

# How Do Female and Male Faculty Members Construct Job Satisfaction?

Diana Bilimoria, Susan R. Perry, Xiangfen Liang,  
Patricia Higgins, Eleanor P. Stoller, Cyrus C. Taylor

ACES and Resource Equity Committee, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, 44106

## ABSTRACT

In this study we examine how a sample of 248 male and female professors at a Midwestern private research university construct their academic job satisfaction. Our findings indicate that both women and men perceive that their job satisfaction is influenced by the institutional leadership and mentoring they receive, but only as mediated by the two key academic processes of access to internal academic resources (including research-supportive workloads) and internal relational supports from a collegial and inclusive immediate work environment.

Gender differences emerged in the strengths of the perceived paths leading to satisfaction: women's job satisfaction derived more from their perceptions of the internal relational supports than the academic resources they received whereas men's job satisfaction resulted equally from their perceptions of internal academic resources and internal relational supports received. Implications for leadership and institutional practices are drawn from the findings.

## INTRODUCTION

What contributes to the job satisfaction of male and female faculty in a research university? What are the effects of perceptions of institutional leadership (i.e., departmental chairs, deans) and mentoring (within and outside the university) on job satisfaction? Through what academic processes do these experiences of institutional characteristics influence job satisfaction, and does the perception of these processes vary by faculty gender?

**Objective:** To expose the pathways leading from perceived institutional characteristics (the experience of leadership and mentoring) to the job satisfaction of faculty members; and to investigate likely differences in the strengths of these paths for women and men in academic career tracks;

## METHODS

An online survey invitation was emailed to all full- and part-time faculty, for a total of 3,699. This total was made up of 2,233 full-time faculty and 1,466 part time faculty.

The results reported in the current investigation pertain only to the university's full-time, non-medical school faculty, for an overall response rate of 39%. The final sample size was 248.

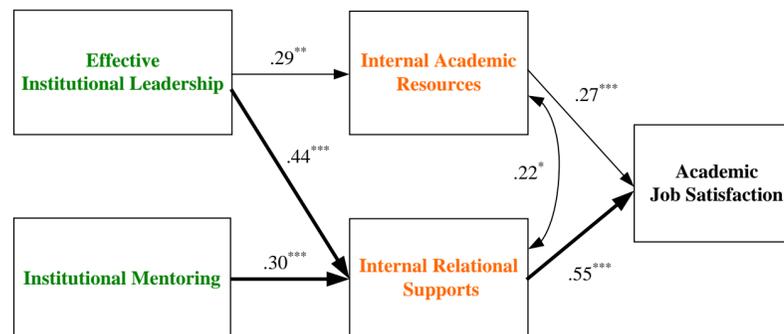
The female faculty sub-sample consisted of 100 respondents (17 professors, 31 associate professors, 30 assistant professors, 18 instructors and 4 lecturers); the male faculty sub-sample consisted of 148 respondents (79 professors, 33 associate professors, 28 assistant professors, 5 instructors, and 3 lecturers).

The questionnaire was modeled after several existing public-domain faculty climate surveys from Purdue University, University of Kansas, The Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey, and the University of Michigan. Questionnaire items were also based in part on the results of an earlier focus-group investigation of faculty members conducted at the university.

The proposed model was evaluated with Amos, a structural equation modeling package (Arbuckle, 1997, Version 4.0).

