

# **Job Satisfaction of Civil Service and Administrative and Professional Staff in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify attitudes and perceptions of staff in a College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Science regarding job satisfaction. A mail questionnaire was sent to all staff in the College (N = 1,455) with responses received from 875 which was a response rate of 60%. The questionnaire asked staff to rate items in terms of importance and also on how well that item was being demonstrated in the College. Exploratory common factor analysis was used to identify factors related to job satisfaction. The seven factor model showed 42% of the total variance to be common variance. The researchers named the seven factors as follows: factor 1, opportunity for networking; factor 2, open communications; factor 3, informed of decisions; factor 4, meaningful evaluations; factor 5, feeling appreciated; factor 6, job flexibility and variety; and factor 7, need for training. Average difference scores were computed for each factor based upon the perceived importance of the factor and how well that factor was being accomplished in the College. Population parameters were calculated to look at differences among groups on the seven factors. In general for the four groups studied factor 3, informed of decisions, was identified as a major barrier to job satisfaction with factor 2, open communications, and factor 4, meaningful evaluations, as other factors also considered barriers to job satisfaction.

## **Introduction**

Clerical and other support staff personnel comprise approximately forty percent of the higher education workforce (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Often times clerical and support staff are on the frontlines of meeting and greeting individuals which play an important role in a student's, parent's, legislator's, or stakeholder's first impression of that university or college. The level of job satisfaction by clerical and support staff should be of concern to middle managers and those in supervisory positions in higher education.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been studied extensively (Herzberg, 1959; Locke, 1976; Lee & Wilbur, 1985; Kacmar & Ferris, 1989). However, along with the concept of job satisfaction, employee motivation and workforce commitment also influence employee satisfaction. Motivation is the internal force that drives behavior while workforce commitment is the psychological ownership one has for his/her job in the work environment. These concepts often interact with each other where employee motivation influences job satisfaction or work force commitment while job satisfaction may influence motivation or workforce commitment. For

those frontline employees who provide the first impression of the campus environment, job satisfaction is a critical component in making that first impression. Many studies have revealed positive relationship between job satisfaction and productivity (Allen, 1996; Bassi & Van Buren, 1997; Church, 1995; Laabs, 1998; Sauter, Hurrell, & Cooper, 1989; Savery, 1996).

Locke (1976) identified the following working conditions associated with job satisfaction: mentally challenging, work with which one can successfully cope, personal interest in the work itself, work that is not too physically tiring, rewards for performance, good working conditions, high self-esteem, and attainment of interesting work, pay, promotions, and help in minimizing role conflict and ambiguity. In Herzberg's (1959) landmark book, The Motivation to Work, he outlined intrinsic factors such as interpersonal relationships, working conditions, status, and security which influenced job satisfaction. Other researchers have found that extrinsic factors such as salary and employee benefits exerted greater influences on job satisfaction – especially for young workers (AON Consulting, 1998).

The literature is mixed as far as studies on job satisfaction for support staff in higher education. Ford (1992) reported at Mid-Plains Community College employees which included classified staff reported being the least satisfied with rewards which included salary and benefits. However, a survey by the University of Delaware (1996) reported that 48 percent of the salaried staff was very satisfied with their salary and 93 percent agreed that university benefits were excellent. Overall, 71 percent of the salaried staff indicated they were satisfied with their jobs.

However, high pay and benefits alone are not the only components of job satisfaction. Leavitt (1996) found that career development needs are an important component of job satisfaction. Laabs (1998) added another dimension to job satisfaction by stating that managers need to show employees they are needed, valued, and appreciated. This recognition does not have to be financial; it can simply be recognizing a deserving employee as an employee of the month or giving that employee a plaque.

Higher education can offer support staff continued growth through academic and continuing education classes. Support staff could pursue a bachelor's degree while receiving a tuition discount or a waiver. Staff members who perceive growth opportunities are more satisfied and gain increased self-esteem and empowerment (Howard & Frink, 1996).

