

University of Wisconsin, Stout Campus Climate: University Staff Job Satisfaction

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A mixed-methodology research approach was taken to understand what job aspects impact university staff job satisfaction at the University of Wisconsin, Stout (UW-Stout). First, thematic analysis of a small number of qualitative interviews produced five themes that impacted university staff job satisfaction: (1) collaboration, (2) job variability, (3) supervision, (4) compensation, and (5) daily tasks. Researchers constructed a survey to measure implicit and explicit job satisfaction of university staff based on the themes generated by the interviews. For the purpose of this study, implicit job satisfaction is the combination of factors that affect job satisfaction, such as workload, supervision quality, communication, compensation, and benefits. A job satisfaction survey was administered to measure implicit job satisfaction in this study. Explicit job satisfaction is the staff members' direct perception of their job satisfaction. A single item on the survey asked participants directly about their level of job satisfaction to measure explicit job satisfaction. A measure based on three of the five themes was also administered to examine the predictor variables for job satisfaction. This aforementioned survey was sent to all the university staff at the UW-Stout. Statistical analysis revealed a positive correlation between implicit and explicit job satisfaction of university staff. Regression models found that collaboration, supervision, and compensation predicted implicit job satisfaction, whereas supervision and compensation predicted explicit job satisfaction of university staff.

Literature Review

Employee satisfaction is a vital component in any professional organization. University staff job satisfaction is important for a university climate because university staff work in conjunction with students and faculty members. Areas in which university staff work include, but are not limited to, university dining services, institutional research, housing, recreation, and admissions. Due to the multitude of different jobs of university staff, job satisfaction can have a significant impact on the student experience at institutions of higher education (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Byrne, Chughtai, Flood, & Willis 2012). There can be a variety of factors that influence university staff job satisfaction, such as collaboration, job variability, supervision, compensation, and daily tasks (Spector, 1985). Due to the importance of job satisfaction for institutional performance, a study was conducted to explore various facets that can influence explicit and implicit job satisfaction for university staff at the UW-Stout.

Prior research has examined university staff with regard to factors that contribute to job satisfaction and commitment to the university. Specific job characteristics that have been examined include job security, isolation, and lack of support from the employer and peers. These characteristics contribute to low job satisfaction and low affective organizational commitment for university staff (Papinczak, 2012). Prior research has also found that departmental leadership, autonomy, expectations, work-life balance, support, and compensation predicted job satisfaction (Chung et al., 2010). More specifically, the relationships that exist between supervisors and their subordinates have been found to be an important factor in university staff satisfaction (Ambrose et al., 2005; Chung et al., 2010; Byrne et al., 2012; Filiz, 2013).

Purpose of Current Study

The current study was designed by the researchers to investigate job aspects that impact university staff job satisfaction at UW-Stout using a mixed methods approach. This research incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the working environment for university staff members. More specifically, qualitative interviews with university staff members informed the development of a quantitative survey. The following research question was constructed and addressed through the qualitative portion of this investigation to guide the study:

RQ1: What job aspects impact university staff job satisfaction?

Based on conclusions from the qualitative research

(Study 1), the following hypotheses were created for the quantitative portion of the research (Study 2):

H1: Explicit and implicit university staff job satisfaction will be positively related.

H2: Collaboration, supervision, and compensation will predict implicit university staff job satisfaction.

H3: Collaboration, supervision, and compensation will predict explicit university staff job satisfaction.

Study 1 Method

Participants

Four staff members, each from a different department at the UW-Stout, were contacted via email to participate in a qualitative interview regarding job satisfaction. Four staff members participated in the qualitative interviews. The staff members varied in age. Three of the four staff members identified as being male.

Measures

Qualitative Interview Protocol. The qualitative interview protocol was developed by the researchers using the steps outlined by Creswell (2009). The interview protocol was designed after reviewing and examining job satisfaction literature and previous campus climate surveys. This literature led to the development of the following protocol sections: (1) demographic information, (2) interpersonal interaction in the workplace, (3) workload, (4) compensation, (5) job security, and (6) resources. Including demographic items, a total of 17 questions were asked during each interview. An example item from the interview protocol was "Describe how your interactions with your supervisor affects your job satisfaction." Another example item was "Do you feel like you have the resources required to do your job?"