## RESULTS

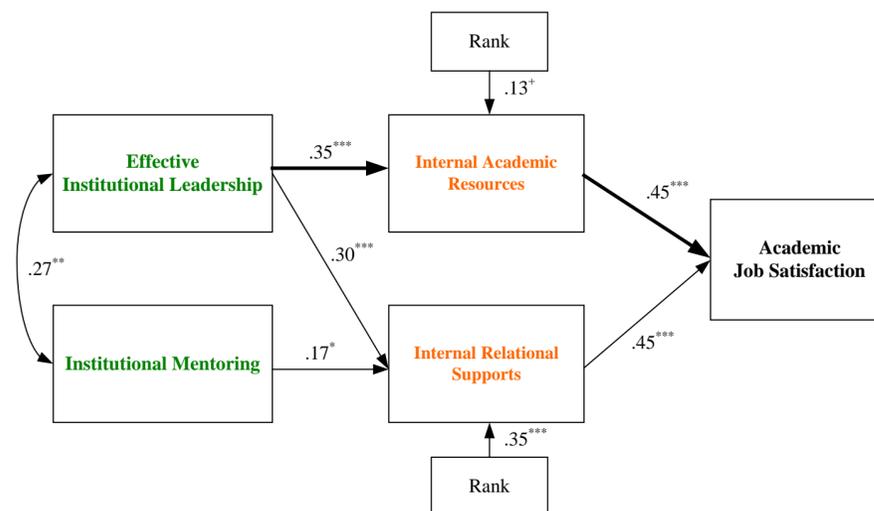
### Significant Path Coefficients for Female Faculty



The path coefficients through internal relational supports were consistently larger for female than male faculty members, suggesting that women appear to derive greater career supports and satisfaction than men from an inclusive and respectful internal work environment consisting of colleagues who value their contributions.

The path from institutional mentoring to relational supports was significant for both men and women in our sample, but the strength of the relationship was almost double for women ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) than for men ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ).  $\chi^2 = 7.662, df = 4, \chi^2 / df = 1.915, RMR = .027, GFI = .971, IFI = .968, NFI = .936, CFI = .967, RMSEA = .096$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$ ;

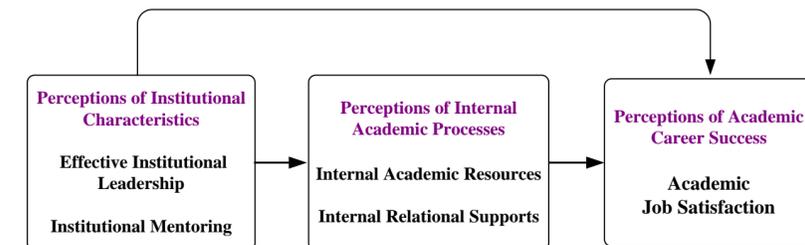
### Significant Path Coefficients for Male Faculty



The path coefficients through internal academic resources were larger for male faculty members than for female faculty members, suggesting that men derive greater academic job satisfaction from the receipt of internal academic resources (including research-supportive workloads) than do women.

Interestingly, while job satisfaction for male faculty arises equally from internal academic resources and relational supports, job satisfaction for female faculty derives twice as much from internal relational supports ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ) as it does from internal academic resources ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ).  $\chi^2 = 9.965, df = 6, \chi^2 / df = 1.661, RMR = .028, GFI = .978, IFI = .978, NFI = .946, CFI = .977, RMSEA = .067$ .

### A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF JOB SATISFACTION



## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS

**Conclusions:** We provide empirical evidence to support the notion that both male and female faculty members believe that leadership and mentoring influence their job satisfaction but only through the mediating processes of internal academic resources and internal relational supports. However, women and men appear to weight the paths to their job satisfaction differently.

**Implications:** Department chairs and senior faculty members should pay particular attention to the importance of establishing strong mentoring relationships as well as collegial and respectful interactions with women faculty. Likewise, women faculty members should recognize the importance of internal relational supports for their own job satisfaction, and should proactively initiate and maintain positive relations with departmental chairs and senior faculty mentors within and outside their departments.

Contrary to previous research findings, we did not find significant direct influences of the perceptions of effective leadership and institutional mentoring on ratings of academic job satisfaction. This indicates the existence of a fully-mediated model, and showcases the importance of key academic processes as influences on faculty members' perceptions of job satisfaction.

University leadership that is interested in fostering the enhanced job satisfaction of professors would do well to focus on the perceptions they hold about their access to academic resources and research-supportive workload responsibilities, as well as the quality of the relational supports they experience in their immediate workplace environments.

**Limitations:** First, the data were collected from one private research university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. A second limitation refers to the small sample size employed in the study, and the large (although representative) differences observed in the rank distributions of male and female respondents. Future research should examine these relationships in other higher education settings, using larger sample sizes, and more equally distributed ranks of female and male faculty respondents.