Even if the salary, benefits and the opportunities for growth are at an acceptable level, one's perception of the work situation may affect the perceived level of job satisfaction. An individual's perception of the work environment may be affected by interpersonal relationships with coworkers, perceptions of campus multiculturalism, internal motivation, involvement in decision-making, and perceptions of the physical work environment. Howard and Frink (1996) found that satisfaction with coworkers had a positive relationship with internal work motivation and general job satisfaction. It is important for college administrators to monitor if minority staff perceives bias or discrimination. Debow-Makino (1993) reported that African American and Hispanic staff members were more likely to report negative responses than respondents who were male, managers, and full-time faculty. Studies have shown that increased job satisfaction and commitment were achieved when employees perceived themselves as involved in decision-making (Sauter, Hurrell, & Cooper, 1989; Locke & Schweiger, 1979).

## Union and Nonunion Staff

In the past 20 years unionization of university noninstructional staff has grown (Hurd & Woodhead, 1987). Putten, McLendon, and Peterson (1997) found significant differences between union and nonunion noninstructional staff in higher education on their perceptions of the work environment. Union-affiliated staff members perceived the culture, philosophy, climate, and outcomes of their work environment more negatively than nonunion staff.

## Summary

Many variables are involved in explaining and understanding job satisfaction. While many university policies were designed for the needs of faculty, support staff may have different needs and interests. Their needs and concerns should be addressed since they are often placed in the critical role of making that all important first impression.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify attitudes and perceptions of staff in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences towards making the College a more compelling place to work.

### **Objectives**

1. To describe the College staff demographically
2. To identify factors staff indicated as needs, interests, and concerns in making the College a more compelling place to work
3. To determine if there are differences on the identified factors among the groups studied

### **Methodology**

#### Subject Selection

The College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences sent questionnaires to a census of staff members employed by the college during Spring Quarter, 2000 (N=1,455). A cover letter from the Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Dean was sent with each questionnaire asking staff to complete the questionnaire as a first step in making the College a more compelling place to work. The questionnaire was part of a College process to discover the attitudes and perceptions of staff regarding job satisfaction and to commit to a plan of action for addressing widespread needs, interests, and concerns. A follow-up email reminder was sent to all staff that had not responded within 15 days. All responses were kept confidential with only summary data reported. Responses were received from 875 staff which resulted in a response rate of 60%. No additional follow-up of non-respondents was done.

## Instrument Development

The questionnaire was developed by the College Staff Advisory Council drawing upon the knowledge and expertise of the council's various functional subcommittees as well as its membership at large. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part 1 of the questionnaire was composed of 40 Likert type items with respondents asked to rank the level of importance of each item toward making the College a more compelling place to work by utilizing a four-point scale (1 - Not important, 2 - Of little importance, 3 - Somewhat important, and 4 - Very important). Part 2 of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank each of the previous 40 items on how well the item was being demonstrated by the College again utilizing a four-point scale (1 - Not demonstrated, 2 - Occasionally demonstrated, 3 - Demonstrated most of the time, and 4 - Demonstrated all the time). A Cronbach's alpha of .93 for the importance rating scale and a .94 for the demonstration scale was obtained. Part 3 of the questionnaire was used to gather demographic data.

## Data Analysis

Population parameters including frequencies, measures of central tendency, variability, and correlations were calculated using SPSS version 10.1.0 as a census was conducted. Exploratory common factor analysis using maximum likelihood extraction procedures was used to identify common factors. Based upon the correlation matrix (several correlations above  $|\ .30|$ ), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $p < .001$ ), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (.92), the data appeared appropriate for common factor analysis. The analysis provided a parsimonious number of factors (7) that could be used to represent the relationships among the sets of many interrelated variables.

Two criteria were used to determine the number of factors to be extracted. First, only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were considered in the analysis. Second, a scree plot of the factor eigenvalues was used to identify breaks or discontinuity in determining the number of factors. The factors were rotated orthogonally using a varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalization to aid in the interpretation of the factors. Stevens (1992) suggests using loadings of .40 absolute when determining which items are of practical importance in loading on a factor.