Procedure

The interviews took place from February 8, 2016 to February 16, 2016. Upon agreeing to participate in the interview, the researchers requested that their interviewees choose the meeting location. This request was made to ensure participants felt as comfortable as possible during the interview process. During each interview, the researcher introduced themselves and the purpose of the project. Next, each participant was provided with a consent form. After consenting to the interview, the

researchers proceeded with the structured interview questions. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. If the participants' answers were not typed during the interview, answers were later transcribed into a digital document with permission of participants to use audio files for such purposes.

After the interviews were completed, thematic analysis took place to analyze the responses from the interviews. The thematic analysis was based on the protocol laid out by Creswell (2009). This thematic analysis was a group process undertaken by the four researchers. In the first step of the thematic analysis, responses were themed individually from the interview with the participant, as well as interview responses from other university staff members collected by the other researchers. Thus, all four interviews were thematically analyzed by each researcher. Due to the small sample size, the researchers decided if at least two interview participants responded with a similar answer, then these responses represented a theme. For instance, if two participants responded to an item about satisfaction with professional development opportunities by mentioning that their supervisor encouraged professional development, then "supervisor encouragement of professional development" was considered a theme.

In the second step, after the individual thematic analysis, the researchers came together to compare themes. Again, due to the small sample size, if two or more researchers had similar themes, this was considered a theme for university staff job satisfaction at the UW-Stout. Thus, disagreement was avoided by taking a majority rule approach. If researchers had similar themes named differently, the other researchers were asked for their preference of theme name.

In the third step, the researchers analyzed the themes that had been agreed upon to see if these themes clustered into overarching themes. These overarching themes were considered to be the main themes for job satisfaction of staff members at the UW-Stout. There were five main themes that emerged from the group analysis. These themes were collaboration, job variability, supervision, compensation, and daily tasks. University police and open departmental access are examples of themes that fit in the collaboration main theme. Role variability and task variability are examples of themes that fit in the job variability main theme. Supervisor encouragement of professional development opportunities and receptive to employee feedback are examples of themes that fit in the supervision main theme. Insurance in benefit package and benefit package has not changed are examples of themes that fit in the compensation main theme. Finally, emailing and meetings are examples of themes that fit in the daily tasks main theme.

Results

The thematic analysis conducted by the researchers revealed five overarching themes: collaboration, job variability, supervision, compensation, and daily tasks. Each staff member reported overall satisfaction with their position at the UW-Stout. More specifically, they expressed satisfaction with the level of collaboration within and between departments. The supervision theme also revealed that participants were mostly satisfied with supervisor. In addition, there was agreement that a positive relationship with supervision is important. Each participant also suggested that their job varied. This variation could be positive or negative depending on the participants' knowledge of their role and job tasks, as well as their level of adaptability to change. As mentioned, another theme that emerged during the qualitative interview was compensation. In general, the participants were satisfied with their compensation. However, it was clear that any sort of decrease in benefits was viewed unfavorably by the participants. The final aforementioned theme was daily tasks. For the most part, participants reported having consistent daily tasks (e.g., e-mails and meetings), as well as variability throughout their days. Specific examples of each theme are included in the following tables in the form of direct quotes.

Interview Theme 1	Collaboration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unique office. Independent work. No overlap, but we help each other. Not a lot of interaction aside from meetings. Tone of meetings can be influenced by people's mood in the office.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We always look out for one another. People help with picking up the slack.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In my job, I work with all departments.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think I've gotten a lot of experiences being on campus-wide committees...</i>

Table 1 Collaboration examples

Interview Theme 2	Job Variability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The work here changes a lot. Commonly working on performance indicators, moving from pdf format to tableau. Understanding the programs. Getting information on to the website. Beginning of semester, most time is taken up by engagement session planning followed by debriefings after the sessions. Very project specific. 30% of time spent responding to emails, 30% attending meetings, and 60% working on projects.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every day is a little different depending on what projects we are working on – and what additional evaluations we are working on. Some days I start with emailing colleges, phone calls, etc.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A lot of times when things happen it has to happen really fast.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But I think the way in which a supervisor communicates with me either helps me be more successful or hinders my abilities to be as successful.</i>

Table 2 Job variability examples.

