge gap regarding the work experiences of two-year faculty. Research questions were uncovered during a review of literature pertaining to the two-year faculty experience. These questions focus on sources of stress, salience of rewards, demographic differentiation of experience and perception regarding administration.

#### **SAMPLING**

The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of the work experience of two-year college faculty. With this goal in mind, a qualitative approach was taken. Subjects were purposively sampled in order to access as many cases as possible which fit particular criteria (Nueman 2006). Criteria are faculty characteristics found to especially relevant to the experience of work stress and job satisfaction. These criteria are explained in detail later in this section.

Due to the chosen method of depth interviewing functioning best with a homogenous sample (Miller and Crabtree 2004) the author chose to select faculty from a single discipline. Sociology was chosen due to the author's familiarity with the discipline and the perception sociology faculty would function well in an interview setting, a desirable

characteristic of a depth interview subject (Miller and Crabtree 2004). Fourteen faculty members were sampled, stratified according to relevant categories derived from the literature review (sex, experience, education, work history and tenure). Optimally, the sample would split evenly across these characteristics. However, due to the range of characteristics of each subject, such an ideal split proved unworkable. Sample characteristics are provided at the beginning of chapter four. In order to compare the effects of different social and organizational contexts, subjects were selected from a variety of two-year colleges drawn predominantly from a large metropolitan area. Subjects were contacted via information from individual school websites. At times, subjects who had agreed to participate upon being contacted in this manner also volunteered names and contact information of other subjects they believed would be interested in participating.

According to the sequential method, the researcher found as many relevant cases as possible, until time, energy and resources were exhausted and little new information was being derived from the subjects (Neuman 2006). Research for this project took place during the summer and fall of 2011. Due to the relatively brief window to perform research, the recruiting goal was to locate subjects until responses become repetitive and relevant subject categories were satisfied. A sample size of fourteen subjects was determined to meet these conditions.

## DATA COLLECTION

Data was constituted by subject responses to interview questions. The interview guide began with closed, demographic questions which necessitated only brief answers and proceeded to open-ended questions which offered the opportunity for in-depth exploration of a subject's perspective on a given topic.

Data was collected utilizing an in depth interviewing technique. This technique is recommended when the purpose is exploratory and meant to generate themes, discover perceptions and depict narrative understandings (Miller and Crabtree 2004). Interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured format, in which the author would ask a predetermined list of questions in a set order from an interview guide, but retain the freedom to ask follow up questions or probe deeper when deemed appropriate (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2009). This method of inquiry allowed the researcher to systematically target themes which appeared in the literature review, while also recognizing the limited nature of the review, and thus provide an avenue to uncover additional themes yet unknown.

As previously noted, the interview guide included an introductory set of biographical/demographic questions. These questions provided context, aided in analysis, and helped to develop rapport by easing into the interview with unchallenging questions (Miller and Crabtree 2004). The second component of the interview guide included a set of open-ended questions targeting the subject's perspectives on a number of topics. These

questions were derived from themes present in the literature review. Also included in the interviewer's copy of the interview guide was set of potential prompts and probes.

In advance of interviewing, the author conducted a series of pilot interviews, accompanied by revisions to the interview guide. The author contacted the faculty member in advance of the interview by telephone to solicit their participation. During this initial contact, the author 1) introduced himself, 2) explained university oversight, 3) made clear the purpose of the research, 4) explained the selection of the subject, 5) assured confidentiality, 6) explicated note taking and recording processes, as well as expected duration of interview and 7) obtained informed consent (Miller and Crabtree 2004: 195). Upon a subject agreeing to participate, a time was set to meet for the interview.

Upon meeting, an informed consent form was presented for review and signature. The form provided (in writing) the purpose of the study, subject's role in it, and potential benefits and discomforts associated with their participation. The letter informed subjects of protective measures taken to insure their confidentiality, as well as their right to discontinue their participation at any time during the interview. All information included in the form was previously discussed during initial contact. Upon approval of the document, subjects were asked to sign the consent form stating their willingness to participate in the interview. The subject was also asked to approve by signature the usage of an audio recorder for the purpose of transcription, an issue also discussed in advance of the meeting.

During the interview, the researcher utilized an audio recorder to record the conversation. The researcher asked questions in sequence from the interview guide. When necessary, the researcher utilized prompts or probes to stimulate further explanation. The active interviews were conducted in a relaxed, conversant manner, and exchanges were meant to be as fluid as possible (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The researcher in this case was more a participant in an authentic conversation than a passive observer. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. The subject was notified they were free to refuse to answer any question or to discontinue the interview at any time.

There is always the potential that questions are not understood in the manner intended by the author. In order to avoid this occurrence, the author tested the questions in advance to gain feedback on clarity, and used the semi-structured interview technique to offer clarifications when necessary.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data was initially transcribed verbatim and kept in a document separate from the thesis. Following data collection and in advance of draft writing, the author used a memo writing process described by Charmaz (2008) to explore the data. Memos were created as documents separate from both the data and the thesis draft. Writing was done in a free association manner, quickly and without editing, in order to facilitate the authors thinking and aid in synthesizing data, analyzing data, forming codes, and connecting codes.

Data was analyzed using a sequence of coding techniques described by Strauss (1987). These techniques were open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The first step in



the data analysis process, or open coding, involved the condensing of data into categories or codes. The author then analyzed the data line by line and created categories with short, simple names which captured both action and meaning (Charmaz 2008). Line by line coding is helpful in creating analytical distance and detaching the researcher from the subject's world view (Charmaz 2008). Next, axial coding was conducted. During this step, according to Strauss (1987), categories or codes are organized and analyzed for linkages. The author asked whether it is possible to divide or group categories for greater coherence, whether a logical sequence between the categories reveals itself, whether certain categories should be removed or expanded upon, and whether relationships between categories appear. Finally, during selective coding, the author selected data which supported the categories or codes developed. Respondent names were altered in order to protect their confidentiality.

Fourteen interviews were carried out with two-year college faculty between the months of July and December of 2011. Potential subjects were contacted via phone, email or both. My intention was originally to obtain a sample of at least twelve subjects which would be relatively equally split across sex, educational attainment, experience, tenure achievement and work history. This turned out to be fairly difficult to achieve, and in the end I settled for a sample which represented each category, though not always as equally as I would have liked. Female faculty and faculty with extensive experience tended to be more responsive to my requests for an interview. In Minnesota, tenure is granted after a three year probationary period. Thus, the disproportionate numbers of experienced faculty also meant a disproportionate number of tenured faculty members.

**Table 2. Sample Demographics**

|            |                     |                     |         |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Sex        | Male (5)            | Female (9)          |         |
| Experience | <10 yrs (5)         | >10yrs (9)          |         |
| Education  | MA (6)              | ABD (2)             | PhD (6) |
| Career     | 1 <sup>st</sup> (8) | 2 <sup>nd</sup> (6) |         |
| Tenure     | Yes (9)             | No (5)              |         |

## **CHAPTER FOUR: STRESS, REWARDS, DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENTIATION AND PERCEPTION OF ADMINISTRATION**

Research findings are formatted according to their connection with one of four previously specified research questions. The format of this section is a result of a three step coding process, resulting in categories and subcategories which are illustrated by selected quotations from interview transcripts. Categories are ordered according to the prevalence with which highlighted themes arose in the transcripts. For example, for research question one, institutional and departmental decision making was the most prevalent source of stress mentioned by respondents, with students the next most prevalent, then grading and so on. Subject names have been altered to protect their confidentiality.

### **SOURCES OF STRESS**

#### *Institutional/Departmental Decision Making*

Huber (1998) finds considerable faculty strain resulting from faculty governance processes. A similar theme became apparent during this study. Minnesota two-year colleges operate under a system which contractually mandates faculty members are consulted regarding institutional policy decisions. These consultations tend to take the form of committees which specialize in particular aspects of the college, such as institutional policy, academic affairs, student affairs, etc. In addition, it appears to be relatively common for academic departmental matters to be handled in a similar consultative manner. While Zeffane (1994) finds involvement in decision making to be one of the strongest predictors of positive job satisfaction ratings, this study conversely

finds conflicts emanating from decision making bodies and processes often noted as considerable sources of faculty stress and dissatisfaction, at times to such a degree faculty members eventually quit participating. In fact, faculty members interviewed, when given the choice, largely chose not to participate in institutional decision making. Therefore, most of the commentary regarding group decision making centered on departmental matters. For some, perceived strain derived from the feeling decision making processes were not truly representative of an open and authentic discourse, but instead were being skewed by power relations between faculty and administrators, an inequity which appeared to be growing during an economic downturn. According to Adelle, this imbalance of power consistently led to acquiescence from faculty members on a number of issues. This trend was a source of great frustration for Adelle, who found herself incensed by “watching people do anything that their supervisors tell them to do, in order to hold onto their job.” Others wondered whether faculty input was given the full consideration implied by the faculty governance model. Serena cited a departmental example where a significant majority of faculty members wanted to insert a prerequisite for a transfer course. According to Serena “...this argument has been going on since I started working there, and a lot of people are very frustrated. It seems like (these faculty members) have a lot of power, but I’m not sure if that is illusory or if it is real.” It is important to note, frustration with group decision making was not reserved solely for faculty members, but applied to those with administrative duties as well. Sam, who also held the position of department chair, claimed “...too many (faculty) are sort of cordoned off in their little niche of their discipline and don’t understand the bigger context, and that

results in their being unhappy about a lot of things.” Therefore, some of the conflict which took place may have been the result of differing understandings of the issues being discussed. While some subjects were relatively satisfied with their own input and the nature of group decision making processes in which they took part, they were often aware of instances where the situation differed. According to Bruce, his institution contained “some departments that could be technically described as snakepits. There is a lot of backstabbing, infighting...quote ‘sabotage.’”

Most respondents who cited group decision making as a source of stress implicitly or explicitly stated the tendency of the process to create considerable interpersonal conflict, which held detrimental consequences for the work experiences of faculty members. Matty stated “The conflict that goes on, I don’t do well with it...And there are people who can, who don’t take that home with them... it doesn’t bother them. Not ok for me.”

Group decision making processes invoked a great deal of stress for a number of interviewees. Even though procedures were supposed to be relatively standardized, a number of individuals argued processes were largely reflective of the personalities of those in positions of power, and therefore individual faculty member’s perceptions of faculty governance equated largely with how they felt about their administrators as people. While some faculty participated a great deal, most made a conscious choice to distance themselves from decision making processes as much as possible. These faculty voiced discomfort with past group decision making experiences and a desire to focus their energies on teaching and their students. Interviewees who chose to distance

themselves from decision making processes also tended to convey stronger job satisfaction ratings, while those who indicated greater engagement tended to rate their job satisfaction lower.