A measure of job satisfaction was determined by calculating an average difference score (based upon summated item rating scores divided by the number of items composing a factor) between the importance of a factor in determining job satisfaction and how well that factor was being demonstrated by the College.

## **Results**

The demographics of the support staff are shown in Table 1. Staff could be located in one of the four following areas: the main campus, the experiment station or technical institute both of which are located in a different city than the main campus, an Extension county or district office, or an experiment branch station located in another area within the state. Staff were primarily located in an Extension county or district office, 56.4%, followed by main campus, 25.5%, experiment station or technical institute, 14.9%, and lastly an experiment branch station,

3.2%. Their primary area of appointment was Extension, 67.4%, followed by experiment station, 15.1%, academic unit or department, 13.8%, and technical institute, 3.8%. For average years of service to the College, staff who worked at the experiment station had the most years with 12.8 followed by the technical institute, 9.7; staff who worked in an academic unit or department, 9.5 years and lastly staff who worked in Extension averaged 8.6 years. The majority of staff were administrative and professional, 55.2 % followed by civil service, 44.8%. Administrative and professional staff have a renewable, annual contract whereas civil service staff have a continuing contract after their probationary period. Most staff were full time, 83.2% followed by part-time staff, 16.8%. In summary the profile of a typical staff member in the College was full-time, had an administrative and professional appointment, and worked in an Extension county or district office.

Table 2 reports the factor loadings associated with job satisfaction. The seven factors extracted by the procedure were named by the researchers as follows: factor 1, opportunity for networking; factor 2, open communications; factor 3, informed of decisions; factor 4, meaningful evaluation; factor 5, feeling appreciated; factor 6, job flexibility and variety; and factor 7, need for training. The common variance for the seven factors accounted for 42% of the total variance explained. The seven factor model explained 52% of the total variance.

Table 1. Support Staff Demographics

Demographic:	N	Percent	Mean
<b>Location:</b>			
Main Campus	217	25.5	
Experiment Station and Technical Institute	127	14.9	
Extension County or District Office	479	56.4	
Experiment Station Outlying Branch	27	3.2	
<b>Primary Area of Appointment:</b>			
Academic Unit or Department	117	13.8	
Extension	573	67.4	
Experiment Station	128	15.1	
Technical Institute	32	3.8	
<b>Years of Service to the College:</b>			
Academic Unit or Department	108	14.5	9.5 (sd 9.2)
Extension	494	66.3	8.6 (sd 7.1)
Experiment Station	113	15.2	12.8 (sd 9.2)
Technical Institute	30	4.0	9.7 (sd 7.5)
<b>Type of Appointment:</b>			
Civil Service	377	44.8	
Administrative and Professional	465	55.2	
<b>FTE:</b>			
Full-time	690	83.2	
Part-time	139	16.8	

Table 2

Rotated Factor Matrix of Factors Associated with Job Satisfaction (n = 723)

Item:	Factors						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Opportunity to make professional connections with staff and faculty from other departments	.73						
Administrative encouragement to work across departmental and college boundaries	.70						
Opportunity to interact with staff and faculty from other departments and programs	.65						
Opportunity to learn what is happening in departments and programs across the college	.60						
My feeling that I am a part of the college	.54						
Spirit of cooperation between departments and units within the college	.44						
Understanding how my work contributes to the larger mission of the department	.41						
Clear communication of departmental decisions to all faculty and staff		.55					
Administrative support for collaboration among faculty and staff in our department		.48					
Open communication between faculty and staff within our department/unit		.45					
Fair implementation of policies at the college level		.43					
Fair implementation of policies at the department/unit level		.41					
Being kept informed of decisions made in my unit that impact my position/responsibilities			.58				
Having a clear understanding of my job responsibilities between my supervisor and me			.53				
Being kept informed of college policies and decisions that impact my job			.51				
Adequate equipment needed to do my job			.41				
Annual review that provides a clear understanding of expectations for future performance				.70			
Assurance that a meaningful evaluation will be conducted each year on my performance				.70			
Performance evaluations that provide a clear assessment of my past year's performance				.68			
Performance evaluations that are based on a realistic set of expectations				.52			
Appreciation of my work by the co-workers in my department/unit					.66		

Item:	Factors						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Knowing that my input is appreciated by my department/unit					.50		
Being appreciated by my supervisor for my accomplishments					.46		
Flexibility in planning and implementing my work						.71	
Variety in my job responsibilities						.52	
Time off provided to participate in training and development							.59
Funding provided to attend training and development programs							.48
Training available to improve technical job skills							.43
Eigenvalue	3.6	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.4	1.8	1.3
Percent Trace	22	16	15	15	14	10	8
Cumulative Trace	22	38	53	68	82	92	100

The data in Table 3 reports job satisfaction by staff location. The larger the mean difference score the more staff rated those items as being important but not well demonstrated in the College. Factor 3 was named informed of decisions which indicate that staff perceived this factor as being important as a measure of job satisfaction but was not well demonstrated in the College work environment. This factor had the highest average difference scores for all four groups studied. This factor included items such as, “being informed of decisions made in my unit that impacts my position and responsibilities,” having a clear understanding of my job responsibilities between my supervisor and me,” and “being kept informed of College policies and decisions that impact my job.” For main campus and experiment station staff factor 2, open communication, was a close second. This factor contained items such as, “clear communication of departmental decisions to all faculty and staff”, and “fair implementation of policies at the college and departmental level.”

Table 4 reports job satisfaction by area of appointment again using average difference scores. Once again, the larger the average difference score the less that factor is contributing to job satisfaction as measured by staff. Factor 3 which was named informed of decisions had the highest average difference scores except for the Technical Institute where that factor was the second highest. In the overall ranking, factor 3 had the highest average difference score which indicates that being informed of decisions is not contributing to staff job satisfaction. For Extension and experiment station staff factor 4, meaningful evaluation was a close second. This factor included such items as, “annual reviews that provide a clear understanding of expectations for future performance,” and “performance evaluations that provide a clear assessment of my past year’s performance.” For staff in academic units or departments and the technical institute factor 2, open communications, was a close second and included items such as, “clear communication of departmental decisions to all faculty and staff” and “fair implementation of policies at the college and departmental levels.”

Table 3. Job Satisfaction by Location using Average Difference Scores

Location:	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
<b>Main Campus</b>							
Mean	.69	.81	.84	.70	.62	.44	.57
Standard Deviation	.64	.67	.64	.84	.73	.71	.76
N	192	191	207	194	201	208	205
<b>Experiment Station</b>							
Mean	.55	.89	.92	.82	.74	.45	.49
Standard Deviation	.61	.69	.66	.99	.83	.77	.70
N	117	115	122	121	121	125	122
<b>Extension</b>							
Mean	.47	.69	.83	.81	.74	.40	.45
Standard Deviation	.64	.66	.61	.94	.76	.64	.74
N	435	425	467	451	459	471	471
<b>Experimental Branches</b>							
Mean	.48	.73	.90	.83	.70	.12	.23
Standard Deviation	.51	.36	.53	.93	.71	.60	.68
N	25	24	27	27	27	25	25
<b>Overall</b>							
Mean	.54	.75	.85	.77	.71	.41	.48
Standard Deviation	.64	.66	.62	.92	.76	.68	.74
N	769	755	823	793	808	829	823