### *Students*

Two-year college faculty stress has been found to largely derive from concerns with teaching (Valadez and Anthony 2001). A central element of teaching is of course the interactions which take place with students. During interviewing, a number of faculty expressed concerns regarding their students. These concerns can be split into two categories: preparation/engagement and conflicts with students.

#### *a. Preparation and Engagement*

Some research finds community college faculty are disappointed by students with low abilities, low skills and low motivation (Cohen and Brawer 2003; Murray and Cunningham 2004; Townsend and Twombly 2007). This study found similar perspectives among some faculty members. These frustrations were especially salient for veteran faculty, who tended to compare this generation of community college students unfavorably with those they had taught in the past. Loretta, a veteran of twenty years, stated “students are less prepared for college than they have ever been. They are not curious. I’ll ask them what are they interested in and they’ll say, ‘Nothing.’” Bruce, who possessed over thirty years of teaching experience, largely agreed with this assessment, declaring “...prep(aration) that students get coming into college has become conspicuous in its absence.”

What potential explanations exist for this suggested decline in preparation and motivation of community college students? Sam pointed to the growth in college attendance and the affect this is having on *who* is attending. “When I started here...if you had background information on how the students coming here did in high school they probably would have been in the top half of their class. Now they are (in) the top eighty percent.” Therefore, the population faculty members are instructing is increasingly including those with weaker secondary school performance, and therefore perhaps also weaker academic motivation. In addition, Pam noted a perception expectations at secondary schools may be in decline, making the adjustment for new college students increasingly difficult.

*b. Conflict with Students*

Faculty members noted teaching between one-hundred fifty and two-hundred students per semester, which speaks to the highly interactive nature of the occupation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, faculty members often noted intense interactions with students as being highly emotional and stress inducing. “If I were to identify things that have just about sent me over the edge, they would be classroom situations where a student is particularly difficult. I had a student once tell me that she hoped my baby died (Matty).” Serena, a new faculty member, also noted the angst caused by such intense interactions, though she found the impact of these encounters was beginning to dissipate for her as she gained in experience. According to Serena:

...sometimes (these intense interactions) are new and unique...a student is mad at you and they are really mad and they are taking that out. But again,

those start to become somewhat repetitive. Even though they are unique in that instance, you know you've dealt with stressful students before.

A number of veteran faculty members noted a perception of increasing pressure from students to give high grades and the tendency for conflicts with students to arise when these pressures were rebuked. Often veteran faculty felt students had acquired unrealistic expectations of the appropriate effort-reward relationship inherent in college academics. According to Sam, "... many of our students come who are not prepared to demonstrate real proficiency and yet expect at least a B for just registering for the course, and I don't do that. I am constantly dealing with students who are telling me in various ways that I am ruining their lives." For Bruce, students tended to demonstrate both unrealistic expectations and a sense of entitlement in conflicts pertaining to grading. As a veteran faculty member, Bruce was not fond of this approach, claiming "In my day, you had to work for everything" and felt his reluctance to inflate grades had given him the reputation among some students as a "mean old fogey." Even in absence of visible conflict, faculty noted the emotional tension arising from handing out grades. Pam described feeling apprehensive when a student received a final grade which was on the borderline, such as an 88.5 or an 89, stating it "really bugs me because they are so close, but they are not there. But there is nothing I can do. And so I am thinking, uh oh, this person is going to be mad at me." While most of the time the pressure for high grades was seen by faculty as deriving directly from students, this was not always the case. According to Sam:

...if you are not responsive to the students pressure, then they go over your head to the dean and most of them are shrewd enough to know that just saying, 'he's too hard a grader' is not going to get them any traction, so they turn that into...his tests are impossible to understand...his lectures are impossible to follow... and too many of the deans modus operandi is



the path of least resistance. If the student is complaining, then the instructor must be doing something wrong.

It is notable each interviewee who cited significant frustration with student expectations possessed twenty or more years of experience. It was clear to these faculty members student grading expectations had become inflated over time. Some hint high schools may hold some accountability for this alteration. Pam got this sense from her children (recent high school graduates), who claim “some kids are getting, like, second and third chances. If they mess something up they get another chance...if they don’t do some work, they get to turn it in late, and that doesn’t always work in college.” Sam felt the practice of requiring less of students had also expanded to two-year college faculty as well, stating:

...new faculty, probationary faculty or adjunct faculty, perhaps rightly so, feel that unless they have really good student evaluations they aren’t going to be made unlimited and secure a permanent job. And what is the easiest way to get really good student evaluations? Tell them how bright they are, how exceptional they are, and superior grades.

It is apparent faculty need to navigate divergent pressures from students, colleagues and administrators. Interviews offer the following depiction: students clamoring for higher grades, colleagues applying pressure to maintain disciplinary standards of rigor, and administrators emphasizing student retention and academic assessment. It is perhaps important to note, though some of these interests may conflict, they may also each be legitimate. Students are likely aware of the economy and realize they need to improve their academic resume. Administrators are dealing with reductions in state funding and oversight from outside accrediting agencies. Instructors are socialized to maintain disciplinary standards but also may be faced with pressures to improve student evaluations in order to increase their job security.

Consistent with past research on community college faculty, some interviewees are disappointed with their students' preparation, abilities and level of engagement. Attitude towards students appears to have importance for faculty satisfaction, as those who convey disappointment also generally rate their satisfaction lower, while those who spoke of relishing their student interactions tend to rate their satisfaction higher. Interviewees also note the strain which can derive from negative student interactions. According to Collins (1975), conflict is the most basic social process. Full-time faculty members in Minnesota often instruct two-hundred or more students per semester, offering many opportunities for disagreements and tensions to arise. Additionally, the dynamic between instructor and student lends itself naturally to conflict. While the student is driven to obtain the best grade, the instructor is obligated to give the grade they believe corresponds with the students achieved level of mastery. Of course, perceptions of student performance between the instructor and student may diverge, as they differ in background and level of subject expertise, setting the stage for potential conflict.

#### *Contraction of State Funding*

As government employees, interviewees often mention budget shortages and note the fact state funding has been undergoing contraction. Faculty members argue such a trend is detrimental to both institutions and faculty. Adelle states, due to funding reductions, her institution has been having to look to private organizations for funding.

When I arrived in 1999 we got 70% of our funding from the state. My understanding is that it was 33% this last year and there is going to be a big cut.... As that has occurred, faculty (members) have become more

competitive with one another, fearing that they have to prove that they are useful...

Of course, budgetary issues are not new, but are often associated with economic downturns. According to Daryl, approximately a decade ago his school was threatened with closure because the campus needed construction upgrades and the state didn't want to pay. In that particular case, the community rallied behind the school and it was able to stay open. However, such experiences leave faculty members with the realization their jobs are never entirely secure, particularly in a poor economy. Finally, the economic downturn had Loretta worried her retirement benefits may diminish in the new collective bargaining contract. According to Loretta, "There is a lot of uncertainty...we're teaching without a contract as of July 1... I thought I had a deal. That was the deal I was operating under, and that may not be the deal in the new contract with the legislature what it is right now. That is causing me more stress than anything."

Poor economic conditions and reductions in state funding resulted in a number of faculty voicing feelings of insecurity and displeasure. Insecurity appears to be felt by many faculty members, regardless of age or level of experience. Additionally, the current economic situation is perceived by some as weakening both the faculty union bargaining position and the individual power of faculty inside their institutions.

### *Teaching Load*

Faculty members at two-year colleges in Minnesota are required to instruct ten sections over two semesters in order to constitute a full-time appointment. This requirement is roughly equivalent to full-time course loads found at two-year colleges across the country

(Cohen and Brawer 2003). Two-year faculty members in national surveys have cited the teaching load as a considerable source of strain (Huber 1998). Similarly, some interviewees noted a variety of concerns with teaching load, which can be categorized as pertaining to course load, class size and grading load.

*a. Course Load*

For many faculty members, the five course per semester requirement was a source of frustration because it was perceived as monopolizing faculty member's time and precluding the pursuit of other activities. Often noted was the desire for more time in order to stay current with recent research. Cathy argued "you can't just sit down and read a book and write...you don't have the time, like at a four-year (college or university) to do that." While the argument could be made that scholarship is not required at the two-year college level, thus negating such a concern, Serena argued she *did* feel pressure at her institution to publish, and the current course schedule made such expectations difficult to meet. In a lone voice of opposition, Sam argued the heavy course load did not have to rule out writing and research, noting he had found a way to do both throughout his tenure, though Sam conceded "I do spend considerably more time than other faculty to fulfill my various duties."

*b. Class size*

For a number of interviewees, class sizes were a concern. Most institutions capped generally classes at around forty to forty five students. However, each institution appeared to set its own caps, and faculty members noted the possibility of the current

economic situation driving a move to expand class sizes. Serena, citing past experience with larger classes at another institution, stated "...since the budgetary crises have occurred they (administrators) are really discussing increasing class sizes, so that I do not like that, and nobody does. I thought 50 or 60 was too many, especially 60...That is a lot to give the students the attention they deserve..." Loretta argues even forty students in a class, which was relatively standard at most institutions, is too many, stating "with forty in a class they slip through the cracks. I don't know some of them. I know about half of them at the end of the semester, where I know their names, I know something about them, I know what their life is like, and the other half I don't." While faculty relatively consistently wished for smaller class sizes, Cathy found attempts to achieve such a change stifled. When her department asked for smaller class sizes "they (said) you are our cash cows, we can't afford to do that. It's basically the dollar."

### *c. Grading Load*

It was not uncommon for interviewees to cite teaching two hundred or more students per semester. Depending on faculty assessment techniques, this can result in a significant amount of time dedicated to grading student assignments. Some interviewees, such as Serena, cited grading load as a source of stress.

I always do some papers and some essay questions on tests...There were times when I got tired or lazy, and there were many times when I thought 'I'm just going to do multiple choice, (because) this is way too much.' I could see myself after five years, eight years, ten years just being like, screw it, I'm tired. Other faculty on Friday afternoon run theirs through, it takes twenty minutes and I'm going to be grading for eight hours this weekend? That's not what I want.

Interviewees cited teaching load, class size and grading load as sources of stress. While full-time course loads were consistent, institutions differed in setting maximum occupancies for their courses. To this researcher's knowledge, faculty teaching larger class sizes did not receive any additional compensation. According to the Effort-Reward model, additional exertion without reciprocal rewards will leave faculty in a state of imbalance, leading to reduced satisfaction and increased stress. Data collected offers support for this analysis. Of the faculty interviewed, Matty and Daryl taught the smallest student loads with course maximums set at thirty, and both rated their job satisfaction highly. Three faculty taught courses with maximum occupancies of fifty, and two of the three demonstrated relatively low satisfaction. Interviewees demonstrated a consistent desire among faculty members for smaller classes. However, this position appears to be at odds with the financial needs of institutions who are increasingly leaning on student tuition for their operations costs in response to reductions in state funding.

Finally, grading was viewed as burdensome by most faculty members interviewed. As Daryl points out, most people get into teaching because they enjoy discussing ideas and other classroom activities. No interviewee mentioned grading as a reward of the profession. Of course, the degree of burden associated with grading fluctuates based on student load and chosen modes and frequency of assessment. Assessment style may be affected by personal, departmental or institutional philosophies.

### *Assessment*

Some researchers claim higher education is moving towards private sector administrative practices, including a new emphasis on managerialism, which is constituted by increased quality control, accountability measures, outside accreditation and reductions in faculty discretion (Abbas and McLean 2001; Nixon 2001; Benmore 2002). Interview subjects often cite opinions which reconcile with this view. Of particular focus is the issue of assessment, which in this context does not refer to grading of student work, but instead to various means of providing evidence of educational effectiveness to outside accreditation agencies. Issues surrounding assessment policies were mentioned by a number of interviewees, including Adelle, as a source of frustration.

The assessment that we have been asked to do is coming from a very, very narrow group of writers. It to me almost seems like a cult. Any good teacher assesses. But the more this cult seems to get entrenched the more they are attempting to coerce people into assessing the way they think we should be assessing.”

Daryl was especially vehement in his opposition to assessment, due to the fact he did not think assessment policies advocated by his institution were capable of effectively measuring what they were intended to.

Assessment has been a big buzz word in education the last few years, and I *hate it*. There are too many variables. You can't assess effectiveness well, because it depends on the students, it depends on the subject...one year when the information is relevant and applies to students lives it is going to be great and two years later society changes...your information might not fit anymore. How can you assess that equitably? You can't. You can't assess a teacher over time, because students leave. You can't follow these students five years later, (because) they are not there. You're teaching a totally different set of people with different skills, and you can't control any of that. And they are going to college, so they are having a ton of experiences, so how can you tie any particular change in a student to a

teachers influence. You can't do that effectively. I'm with my students for three or four hours a week. That leaves an awful lot of hours for them to change. So for me to say, at the end of the semester, that something I did changed them, that is going to be tenuous under any circumstances. So to assess some things is terribly hard. And we do it, and we try to say we were effective. Everyone who is a part of higher education has been to college. They all know that it works. They know that they changed going to college. They know the students are changing going to college. Trying to figure out how and why... oh my gosh. Casting a similarly skeptical light on the long term potential of the assessment movement, Bruce, a veteran with over thirty years experience reflected on past experiences with similar notions of measuring educational effectiveness. "I was actively involved in (assessment) twenty-five years ago. I spent a huge amount of time and effort in doing all the research and the reports and attending conferences, and it came to nothing (Bruce)." In contrast, Sam's frustrations with assessment as a department chair derive not from the assessment policies themselves but rather from what he perceives as lack of faculty understanding of the situation community colleges are in. According to Sam, "...many faculty fail to recognize how in Minnesota, and I'm sure this is not much different than other places, that powerful people in the legislature have been talking about not just K-12 but K-14, and they would like to have control over our curriculum the same way they have (control) over the primary and secondary curriculum, and the only way we fend that off is to demonstrate that we are policing ourselves, and assessment is the proof that we are doing that... Anyway, in my experience, most faculty are woefully ignorant of the larger context in which we conduct our work, and consequently are unhappy with anything that emanates from outside themselves..."

The assessment movement is logically perceived as decreasing instructional autonomy, one of the most prized characteristics of the academic profession (Valadez and Anthony 2001; Isaac and Boyer 2007; Kim, Twombly and Wolf-Wendel 2008). According to the effort-reward model, increased effort must garner equivalent reward in order to maintain worker satisfaction. However, interviewees clearly did not perceive appropriate reciprocity in regard to the additional demands placed upon them by assessment policies. Interviewees did not cite any financial compensation or other incentives for these additional duties. Additionally, rewards in the form of satisfaction over improved



instructional effectiveness may be thwarted by disagreement over effectiveness of assessment policies. Thus, it appears some faculty members are suffering from the perception of increased demands without reciprocal rewards, and thus experiencing resultant frustration.

### *Online Teaching*

A number of faculty members interviewed noted stress and diminished satisfaction deriving from teaching online courses. Loretta, having recently taught an online course for the first time, claimed “I’ll never do it again. It was awful. My technology skills aren’t good enough... (and student) skills were not what they needed to be.” While Loretta’s rebellion against distance education was the most vehement of faculty interviewed, other faculty consistently noted deriving less satisfaction from teaching online courses than face to face courses. According to Daryl and Serena, this is largely because of the lack of interaction and the perception students don’t enjoy the experience as much or learn to the same degree they do in face to face courses. Daryl notes the experience may differ for specific personalities.

If you don’t mind being alone, it is nice to teach that way... it’s nice to sit in your office and sit at your computer and have quiet. You don’t have to deal with inane questions and distractions...It’s cleaner. You lose a lot of the channels of communication but you also lose the distractions that come with a live classroom.

Of course, sociology as a discipline tends to assume we are social animals, and thus working in isolation may not be ideal for us no matter our disposition towards it. Similarly, the demand-control model claims social support provides a buffering effect for stress inducing experiences. While the model focuses on social interactions with

colleagues and supervisors, faculty interviewees tended to work in relative autonomy unless they sought out contact. Therefore, for many faculty members the majority of their social contact during their work days came from students. In this case, it is possible the concept of social support may be extendable to positive interactions with students during the teaching process, which is found to be greatly diminished in online teaching.

### *Lack of Social Support*

Perhaps somewhat surprising for a profession which demands a great deal of interaction with students, a number of faculty members noted having little interaction with colleagues. Cathy was one respondent who appeared relatively socially isolated, stating “Here I personally don’t have any relationships.” Cathy provided a number of factors which contributed to her isolation, including recently being reassigned from criminal justice, where she had taught courses for fifteen years, to sociology, due to new regulations limiting the instruction of criminal justice to those who have previously worked in law enforcement. As a result, Carol stated she lost a number of relationships established in the criminal justice department, and was now extremely busy due to having to learn all new material which restricted her willingness to socialize. Loretta had also lost a number of social relationships due to the retirements of faculty in her age group.

I’m in kind of a weird demography, because when the community colleges started, they opened in the late sixties or early seventies, they hired a bunch of people at that point, almost everybody. And I had a lot of friends in that cohort, but they’ve all retired, and they are replacing them with much younger people. There weren’t many people hired in the years that I was hired. I had more social relations before, and I still have those

friendships outside of work, and I've found some friendships with some of the younger people, but it's kind of lonely right now.

Similarly, Bruce has also lost many of his colleagues to retirement, and claims with where he is in his career, he's lost a lot of day to day contact with colleagues because "I've seen it all before, there is no learning curve. People are busily reinventing the wheel. I'm just tired of playing the academic games, so in that sense I have pulled back...I'm much more independent...stand alone."

Interviewees who described a lack of connection with other colleagues in their daily work experience tended to rate their job satisfaction lower than other faculty who displayed more connection. As previously mentioned, the demand-control model emphasizes the role of social support from colleagues and supervisors in moderating job stress. However, the faculty noted above explained how they worked in relative autonomy and even isolation. Perhaps exacerbating these dynamics, the office settings I encountered while interviewing these faculty did not appear overly conducive to collegial interaction. The offices inhabited long, narrow hallways, invoking the feeling of an educational factory. It was also relatively common not to have faculty offices in a disciplinary area, but rather an area set aside for a smattering of related disciplines, such as a behavioral sciences wing. Due to this layout, disciplinary exchange may be reduced, a phenomenon which Cathy notes as detrimental to forming social connections.

At a four year, it seems more like if there is a department party or something, that is when you would get to talk about sociology. Here a department party is all these people (from different disciplines) at the party, and that's fun, but nothing scholastic. Because everybody reads a different book.

### *Job Insecurity*

Though only two interviewees held temporary positions, these faculty stated job insecurity was their primary source of stress. Serena teaches full-time at one institution on a fixed-term contract. She has a child and noted the insecurity of not having a contract which guarantees ongoing employment and insurance was very difficult. Karen maintained a full-time course load working as an adjunct at multiple institutions and stated she was tiring of juggling schools.

There are lectures I want to update, things I want to do to improve on my teaching, there are conferences I want to go to. I can't do any of that. It's not feasible for me. I'm working at three different schools, or I have to work my third job and that is becoming frustrating. It's just kind of wearing after you've done the adjunct thing for awhile.

Benmore (2002) argues past worker expectations of hard work leading to job security no longer fit with contemporary organizational operating procedures which seek efficiency and flexibility by offering less wage and job security. Karen testified to a similar perception, stating "I'm going to have to be a little bit more aggressive in terms of speaking out, and stating I'm not cool with just being an adjunct forever, because there are people here that have been adjuncts for ten years..."

Brehony and Deem (2005) view market forces leading institutions to move towards two separate labor forces: a core force made up of full-time faculty, and a peripheral force of part-time and temporary workers. Abbas and McLean (2001) argue this practice derives from increasing institutional competition, decreasing government funding and an economy producing high fluctuation in student needs. Results of this study generally agree with this analysis. Additionally, it did not appear to only be new, temporary faculty

who felt increasingly insecure. Both Loretta and Daryl, tenured with fifteen and twenty years of experience respectively, noted being wary of the possibility of school closures if state funding continued to decrease.

### VALUED REWARDS

The person-environment fit model, effort-reward model and demand-control model all state rewards are an important ingredient to job satisfaction and can provide a buffer to work-related stressors. Interviewees noted and expounded upon a number of valued rewards in their current occupation, including the teaching process, the mission of the two-year college, relationships with colleagues, schedule flexibility, autonomy and faculty development opportunities.

#### *Teaching*

Activities associated with teaching are the primary focus of two-year college faculty. Therefore, it is logical those faculty who enjoy the teaching process should experience the greatest occupational satisfaction. Many faculty noted interactions with students and the learning process were highlights of their work.

##### *a. Student Interactions/Relationships*

Pam stated she loved face to face classes because of the interactions with students.

...meeting the students... that is why I don't want to step out of the classroom, because I get to talk to my students before class, after class, during office hours. Every time I walk in the hallway I see either one of my current students or a former student...I go in the library and I see students. I go eating and I see students. My family laughs at me. We'll go to a restaurant...we went to Olive Garden...the waitress was one of my

former students, everywhere we go, Old Chicago, the hostess was one of my students... I love it. It's the students. That is my favorite part.

Karen similarly found the bonds formed with students to be extremely rewarding, citing as particularly satisfying instances when students take all of her classes or talk to her outside of class.