Table 4. Job Satisfaction by Area of Appointment using Average Difference Scores

Appointment Area:	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
<b>Extension</b>							
Mean	.53	.73	.83	.77	.71	.41	.47
Standard Deviation	.66	.67	.63	.93	.76	.64	.74
N	515	508	557	536	552	559	562
<b>Experiment Station</b>							
Mean	.52	.83	.89	.84	.71	.37	.43
Standard Deviation	.61	.68	.70	1.0	.83	.78	.67
N	117	115	122	119	120	126	120
<b>Academic Unit/Dept.</b>							
Mean	.54	.72	.86	.69	.62	.45	.63
Standard Deviation	.51	.56	.55	.75	.65	.73	.80
N	106	102	114	107	106	111	109
<b>Technical Institute</b>							
Mean	.68	.99	.93	.81	.70	.42	.47
Standard Deviation	.49	.58	.48	.90	.80	.64	.61
N	30	29	31	32	31	32	31
<b>Overall</b>							
Mean	.54	.75	.84	.77	.70	.41	.48
Standard Deviation	.63	.66	.62	.92	.76	.68	.74
N	768	754	824	794	809	828	822

Table 5 reports job satisfaction by type of appointment using average difference scores. Factor 3, informed of decisions, had the highest average difference score for both civil service and administrative and professional staff. For civil service factor 2, open communications, was the next highest followed closely by factor 4, meaningful evaluations. For administrative and professional staff factor 4, meaningful evaluations, was the next highest followed by factor 2, open communications. Those three factors were the most important in determining job satisfaction for staff by appointment.

Table 5

Job Satisfaction by Type of Appointment using Average Difference Scores

Appointment Type:	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
<b>Civil Service</b>							
Mean	.59	.86	.89	.85	.78	.51	.47
Standard Deviation	.64	.67	.67	.96	.75	.72	.68
N	326	322	363	343	357	361	361
<b>Admin. &amp; Professional</b>							
Mean	.49	.67	.79	.72	.62	.32	.48
Standard Deviation	.62	.62	.56	.88	.75	.62	.78
N	435	428	454	443	445	459	453
<b>Overall</b>							
Mean	.54	.75	.84	.78	.69	.40	.48
Standard Deviation	.63	.65	.61	.92	.75	.67	.73
N	761	750	817	786	802	820	814

The data in Table 6 reports job satisfaction by full-time or part-time status. For both groups factor 3, informed of decisions, had the highest average difference scores. For full-time staff factor 4, meaningful evaluation, was rated second followed closely by factor 2, open communications. For part-time staff there was a tie between factor 2, open communications and factor 4, meaningful evaluation; the next highest was factor 5, feeling appreciated which include items such as, “appreciation of my work by the co-workers in my department” and “knowing my input is appreciated by my department.”

Table 7 reports the relationship between years of service in the College and job satisfaction. For factors 1 (opportunity for networking), 3 (informed of decisions), 6 (job flexibility and variety), and 7 (need for training) the analysis revealed a negative correlation which means that the longer a staff person has worked in the College the more dissatisfied they were in relation to what those factors identified. For factors 2 (open communication), 4 (meaningful evaluation), and factor 5 (feeling appreciated) the correlation was positive which indicates that the longer the years of service a staff member had, the more satisfied they were in

relation to what the factors identified. Out of seven possible factors, four of the factors had a negative relationship. However, the reader is cautioned that all correlation coefficients were very low.

Table 6

Job Satisfaction by FTE using Average Difference Scores

FTE:	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
Full-time							
Mean	.55	.78	.86	.80	.71	.41	.50
Standard Deviation	.64	.67	.64	.93	.77	.67	.75
N	626	613	670	640	653	670	667
Part-time							
Mean	.50	.64	.76	.64	.61	.34	.45
Standard Deviation	.62	.61	.51	.88	.71	.65	.66
N	119	121	132	133	134	135	133
Overall							
Mean	.54	.76	.84	.77	.69	.40	.49
Standard Deviation	.64	.66	.62	.93	.76	.67	.74
N	745	734	802	773	787	805	800

Table 7

Relationship between Years of Service in the College and Job Satisfaction Average Difference Score by Factor

Factor:	Correlation (r)
Factor 1	-.09
Factor 2	.04
Factor 3	-.03
Factor 4	.02
Factor 5	.02
Factor 6	-.05
Factor 7	-.06

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The demographic data for the staff in this study revealed that a typical staff member in the College was a full-time, had an administrative and professional appointment, was employed in an Extension county or district office, and had an average of 8.6 years of employment in the College. The following seven factors were identified and named by the researchers: factor 1, opportunity for networking; factor 2, open communications; factor 3, informed of decisions; factor 4, meaningful evaluation; factor 5, feeling appreciated; factor 6, job flexibility and variety; factor 7, need for training.