(Once) I had a student in my office, who comes in and she shuts the door and she just starts crying. Not that I'm happy that she is upset, (but) she came to MY office. That is really rewarding. Those relationships...

*b. Learning*

According to Daryl, people get into teaching because they like learning and the classroom environment, a model he argued he fits to a T. "I love ideas, concepts, theory. I love talking about that (Daryl)." Matty stated she derives the most satisfaction from "using the internet to find resources, reading research, pulling together all this disparate stuff into something that I can build into an activity that will teach something. I love that. I could do that all day and all night." Other interviewees noted the learning opportunities their diverse student bodies provided. Pam cited a recent example of an exchange she had with a Somali student about the famine in his home country. She recounted how he was telling her he used to be in a refugee camp and "he was explaining to me what the refugee camps were like and how people don't let the food get to who needs it, and I'm like oh my god, I learned so much from talking to him, and that sort of thing." Similarly, Serena viewed the community college setting as particularly exciting for a sociologist because she gets "to see people who...have lived things that we only read about...and then they

tell these things in class, and as someone who is fascinated by all sorts of different peoples life experiences, they are right there.”

When interviewing Serena, I asked her what characteristics she thought made for a content, successful faculty member. She enumerated a number of things, then stopped and exclaimed that it was so obvious she hadn't even mentioned it...but the person should probably like to teach. It bears repeating, because there may be the tendency to overcomplicate this issue. At the two-year college level, faculty duties largely involve teaching introductory level courses. For most faculty members, the content is relatively superficial compared to what they studied in graduate school. Once a faculty member has taught these courses a number of times, retaining enthusiasm may be difficult if subject matter is the principal source of satisfaction. So what are some keys to sustaining enthusiasm for the community college faculty member? Matty has been teaching at community colleges for twenty-nine years and still speaks of deriving great satisfaction from searching for innovative methods of delivery and new research. In addition, both Serena and Pam noted the enjoyment they receive from interactions with students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. For faculty interested in learning from their students' experiences, and particularly for sociologists, the two-year college would seem to be an ideal fit, as these students are highly diverse in age, race, ethnicity, place of origin, etc. Perhaps not surprisingly, Matty, Serena and Pam each rated their satisfaction highly. Conversely, faculty members who noted less satisfaction deriving from student relationships and the pedagogical process tended to have lower satisfaction scores. Therefore, it appears high satisfaction in two-year college faculty is associated with

interest in the craft of teaching and the enjoyment of the particular group of students which attend community colleges.

*Belief in the mission of the two-year college*

Trautvetter et al. (2008) find it is important for faculty at church-related colleges and universities to understand the mission of their institution. Similar to religious institutions, two-year colleges have a distinct mission, which includes open-access, low cost and serving the needs of their local communities. Several interviewees claimed their belief in the mission of their institution provided them with a great deal of satisfaction. Karen argued “there is so much power in a localized community college. (A local business) just laid off like 600 people. Where are those people going to go? Are there 600 new jobs in (this town)? This is a great place to save people.” For Serena, the mix of experiences and perspectives of her community college students is what hooked her. A PhD from a relatively high status university, Serena fell in love with her current institution during her first term in 2009, when the economic recession was ravaging the country. Her institution had run a special which offered free tuition for a class to those who had been fired or had lost their job. The resultant influx of non-traditional students created a mix of experiences Serena found especially powerful.

To see students who said, I’m 45, I just lost my job, I’m starting over and really trying, very hard, and then other students who were just out of high school and had no idea what they wanted to do with their life, and these people are in the same class, talking to each other, influencing each other... It was just a mix of students, a mix of experiences and things that I don’t think I would have gotten in another institutional setting .



Some faculty voiced a need not just to teach, but to empower their students and to achieve greater equality of opportunity in society. Viewed through the lens of the person-environment fit model, faculty with this desire can be seen as possessing strong fit with the open-access model of two-year colleges. Many students at two-year colleges possess meager economic means and undistinguished academic histories. The two-year college provides opportunities for these students other higher education institutions with selective admissions or higher tuition costs do not, and therefore may be argued to be a greater source of social mobility.

#### *Relationships with Colleagues*

Thorne and Hochschild (1997) related an academic department to a family unit, where members do not choose their peers, but are forced to share space and finite resources. According to interviewees, it appears academic departments can be either socially beneficial or entirely dysfunctional depending upon a number of factors. For some faculty, their relationships with colleagues were viewed as a principal source of satisfaction. Matty beamed about her colleagues, stating “I love the people in my department, oh my gosh, we are good buddies...We just have such similar perspectives about teaching, about the students, about sociology. If we sit and have fun together we are just boom, boom, boom with ideas.” Brian similarly relished these relationships, and recognized the positive impacts which could be derived from nourishing them.

There (are) many times that we’ll meet outside of school for a happy hour or to play cards or something like that....I think that’s very important, too. Yes, we work here and we work together, but by being outside of school,

talking and getting to know people better, it makes your job easier on campus.”

Marie, a young mother, had relocated from a neighboring state and was pleasantly surprised at the relationships she had developed at work.

Socially, it's been great. And I don't know if it would be that way everywhere, but I feel real lucky. I've made actual friends with people, not just people your friendly with...girlfriends. I've got (colleagues) who I do things with socially on a regular basis, hang out with. One of them has kids and our kids play together, one of them doesn't, and we go to the bar together. That has been awesome.

The demand-control model states collegial social support can diminish stress and increase job satisfaction. Data collected in this study generally support this analysis, with faculty expressing strong social relationships often conveying relatively high levels of job satisfaction. However, connections with subjective stress ratings are more ambiguous.

#### *Schedule Flexibility and Autonomy*

Wolf-Wendel et al. (2007) examine female community college faculty with young children and find many of the women made a conscious choice to teach at two-year colleges in a search for work-life balance. These findings were largely collaborated in this study, where a number of faculty members, including Pam, spoke highly of their schedule flexibility and the largely autonomous nature of their position.

I've always said that the hours have been right for having kids....When my kids were younger I wouldn't teach during the summer. I was home when they were home. I would have holidays off when they were off. That was perfect. And I would teach during the day. ...So I would come after they got on the bus and I would go home before they got off the bus. ...So those kind of things have just been really perfect.

In addition to the schedule flexibility allowed, faculty members are often allowed to operate relatively independent inside the institution, a characteristic of the occupation Bruce and Serena specified as being especially rewarding.

Schedule flexibility is a prized characteristic of the academic career, though findings suggest two-year faculty are somewhat less satisfied than four-year faculty with their schedules (Cohen and Brawer 2003). While mandatory instructional and office hours are higher at two-year institutions, there are few if any research obligations. Similar to the findings of Wolf-Wendel et al. (2007), the flexible schedule and lack of research obligations appear particularly valued by female faculty with young children. Faculty members who noted autonomy as a significant reward appeared to use it in a general sense to both describe their schedule as well as their independence in their work activities on campus.

#### *Faculty development opportunities*

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), two-year faculty desire more professional development opportunities and sabbatical leave. However, such findings are not corroborated by this study. Three respondents (Adelle, Valerie and Matty) explained how faculty development opportunities received were a source of great satisfaction. Conversely, no respondents specified faculty development as a major source of stress.

Matty relayed a story of an enriching experience gained during her sabbatical leave, which she spent working at a secondary school in Tanzania.

...one of my students posed the question that caused me to do this. He said...they weren't making anything before that, and now they are making

ten cents a day, isn't that an improvement? And I said, you know what, I'm going to do something in my life to figure out how to answer that well. So I lived with subsistence farmers in rural Tanzania, and wow, it was wonderful, really learned a lot. What it takes every day to stay alive. Gathering firewood and water. And washing all your clothes by hand and walking everywhere. Students have no idea. So its great to be able to say, these are the friends I met while I was there, here is a picture of this person, this is what life was like on a typical day.

Ever the teacher, according to Matty the "best part about (the experience) is that I can come back and say to students 'What do you think about this?'"

Only three respondents spent considerable time addressing faculty development when explaining the positive and negative attributes of their occupation. Though few in number, these respondents clearly appreciated the opportunities they had been afforded by this process. When questioned, the process of obtaining appropriate funding for professional development expenses was not viewed as a major hassle. For each of the three listed respondents, the issue of faculty development was addressed when listing valued rewards. No respondents included the faculty development process as a source of stress. Therefore, I believe it is possible to conclude faculty interviewees were relatively satisfied with their faculty development opportunities and procedures.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS

The primary objective of this research was to explore the occupational experiences of two-year college faculty, a research line which has received little attention, particularly in comparison to similar study of four-year faculty. In depth interviewing allowed me to discover a number of factors which contribute to both faculty stress and job satisfaction. In order to capture at least a superficial sense of intensity of stress and satisfaction, two survey questions were included, which asked interviewees to rate their job satisfaction

and stress from one to ten. These questions allow me to address the question of how stress and job satisfaction differ according to personal, interpersonal and organizational characteristics.

Before attempting to address this question, it is necessary to offer a series of qualifying statements. First, the sampling technique used was not random, but purposive, negating the ability to use statistical techniques to test for significant results. Second, the sample size of fourteen is small and thus numerical results are easily skewed by extreme values. Third, due to the fact qualitative analysis was the focus of this research, the following quantitative analysis is superficial, offering merely mean stress and job satisfaction as well as standard deviations for each dimension of the selected independent variable.

The concepts of stress and job satisfaction are not defined for respondents by the researcher during the interview process. Therefore, respondent ratings are based on their individual definitions of the concepts. This method is based on common findings in the literature that stress experience cannot be separated from subjective individual perception of stressors (McGrath 1970; Doyle and Hind 1995; Hart and Cress 2008). Similar notions can likely be extended to individual job satisfaction ratings. What quantitative ratings of stress and job satisfaction offer in this context is a general temperature reading regarding how an individual is feeling about their working situation. The combination of these ratings with in-depth description of each individuals work environment, however, provides insights into beneficial and detrimental environmental, interpersonal and personal characteristics.

The following analysis lists means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for respondent stress and job satisfaction across a series of variables, including gender, educational attainment, work experience, tenure achievement and career history.

**Table 3. Stress and Job Satisfaction by Gender**

Mean (Standard Deviation)

|         | Men       | Women     |
|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Stress  | 3.8 (2.0) | 7.3 (1.6) |
| Job Sat | 8.1 (1.4) | 7.9 (1.9) |
|         | N = 5     | N = 9     |

**Table 4. Stress and Job Satisfaction by Educational Attainment**

|         | MA        | PhD/ABD   |
|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Stress  | 5.8 (2.8) | 6.3 (2.2) |
| Job Sat | 8.3 (1.8) | 7.7 (1.6) |
|         | N = 6     | N = 8     |

**Table 5. Stress and Job Satisfaction by Two-year College Work Experience**

|         | <10 yrs   | > 10 yrs  |
|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Stress  | 5.9 (1.7) | 6.1 (2.8) |
| Job Sat | 8.9 (1.0) | 7.4 (1.8) |

|  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
|  | N = 5 | N = 9 |
|--|-------|-------|

**Table 6. Stress and Job Satisfaction by Tenure Achievement**

|         | Tenured   | Not Tenured |
|---------|-----------|-------------|
| Stress  | 6.4 (2.5) | 5.4 (2.3)   |
| Job Sat | 7.5 (1.9) | 8.8 (.8)    |
|         | N = 9     | N = 5       |

**Table 7. Stress and Job Satisfaction by Career**

|         | First career | Sec. career |
|---------|--------------|-------------|
| Stress  | 5.3 (2.1)    | 7 (2.6)     |
| Job Sat | 8.4 (1.3)    | 7.4 (2.1)   |
|         | N = 8        | N = 6       |

The variable which appears to highlight the greatest distinction is gender, which shows a sizeable difference in stress between men and women. Women respondents rated their work stress considerably higher on average than men, and women were also more consistent in their stress ratings. Yet, men and women respondents offered roughly equivalent evaluations of their job satisfaction.

The most readily apparent discrepancy in noted sources of stress between men and women faculty was the greater tendency of women faculty to convey the significance of

their emotional ties with students and their willingness to extend these relationships beyond the classroom. While such predispositions were not completely absent among the men, they were conveyed less frequently and less emphatically. Additionally, some men appeared to conduct their teaching at a greater emotional distance and to favor well defined emotional boundaries. Daryl explained how he subtly conveyed to students his lack of interest in counseling them on personal issues, and Bruce and Sam both noted their reputations among students as less than warm and fuzzy characters. In examining the potential relationship between emotional closeness and increased stress experience, it is possible close emotional relationships may serve as a double edged sword, offering satisfaction when the student is successful, but also potentially introducing increased strain for faculty when the student is not. Additionally, a number of female faculty utilized language which demonstrated their tendency, and ability, to empathize with their student's experiences and perspectives. Similar language was less present in interviews with men. An example is provided by Valerie, who explains the guilt she tends to experience when her students do not succeed.

These days, students are doing lots of juggling acts. And how much slack do you give some? And meeting the diverse needs of students who come from many walks of life is a constant challenge. I think a stressor is carrying some guilt about the fact that you haven't accommodated. And for me, as I get older, I think I'm less guilt ridden than I would have been earlier in life. Because I now know, that I can't judge myself so harshly for not being able to get everybody.

As Valerie notes, there is always a percentage of students in any academic setting who do not achieve at a high level. This is perhaps particularly true at open-enrollment institutions. Therefore, it is possible instructors which adopt strong empathetic orientations may experience additional strain resulting from student failure, while those



who hold students at greater emotional distance may experience less emotional aggravation when confronted with such situations.

Level of education appears to make little difference in the experience of stress and job satisfaction. Mean stress and job satisfaction ratings for those with a highest obtained degree of a Master's were roughly equivalent to those who had obtained, or were near obtaining, a PhD, with PhD/ABD's also rating each slightly more consistently.

Data indicate experience does not affect stress but may have some affect on job satisfaction. Respondents with over ten years experience rated their satisfaction somewhat lower than respondents with less than ten years experience. Yet, respondents with over ten years experience were also less consistent in their evaluations of their stress and job satisfaction than respondents with less experience.

Tenure at the two-year college does not appear to be a source of anxiety for faculty, as those without tenure registered less stress and higher job satisfaction on average. Respondents without tenure were also more consistent in their ratings of stress and job satisfaction than respondents with tenure.

Finally, interviewees on their second career appear somewhat more stressed and less satisfied than first career interviewees. However, respondents on their second career were also less consistent in their evaluations of their stress and job satisfaction than those on their first career.

It is apparent the variable of gender appears most impactful of those listed above in the experience of stress. Unfortunately, it is not clear from this research why men and women seem to experience stress to such differing degrees. There are also potential confounds. Two subjects, Pam and Daryl, note difficulty in separating stress deriving from work from stress emanating from their personal lives. Research has found women continue to carry a greater domestic burden than men (Wade 2009). It is possible women are experiencing greater stress outside of work and this is influencing their ratings of work stress. A second potential confound is the fact only two of the interviewees hold temporary, or insecure, positions, both of which happen to be women.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Interviewees worked at a number of different institutions and offered a range of opinions regarding their respective administrative teams. Bruce described a positive relationship with his administrative team, specifying that they were “pretty good at paying attention to contractual matters. That is not true at all campuses. ....Here in our division, they have a pretty, good, loose informal consultative process. We are not obligated to do that legally, but it’s a way of keeping people a little more satisfied.” Brian noted the numerous opportunities his institution offered for faculty to get involved in decision making and also specified positive relationships with administrators, stating “If I need to speak to my dean, I feel very comfortable...I think the administration is very supportive here.” However, Adelle was less satisfied, noting there “is one administrator who very actively has been engaging in attempts to union bust from the inside.” Offering a similarly dour image, Loretta did not feel administrators at her institution took faculty

input seriously, arguing "...within the last five years, it really doesn't matter what we think or say. Up until then, I thought we had more of a voice, but lately, no. Very little...there is a couple of administrators that do not listen...I have never seen morale so low in twenty years..."

Researchers argue higher education administrators are adopting more private-sector managerial practices, including work intensification, enhanced monitoring and quality-control measures and reductions in faculty discretion (Nixon 2001; Benmore 2002; Brehony and Deem 2005). Similarly, interviewees tend to mention frustration with administrative policies, particularly those dealing with assessment procedures. However, attitudes towards administration vary a great deal, with some perceptions generally positive and generally negative. Interviewees did offer some insight into why this variability may exist. Serena noted administrative style tended

"...to be dictated, within the confines of their rules, by a person's personality. That is very variable." Bruce largely agreed with this insight, stating "(perceptions of administration) very much depends on what department, what people you are talking about. It is very personality driven....so it is very idiosyncratic, and you really need to know the personalities and the histories."

While a general trend in faculty attitude did not appear to exist, a clear relationship between attitude towards administration and stress experienced was apparent. Interviewees who showed great frustration towards their administrators also tended to give themselves high stress ratings. Conversely, interviewees who felt positive about

their relationships with administrators tended to rate their stress considerably lower. Therefore, it was quite apparent that these perceptions of administration have a significant impact on faculty experiences.

### FINDINGS SUMMARY

Very little research has been conducted regarding the work experience of two year college faculty. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of this experience. Like many occupations, faculty members at two-year colleges describe a work day which is multi-dimensional. There are triumphs and disappointments, satisfactions and frustrations. Each individual brings unique experiences, skills and expectations to their position. In exchange, their work demands a variety of things from them, but also grants certain rewards, which the individual values to varying degrees. Therefore, each individual's experience is unique, and perspectives offered by respondents regarding the work experience varied. However, interview subjects inhabit the same society and confront many similar roles, activities and demands on a daily basis. These similarities led to common experiences. It is these patterns which this study attempts to highlight.

#### *Sources of Dissatisfaction*

Respondents on average rate their stress at a reasonable level (5.8). However, this hides the troubling fact female faculty rate their stress considerably higher than males (7.3 to 3.8). This analysis parallels research targeting four –year faculty members which finds females consistently report experiencing more stress than males (Doyle and Hind 1998;

Hart and Cress 2008; O'Laughlin and Bischoff 1995; Smith et al. 1995). While discrepancies in four-year findings tend to result from differential experiences in facets such as research support and the tenure process, these findings do not translate well to two-year colleges. As noted previously, it is possible this discrepancy in two-year respondents is due in part to differing orientations between men and women pertaining to student relationships and interactions. However, further research at the two-year college level is warranted to shed greater light on this issue.

During interviews, subjects were asked to list and expound upon major sources of stress. Upon completion of the research, stressors most frequently cited across the sample were selected and grouped into categories. These stressors included institutional and departmental decision making, students, grading, state funding, teaching load, assessment policies, online teaching, social support and job insecurity. These stressors can be further grouped as relating to interpersonal and group conflict, perceptions of job insecurity, lack of social support, loss of autonomy, the changing nature of education, student entitlement and lack of mission fit.

*a. Interpersonal and Group Conflict*

Conflict is theorized by Randall Collins (1975) to be society's most fundamental social process. Accordingly, many of the primary stressors cited and detailed by interviewees appear to be the result of interpersonal or group conflict. Institutional and departmental decision making processes were the most commonly cited stressor, apparently due to the tendency for conflicts to arise between both individuals and groups. Conflicts with

students, particularly regarding grading, were also frequently cited as a significant stressor. Several faculty noted frustration due to existing conflicts with their administration. These faculty members exhibited a generally soured tone towards their daily experiences which appears to speak to the importance of a positive relationship with management. Finally, as public employees, diminished state funding was a source of significant concern for many respondents and tensions exist between faculty members and their state representatives regarding the way public higher education is being handled.

*b. Job Insecurity*

Several respondents were frustrated by a perceived lack of job security. This frustration appears to be deriving from two sources: difficulty in securing permanent work for new faculty and the contraction of state funding which threatens public higher education in general. Two young interviewees had spent considerable time working in temporary positions and were frustrated by the lack of opportunities to move into permanent positions. The prevalence of this experience is acknowledged by Abbas and MacLean (2001), who argue increasing institutional competition and decreasing government funding is leading to an increase in part-time faculty in order to create a cheaper, more flexible work force capable of reacting to fluctuations in the market.

However, feelings of job insecurity were not solely relegated to temporary workers. Permanent faculty also noted feeling threatened by budget shortages, potential school closures and the overall uncertainty of the current economic situation.

*c. Lack of Social Support*

Though faculty rarely cited social isolation directly as a source of stress, it became apparent during analysis faculty who were less socially connected tended to rate their stress higher, satisfaction lower and convey a generally more negative view of their working experience. This finding parallels Johnson and Hall (1988), who argue social support from colleagues and supervisors is capable of diminishing the experience of psychological distress and improving the work experience. It is notable faculty isolation observed in this study appeared to disproportionately affect senior faculty members. Often these faculty members had lost good friends to retirement and found it somewhat difficult to span the generation gap which separated them from the younger faculty.