Interestingly, factor 3, informed of decisions, emerged as the major factor which was a barrier to job satisfaction. In other words staff rated that factor as being important to them but they did not perceive the College as providing adequate communications regarding decisions that may affect their jobs, having a clear understanding of what their job responsibilities are, being informed of College policies and decisions that may affect their jobs, and having adequate equipment needed to do their job. This factor was rated the highest by all four groups when the groups were selected based upon location, type of appointment, and FTE status. It also came in second to factor 2 in one table which looked at area of appointment. This finding seems to support the studies of Sauter, Hurrell, and Cooper (1989) and Locke and Schweiger (1979) both of which stated that increased job satisfaction and commitment were achieved when employees perceived themselves as involved in decision-making. In order for employees to be involved in decision-making, they first have to be informed as to what the College has decided and be in the “loop” before they can be involved in the decision-making process. For staff in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences they value being informed but they do not perceive the College is informing them of decisions that may influence their job responsibilities. This finding also supports Laabs (1998) study which found that job satisfaction is affected by how managers show employees are needed, valued, and appreciated. It is difficult to feel needed, valued, and appreciated when you are not a part of the decision-making process – even when it affects your job responsibilities.

While the job satisfaction literature is mixed on what constitutes job satisfaction, the intrinsic and extrinsic factors outlined did not play a major role in this study. Part of this may be explained by the type of questions asked but in general the communications area (factors 2 and 3) were the biggest barriers to job satisfaction. The other factor which played a part in job satisfaction according to this study was factor 4, meaningful evaluation. Once again, the literature did not reveal much about an employees’ evaluation as a measure of job satisfaction, but in this study evaluation was an important factor in job satisfaction. Generally, the staff in the College did not perceive that their yearly evaluations were providing them with clear direction of future expectations as well as not doing a very good job of evaluating the past year’s performance. This area needs to be looked at by the College office since a staff member’s evaluation should be meaningful to the staff person and the College. If there is a misunderstanding of what the evaluation is showing between the staff member and the College, how is a staff member supposed to improve?

This study did not support the findings of Howard and Frink (1996) which indicated that if staff perceive growth opportunities, they are usually more satisfied. Factor 7 was named need for training and the average difference did not indicate that staff felt this was a barrier to job

satisfaction. This finding is confusing in that academic and continuing education are offered but maybe staff are not encouraged or in some cases allowed to attend. This finding is worth future research to determine if staff are encouraged to attend classes and if not, what are the barriers that are preventing staff from pursuing these growth opportunities? It may be that some staff are not interested in attending classes, but some Colleges have access to video conferencing where classes are taught in the same building where staff are employed.

Generally, job satisfaction increases with age (Lee & Wilbur, 1985). For staff in the College age was not asked in the demographic section but the number of years worked in the College was asked. It could be assumed for this study that the longer a staff member was employed in the College the more satisfied that person was. This study found that in some instances the longer a staff member was employed in the College the less satisfied that person was. This was true for factors 1 (networking), 3 (informed of decisions), 6 (job flexibility and variety), and 7 (need for training). So, the longer a staff member works in the College the less satisfied they are with the opportunity to network, being informed of decisions, job flexibility and variety, and the need for training. As a recommendation, the College should investigate these areas since the employees who have the higher number of years are not satisfied with these areas. Especially important are job flexibility and variety and the need for training. If staff are not satisfied in these areas, they could find employment elsewhere and the College would lose some of its employees who have the most experience. These employees are difficult to replace. Also, some of these staff members are on the frontlines and if they are bored with their jobs and do not perceive any growth opportunities (Howard and Frick, 1996), they may not be contributing to that all important first impression which serves the College well – especially with prospective students, parents, and legislators.

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