*d. Loss of autonomy*

It became apparent during this study two-year colleges are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of their effectiveness in educating students. Far from unique to two-year colleges, this trend in higher education has been termed the rise of managerialism (Nixon 2001; Benmore 2002; Brehony and Deem 2005). In this study, regional accreditation processes and assessment techniques were a controversial issue mentioned as a source of frustration by many faculty members. While most seem to support efforts to improve effectiveness, many are less sure about the usefulness of current approaches. What appears to frustrate many is the fact assessment policies require greater energy expenditure on their part without providing much in the way of compensation. Therefore, faculty members are being faced with a diminishing effort-reward bargain. This

perceived injustice is exacerbated by doubts about the effectiveness of assessment. Yet, while autonomy may be gradually diminishing in higher education, decision making latitude, particularly in day to day instructional activities, still remains a desirable aspect of the occupation (Valadez and Anthony 2001; Isaac and Boyer 2007; Kim, Twombly and Wolf-Wendel 2008 ).

*e. Changing Nature of Education*

Buckholdt and Miller (2008) argue higher education is undergoing a paradigm shift, constituted by increasing educational options for students. According to Buckholdt and Miller, students can now be best thought of as a consumer of education who explores the market seeking their best deal, and institutions as competing with each other for available students. Buckholdt and Miller see this paradigm as shifting the relative power balance between institution and student. To a certain degree, my study finds similar notions of institutions ceding power to students. Many interviewees note an increased emphasis on student retention and keeping students happy. Some respondents indicate this trend may be connected to decreased state dollars and an increasing dependency of institutions on student tuition.

*f. Student Entitlement*

Perhaps most frustrating for senior faculty members was a sense of growing student entitlement and unrealistic student expectations regarding the grading and educational process in general. While it may be natural to reconstruct a ‘golden age’ where students conducted themselves in angelic fashion, reports of a changing demeanor among the



student body were consistent among senior faculty interviewees. However, none of the senior faculty offered a strong argument as to why such a shift might be occurring. Pam speculated some responsibility might lie with high schools. Sam thought various processes were combining to create grade inflation, which perhaps plays into similarly inflated student expectations. There is little dispute higher education has undergone a massification. Perhaps a corresponding influx of marginal students is partially to blame. In any event, there appears to be a cultural shift amongst students worthy of further research and analysis.

*g. Lack of Mission Fit*

While interviewing Cathy, it became apparent she was not satisfied with her current position. She voiced a general lack of enjoyment of her interactions with students, frustration with the lack of time and resources provided for her to write and conduct research and openly expressed a preference to teach at a four-year institution. It is perhaps notable Cathy had obtained a PhD before being hired for her current position, where she had spent the past twenty years. In a related finding, Wagoner (2007) notes two-year faculty with doctorate degrees are less satisfied than those with lower credentials. While an individual with a PhD who is unable to obtain a university position may see the two-year college as a logical stepping stone, the open-access, low cost and community centered mission of the community and technical college differs notably from that of colleges and universities with selective admissions. Department chair Sam speaks to the potential misfit between PhD faculty and the two-year college:

People who have been most successful (at this institution) are those who have a clear understanding that teaching and learning is job one here. It's fundamentally the only thing that matters....One of the things that has been a little bizarre in my mind is that a certain number of the faculty who have been hired in my department are here, not because this was really their first choice or even their second choice but are here because the academic market is not exactly burgeoning. So they don't have a good appreciation for what characterizes our student body here. They are disappointed in their career attainment and they value things that are difficult to optimize here, and so look to hire other people like themselves. For instance, one of the last hirings we did, it was a choice between someone who had a PhD from Minnesota and someone who had a masters degree from University of Nebraska and the person from Nebraska had far more teaching experience here, had (been a) adjunct here for years, been a wonderful colleague, way involved in departmental activities. But a couple of members of the hiring committee, both whom have PhDs from less prestigious places than the University of Minnesota were enamored with the person from the University of Minnesota and it was a hell of a fight to not offer the position, and they were very unhappy and irate about this. And it doesn't show a good understanding of what the focus of this institution is. Its teaching. A PhD doesn't make a better teacher, in fact it may make you a worse one if you think somehow that makes you more qualified than someone who does not have a PhD...that attitude of superiority is not conducive to good collegial relations or relations with ones students for that matter. I think the people who are most likely to be successful in an environment like this are people who are targeting institutions like this, and will have as part of their graduate education and training focused on pedagogy, they will have developed an understanding of what our clientele is like...

Two – year institutions primary concern is teaching, and faculty who expressed satisfaction with their positions demonstrated an ability to derive enjoyment not just from their intellectual pursuits, but also from honing the craft of instruction, the diversity of their students and their ability to aid in promoting social mobility. It is important to note here that Wagoner's findings did receive some, though not overwhelming support. Of faculty respondents who had obtained a PhD, two demonstrated high satisfaction (Pam, Serena), while four (Sam, Cathy, Adelle and Bruce) conveyed less enthusiasm regarding their occupation. Interestingly, Pam had benefited from an unusual opportunity during

her graduate program to take several courses in pedagogy as part of her PhD program. While Serena had not received such unique training in her doctoral program, she explained how she had begun her program targeting a job at a two-year college. Both expressed greater passion for teaching than research. Of the four PhDs expressing lower satisfaction, three appeared to place a greater degree of importance on their research activities (Adelle, Cathy, Sam) than Pam and Serena. Such findings suggest Wagoner's results may be an indirect measurement of the tendency of PhD recipients to favor research activities over teaching and thus to experience misalignment with the mission of the two-year college.

#### *Sources of Satisfaction*

On average, respondents rated their satisfaction relatively high (8.0). Ratings of satisfaction did not appear to be influenced greatly by personal characteristics such as gender, educational background, tenure achievement or first or second career status, though it did seem to diminish somewhat with extensive experience.

High satisfaction subjects still identified a number of stressors when asked to do so, yet they tended to retain and exude a positive outlook throughout the interview process which lower satisfaction subjects did not. Since all faculty members seem to experience a number of job-related stressors, job satisfaction does not appear to be solely determined by the presence or absence of work stress. If this were the case, low work stress should consistently correspond with high job satisfaction ratings and vice versa. However, a number of respondents rated both stress and satisfaction highly. Therefore, high stress

apparently does not rule out the possibility of experiencing high job satisfaction. These findings appear to agree with demand-control model, which states high stress can be countered by decision making latitude and social support. Additionally, high satisfaction respondents viewed many of the primary activities of their position as rewards and were successful in implementing various stress-avoidance coping strategies.

*a. Decision Making Latitude and Learning Opportunities*

The coexistence of high stress and high job satisfaction corresponds well with Theorell and Karasek (1996) who argue jobs which combine high psychological demands and high decision making latitude can in fact lead to desirable forms of stress, high motivation, learning opportunities, a sense of mastery and the diminished impact of job stresses. For the two-year college faculty, decision making latitude comes largely in the form of instructional autonomy and control. While some respondents voice concerns over perceived threats to instructional autonomy, recent research has found two-year college faculty remain highly satisfied with their degree of control over instructional activities (Valadez and Anthony 2001; Isaac and Boyer 2007; Kim, Twombly and Wolf-Wendel 2008). In addition, a number of respondents noted their enjoyment of learning opportunities present in their position as central to their job satisfaction. The importance of decision making latitude in the demand-control model may also help explain why job satisfaction and stress ratings appear to suffer for faculty who perceive their administrators as overly invasive and detrimental to instructional autonomy.

*b. Rewards*

Interviewees with high job satisfaction ratings tended to emphasize rewards inherent in their position throughout the interview process. Rewards in this case refer not merely to financial compensation and benefits, but to a range of activities and relationships which faculty members cited as sources of satisfaction. These findings could be interpreted through the principle of reciprocity which exists in all three work stress models. During this research, it became clear respondent attitude is greatly influenced by degree of desire for the rewards available in the two-year faculty position. For those who relish these rewards, they appear to be key in moderating stress and increasing satisfaction.

Interviewees with high satisfaction tend to speak of deriving pleasure from student interaction, learning opportunities, and collegial relationships. These respondents also appear to relish the challenge of engaging students and the opportunity to dedicate much of their professional time to learning about an area of personal interest.

Respondents with lower satisfaction scores also noted a number of rewards. However, these rewards tended differ from those identified by high satisfaction faculty. Low satisfaction respondents noted rewards which revolved less around the teaching process and social relationships, and focused more on job characteristics such as autonomy, salary and schedule flexibility.

### *c. Coping*

A number of faculty illustrated coping mechanisms they developed during their experience. For some, coping came in the form of avoidance, such as distancing oneself from institutional decision making activities which may promote frustration and exposure

to interpersonal conflict. Coping may also take the form of developing instructional strategies which serve to reduce instructor-student conflicts or through seeking social support from colleagues. Respondents rating their satisfaction lower appear to be less successful in either avoiding various forms of interpersonal conflict or counteracting this effect by deriving significant pleasure from other aspects of the position.

### CONCLUSION

Teaching at a two-year college is a highly interactive experience. Respondents testify to instructing between two-hundred and two-hundred fifty students per semester. In addition, respondents function as members of departments and participate in various committees which specialize in departmental and institutional matters. As illustrated by Thorne and Hochschild (1997), academic departments are similar to the family unit. Faculty members for the most part do not choose their colleagues but are forced into association with them on a regular basis. Therefore, these environments can range from highly functional and supportive to dysfunctional and degrading. Similarly, classrooms can be thought of as extended family units, which provide myriad opportunities for both positive interaction and conflict. Finally, each institution possesses a management tree which imposes rules and standards upon the workers. As a number of respondents noted, administrative actions tend to be highly influenced, within the confines of bureaucratic rules, by individual personality characteristics. Therefore, the two-year faculty experience can be characterized as highly interactive and influenced by the nature of these interactions.

The two-year faculty work experience can be characterized as strongly impacted by the individual's perception of the degree of reciprocity which exists between the energy they expend and the rewards they receive. While demands upon respondents were fairly consistent, individual satisfaction appears to be largely dependent on the salience of rewards available to them in their position. Additional idiosyncrasies in experience arise due to the individual's belief in and desire to fulfill the two-year college mission, sense of job security, degree of social support experienced, feelings regarding assessment policies and report with students. Overall, the two-year faculty position can be characterized as a generally desirable position due to its decision making latitude, schedule flexibility, learning opportunities and generally livable wages. However, some deterioration of the occupation was described, most notably in the areas of faculty discretion and the effort-reward bargain.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE ACTIVE JOB, THE EVOLVING INSTITUTION AND THE CHANGING EFFORT-REWARD BARGAIN**

Based on these findings, how are we to characterize the two-year faculty experience? Faculty members are experiencing varying degrees of job stress and job satisfaction. Satisfaction ratings are relatively high (mean = 8.0) and stress ratings are reasonable (mean = 5.8). But what are some of the primary mechanisms through which these outcomes are being created? Based on this study and a review of related literature, I believe the two-year faculty experience can best be understood by taking into account the following six statements:

1. the two-year faculty occupation is an 'active' job
2. faculty members are experiencing evolving institutions
3. faculty members are facing a less attractive effort-reward bargain
4. faculty members are experiencing role strain
5. faculty members are experiencing stress resulting from a participatory form of governance
6. a segment of faculty members are experiencing person-environment misfit

### **AN 'ACTIVE' OCCUPATION**

Faculty interviewees largely characterize their jobs in a way which places them into the 'active' job category in the demand-control model (Karasek 1979). According to interviews, the two-year faculty position is typified by high demands but also by relatively high decision making latitude and autonomy. According to Theorell and



Karasek (1996) positions which are composed in this way are characterized by opportunities for learning and potential for a sense of mastery which can buffer the experience of work stress. In addition, Theorell and Karasek explain strain experienced in this type of occupation can be differentiated as good stress, due to the higher degree of autonomy and control. The views of Theorell and Karasek regarding active occupations are largely reflected in the responses of interviewees, which enumerate a number of stressors and significant demands which result in frustration, yet generally convey relatively high satisfaction ratings.

#### EVOLVING INSTITUTIONS

Faculty interviewees often spoke with concern regarding state funding of higher education in Minnesota. Is state funding truly decreasing in the state? If so, is this typical of the national condition of higher education? The answers appear to be yes and yes. Peter Zetterberg (2005), the director of institutional research and reporting at the University of Minnesota, finds Minnesota state higher education funding as a proportion of personal income has declined precipitously since its high water mark in 1978 (see appendix, Figure 5). According to Zetterberg, in 1978 Minnesota dedicated \$15.10 for every \$1000 of personal income to higher education. This proportion ranked Minnesota 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation. However, in 2005, Minnesota dedicated \$ 7.39 per \$1000 of personal income, falling to a ranking of 25<sup>th</sup>. In addition, Zetterberg also finds higher education funding in the US has declined from a high of \$10.55 per \$1000 of personal income, also in 1978, to \$6.91 per \$1000 of personal income in 2005 (see appendix, Figure 5).

How does this decline in state funding affect the nature of higher education institutions? According to the evolutionary theory of organizations, organizations are characterized by the *struggle* for scarce resources and the resultant *variation* in routines, competencies and organizational forms (Aldrich 1999). Zetterberg's analysis makes it clear higher education funding is increasingly scarce.

But what policies and routines can be changed in order to cope with the increasing scarcity of public funding? A few obvious alternatives come to mind. First, institutions can lobby for increased state funding. However, Zetterberg's analysis appears to indicate these attempts have been relatively unsuccessful, both on a state and national level. Second, institutions can seek to enhance other funding sources, such as student tuition. According to Kelderman (2011), even community colleges, which have traditionally received a higher proportion of their revenues from public sources than other public higher education institutions, are seeing student tuition dollars constitute larger proportions of their budgets. Kelderman notes that in particular states such as Iowa, community colleges have seen dollars from tuition surpass those derived from state and local funding sources. There are a number of potential avenues for two-year colleges to increase tuition dollars, such as raising tuition rates, adopting more distance education in order to expand the pool of students, growing class sizes, and emphasizing student retention. A number of faculty interviewed for this study note an increased emphasis on the last three items. Additionally, with the increased proportion of tuition dollars in institution budgets, institutions are increasingly dependent on students for their fiscal solvency. Decreases in public sources of funding may force institutions to operate more

like private business, with students in the role of consumer and institutions charged with satisfying student wishes in order to avoid the loss of students to competing institutions (Buckholdt and Miller 2008). Such a dynamic would obviously shift the balance of power between students, faculty and the institution. Third, institutions can attempt to cut costs. Kelderman (2011) argues higher education administrators are already increasing faculty workload and cutting faculty numbers. In an attempt to cut costs, colleges and universities are also hiring more contingent faculty (Abbas and MacLean 2001; Benmore 2002; Brehony and Deem 2005). According to a report produced by the American Association of University Professors (2012), longitudinal analysis of national data finds the proportion of part-time faculty in higher education has increased from 24% of faculty in 1975 to 41.1% of faculty in 2009. At the two-year college level the trend is even more apparent, as Cohen and Brawer (2003) find 62% of faculty members hold part-time positions. These trends are worrisome to many in higher education. In a recent *Time Magazine* article, Webley (2012) argues the increase in contingent faculty is detrimental to student performance. Yet, such trends appear detrimental to faculty as well, as adjuncts interviewed for this study note the salience of chronic stress provoked by the insecurity of contingent work.

#### A DECREASING EFFORT-REWARD BARGAIN

Faculty members are facing a less attractive effort-reward bargain than existed in past years. Faculty are increasingly being asked to do more (teach larger classes, develop new technological skills, assess course effectiveness, complete more administrative tasks), and

yet are receiving less in the way of autonomy, overall compensation and job security. In speaking with veteran faculty, it was noted that, over time, administrative oversight has increased, the quality of benefit packages has decreased and raises have become more infrequent. In addition, budget shortfalls leave faculty with a sense that institutions could undergo major cuts or even be shutdown entirely. Finally, faculty members note the increasing prevalence of contingent workers and appear threatened by the cheap alternative labor force these individuals represent.

#### FACULTY ROLE STRAIN

Throughout the interviews, a picture emerged of the faculty position as one with many roles: content expert, instructor, evaluator, colleague, bureaucrat, confidant, etc. Goode (1960) notes individuals can experience role strain when two or more roles inherent in one status exist in tension with one another. Throughout the interviews, a significant tension of this sort appeared to emerge. First, many faculty members note the great satisfaction they derive from relationships they form with students. Oftentimes these relationships extended beyond the classroom, with faculty serving as confidants for students on a variety of life matters. Second, faculty members often noted the conflict inherent in evaluating student work, with many viewing grading as a source of ongoing stress. There is much emphasis in the current educational literature on faculty increasing interaction with, and forming stronger bonds with, students. Yet, such attempts may be in conflict with the role of evaluator, where faculty must be viewed as an unbiased arbiter of the quality of student work.

## THE PARTICIPATORY OCCUPATION

A number of theoretical models pertaining to the work experience note the advantageous aspects of greater decision making input. Due to the current contract established through collective bargaining, administrators are required to consult faculty regarding any and all institutional policy changes. It was also mentioned that, though not contractually obligated to do so, departments often function in a similarly consultative manner. Therefore, two-year college faculty members in Minnesota appear to be experiencing a high level of decision making input at both the institutional and departmental levels. Yet, many faculty members identify the group decision making process as a major, if not the major, source of stress inherent in their position, to the point a number of interviewees stated they went out of their way to avoid engagement in these processes. Somewhat contrary to occupational models, opportunity for input in institutional decision making was not specified by respondents as a valued reward of the occupation. However, when questioned specifically regarding faculty governance processes, most faculty, including those who avoid participation, voice relative satisfaction with the status quo. Therefore, findings of this study paint an ambiguous picture of faculty attitudes towards governance procedures. Part of this ambiguity appears to be resulting from idiosyncrasies in the process resulting from individual personality traits of college administrators.

### PERSON-ENVIRONMENT MISFIT

A proportion of the interviewees voiced goals which may be characterized as at odds with the mission of the two-year college. In many cases, this involved faculty members who were frustrated by the lack of time they had to write and conduct research. At the two-year college, teaching is the primary role of faculty members and loads are higher than at four year institutions, leaving these faculty members short of time to pursue scholarship and other forms of professional development. In some cases, faculty members were open about their preference for the four-year model of higher education. Whether these preferences predated attainment of the current position or whether they have arisen after spending time at a two-year institution was unclear. Unfortunately, the distinct difference in mission between a selective and open-access institution appeared to be leading some faculty to experience a lack of fit, resulting in high stress and low levels of job satisfaction.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Findings of this study have significant contributions for our knowledge in the following areas.

#### *The Privatization of Public Higher Education*

This study finds a widespread perception among faculty higher education that public funding sources are drying up. Zetterberg's (2005) analysis appears to provide support for these perceptions on both a state and national level, showing the proportion of tax

dollars being dedicated to higher education has been dropping steadily since 1978. Public funding decreases have significant implications for the operation of public higher education institutions, including an increased emphasis on tuition dollars. Such a shift in funding casts public higher education institutions as increasingly dependent on student enrollment and retention. In addition, the privatization of public higher education may potentially shift the balance of power in the academic setting between faculty, institutions and students. Significant implications exist for the faculty position. Due in part to decreasing public funding, faculty members are being faced with an increased work load and less job security.

#### *Hiring Practices*

This study aligns with an increasing awareness that identifying qualified applicants for particular positions requires a great deal more than an analysis of educational preparation and prior work experience. Models utilized in this study highlight the fact job fit and job satisfaction require numerous aspects of the individual, position and organization to align. Such findings hold applications for all occupational areas, including higher education. Based on findings of this study, it is suggested higher education hiring committees should focus not only on the educational preparation and work experience of the individual applicant, but also on the degree of fit between values of the individual and institution, as well as the degree of fit between the skills and desires of the individual and the demands and rewards of the position in question.

### *Gender and Stress*

Though the sample of this study was small and non-random, results align with and extend previous research findings which argue female faculty experience a greater degree of stress than males (Doyle and Hind 1998; Hart and Cress 2008; O’Laughlin and Bischoff 1995; Smith et al. 1995). While this problem was recognized decades ago, why this discrepancy exists remains in need of further explanation. Finally, a need persists for the creation and diffusion of progressive and proactive policies in order to counteract this phenomenon.

### *Group Decision Making and Participatory Occupations*

Decision making input is generally thought to be a positive occupational characteristic (Karasek 1979). Yet, findings from this study indicate faculty appear to be shying away from participation in order to avoid conflict and resultant stress. Further research is warranted in order to aid in developing processes of institutional governance aimed at providing a better experience for faculty participants. These results may also have implications for similar occupations which experience consistent implementation of group decision making processes.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

### *Group decision making*

Past research has found input in decision making processes to be a desirable occupational characteristic. However, this study illustrates many faculty either choose not participate in faculty governance or find their participation to be a primary source of job



strain. Therefore, further research regarding faculty governance processes is needed to describe faculty frustrations in greater detail and to provide potential solutions.

#### *Women faculty strain*

Findings from this study continue to demonstrate what researchers have known for some time: women faculty members are continuing to experience a higher degree of strain than men. In research regarding faculty members at four-year institutions, explanations for this discrepancy have included the marginalization of research interests of women faculty and lack of support from administration for work-life balance needs. However, the results of this study differ. Faculty sampled generally did not voice a concern with research. In addition, women faculty members had generally positive things to say about their schedule flexibility. Therefore, further research is necessary to explicate this gender differential in faculty stress. .

#### *The evolving organization*

This study suggests public funding has declined precipitously since the 1970's. Such a budgetary context begs for an analysis of political lobbying strategies of higher education institutions as well as policies regarding sources of alternative funding. In addition, research has found reductions in funding have led to a growth in contingent faculty. This subject offers a rich and readily available source of data on social psychological research lines such as the identity construction and emotion management techniques of low status workers.

*Personnel decisions*

Findings of this study combined with an exploration of two-year college faculty job postings indicate institutions may at times de-emphasize the importance of dedication to the two-year college mission when confronted with high status candidates possessing extensive educational credentials, deriving from prestigious institutions, or having a significant record of scholarship, even though these characteristics may actually inhibit the future satisfaction of the candidate in the context of a teaching-focused, non-elite, open-access institution. Quoted on page 78, department chair Sam explains the problematic nature of this tendency to hire individuals taking the ‘stepping stone’ approach for both the faculty member selected and the hiring institution.

Occupational satisfaction and strain models demonstrate the importance of matching individual and organizational values in order maximize worker happiness and productivity. Findings of this study indicate faculty members with negative perceptions of their occupation were often suffering from misfit between desired occupational rewards and the rewards present in their institution. Therefore, further research which correlates a mission fit assessment with occupational satisfaction of two-year faculty may be instructive for those in charge of hiring decisions at two-year institutions.

In summary, the two-year college faculty position can be characterized as desirable for those who embody a strong fit with the demands and rewards of the position and the values of the institution. However, these positions are also increasingly hard to obtain and retain due to decreased public funding. Those who are able to obtain a faculty position, while relatively satisfied, are increasingly facing a less attractive effort-reward bargain.

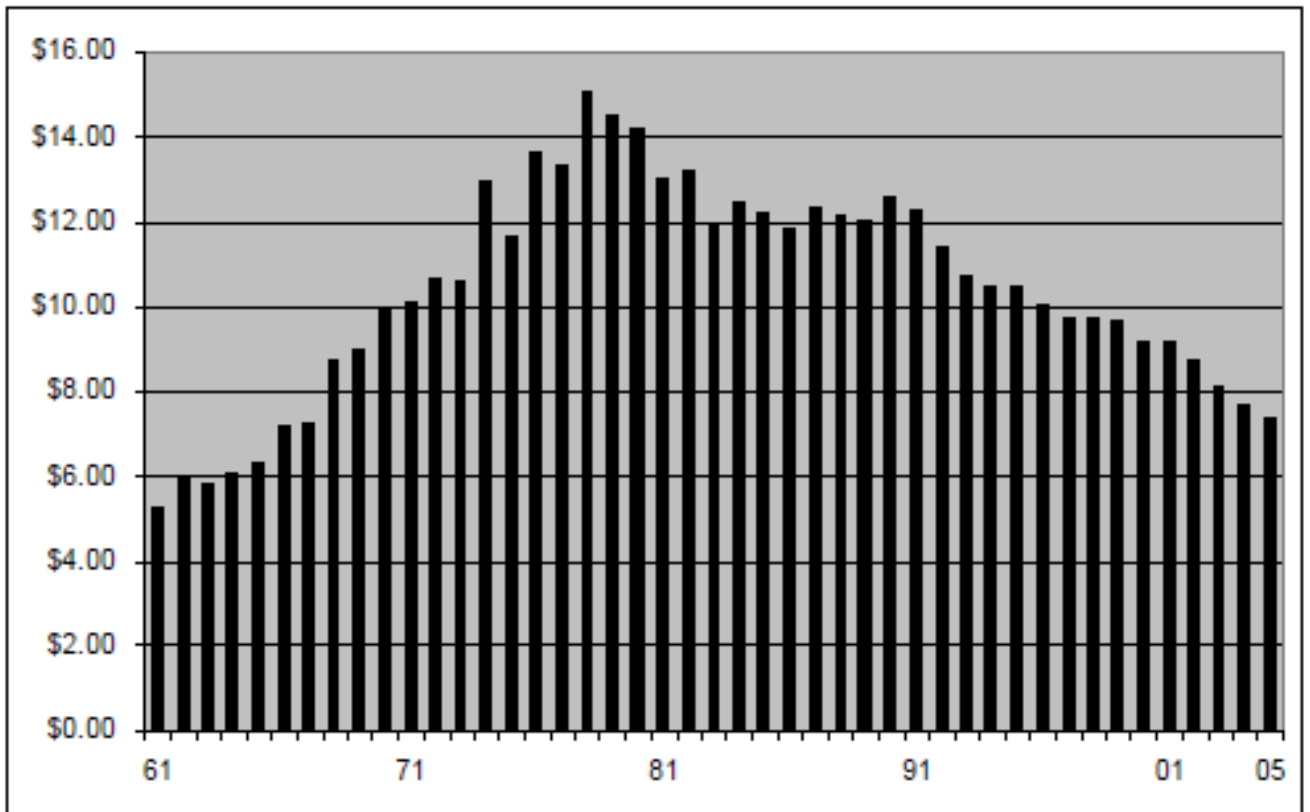
Finally, funding trends are reshaping the operating strategies of the two-year college institution, as well as the role of faculty member and the relationship between institution, faculty member and student.

## APPENDIX

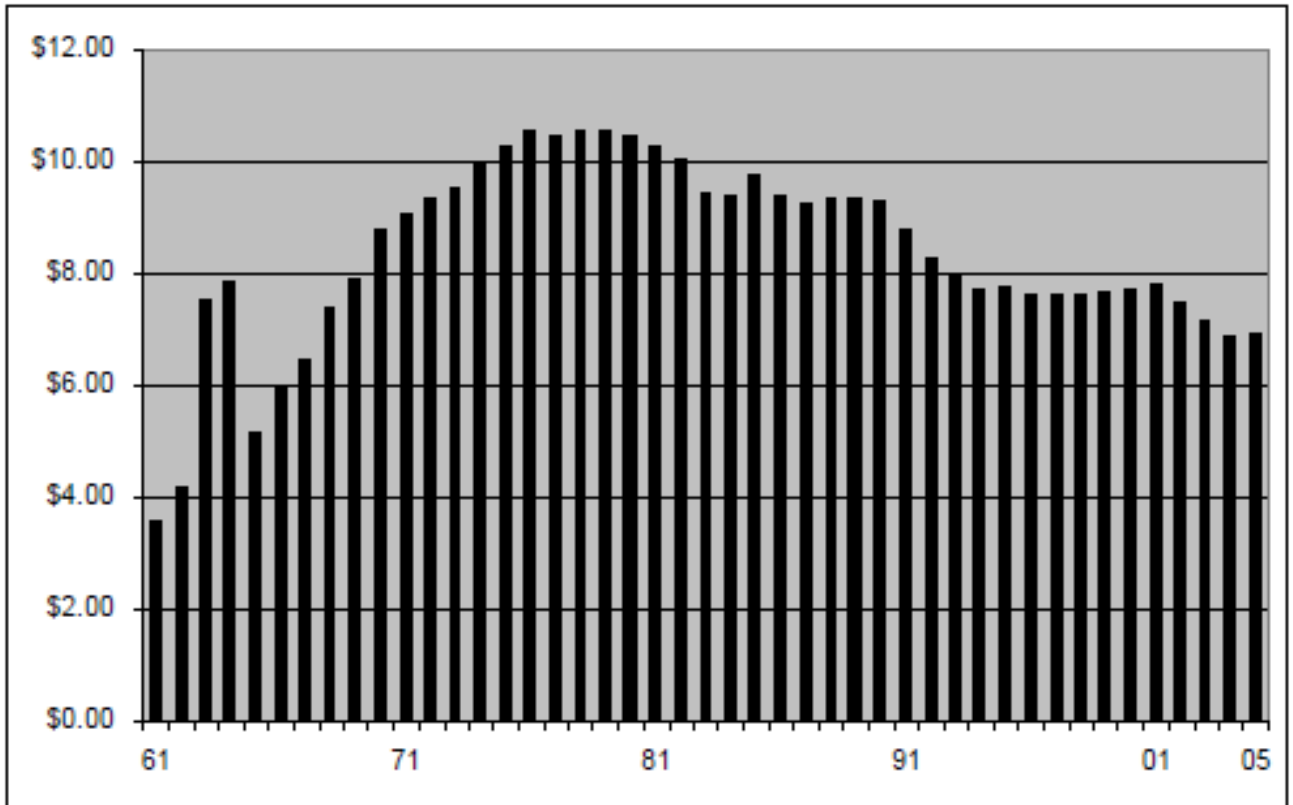
Table 8. Subject Characteristics

|                            | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5       | 6      | 7     | 8      | 9       | 10   |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------|------|
| Name                       | Daryl | Sam   | Karen | Marie | Loretta | Adelle | Brian | Serena | Valerie | Bill |
| Sex                        | Male  | Male  | Fem   | Fem   | Fem     | Fem    | Male  | Fem    | Fem     | Male |
| Exper.                     | 15    | 31    | 4     | 3     | 20      | 13     | 6.5   | 2.5    | 20      | 10.5 |
| Educ.                      | MA +  | PhD   | ABD   | ABD   | MA+     | PhD    | MA    | PhD    | MA+     | MA   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup><br>career? | No    | No    | No    | No    | Yes     | Yes    | No    | No     | Yes     | Yes  |
| Tenure                     | Yes   | Yes   | No    | No    | Yes     | Yes    | No    | No     | Yes     | No   |
| Work<br>Hrs/wk             | 35    | 50+   | 45+   | 45    | 50      | 60     | 52.5  | 50     | ?       | 50   |
| Stress                     | 5     | 6.5   | 8     | 6     | 10      | 8      | 3.5   | 7      | 5.5     | 2.5  |
| Job Sat                    | 9     | 7.5   | 9     | 7.5   | 5       | 6      | 8.5   | 9.5    | 8       | 9.5  |
|                            | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14    |         |        |       |        |         |      |
|                            | Cathy | Matty | Pam   | Bruce |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Sex                        | Fem   | Fem   | Fem   | Male  |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Exp.                       | 20    | 29    | 7(30) | 35(8) |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Educ.                      | PhD   | MS    | PhD   | PhD   |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup><br>career? | Yes   | Yes   | No    | No    |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Tenure                     | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Hrs/<br>wk                 | 40+   | 60+   | 50+   | 55    |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Stress                     | 8     | 8     | 5     | 1.5   |         |        |       |        |         |      |
| Job Sat                    | 6     | 10    | 10    | 6     |         |        |       |        |         |      |

**Figure 4: Minnesota State Tax Funds for Higher Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income:  
FY 1961 – FY 2005 (Zetterberg 2005)**



**Figure 5: U.S. State Tax Funds for Higher Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income: FY 1961 - FY 2005 (Zetterberg, 2005)**



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