Interview Theme 3	Positive Supervisor Experience
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The director really encourages professional development.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My supervisor wants to know us on a personal and professional level. One-on-ones to talk about work and life.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think that my supervisor has a really good method of leading our team.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Even if you're good at it, things pop up unexpectedly that can't be planned for.</i>

Table 3 Positive supervisor experience examples.

Interview Theme 4	Compensation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If any one piece decreased it would not be good. Enjoys the retirement match, good healthcare pay, would choose this one over others.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Would add something related to tuition reimbursement to either push for more education or pay off some loans. Being able to work from home would increase satisfaction.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I would make it more competitive with other universities.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Compensated for not taking the benefits package.</i>

Table 4 Compensation examples.

Interview Theme 5	Daily Tasks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very project specific. 30% of time spent responding to emails, 30% attending meetings, and 60% working on projects.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every morning I go through my to-do list checking email inbox to determine what tasks are still ending to be completed.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Well everyday there is a lot of emailing involved, usually that is how I start the day. There is usually meeting in there that I have to attend...</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every day is a little different depending on what projects we are working on...</i>

Table 5 Daily tasks examples.

Study 2 Method

Participants

The participants for this study were obtained through an electronic survey that was emailed to all 530 UW-Stout staff members that the Senate of Academic Staff had email addresses for. The final sample was comprised of 133 participants, 73 females and 36 males. Approximately half of the participants had been employed at the UW-Stout for 10 years or less (50.34%). The following percentages represent the amount of participants born in each decade from the 1940s to 1990s: 1940s (0.75%), 1950s (13.53%), 1960s (20.30%), 1970s (16.54%), 1980s (13.53%), and 1990s (2.26%). Participants were from the following divisions: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (5.26%), College of Education, Health,

and Human Sciences (9.02%), College of Management (0.75%), College of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics (4.51%), Administrative and Student Life Services (21.81%), Academic and Student Affairs (16.54%), and Chancellor's Division (14.29%). Participants were from over 25 departments. The top three departments in terms of participation in the survey were the Physical Plant (10.53%), Student Life Services (7.52%), and Learning Information and Technology (6.77%).

Measures

The campus climate survey that was administered to the university staff at the UW-Stout was developed, in part, by the researchers. There were three components to this survey: implicit job satisfaction, explicit job satisfaction, and predictors of job satisfaction. The job satisfaction survey developed by Spector (1985) was utilized to measure implicit job satisfaction because items in the job satisfaction survey assess specific dimensions of job satisfaction, which is opposed to directly asking the participants about their job satisfaction. More specifically, the job satisfaction survey is a 36-item measure that assesses employee perceptions of attitudes toward nine dimensions of their job. These nine dimensions are pay ($\alpha = .86$), promotion ($\alpha = .86$), supervision ($\alpha = .90$), fringe benefits ($\alpha = .79$), contingent rewards ($\alpha = .80$), operating procedures ($\alpha = .64$), coworkers ($\alpha = .72$), nature of work ($\alpha = .74$), and communication ($\alpha = .81$). Subscales were comprised of four items each. Each item in the job satisfaction survey was measured on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*).

Since the job satisfaction survey is intended to obtain perceptions about implicit factors that influence job satisfaction, one item was developed by the researchers to examine explicit job satisfaction. This item measured explicit job satisfaction by directly inquiring about participants' job satisfaction. This item was, "Overall, I am satisfied with my experience as an employee here thus far." This item was measured on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*).

The measure for the predictors was also developed by the researchers. To develop this measure, items were constructed based on the five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with the UW-Stout staff, which were collaboration, job variability, supervision, compensation, and daily tasks. These five themes were represented by the five subscales in the predictor measure. The measure consisted of 36 items. Responses to each item were made on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). There were 11 items for collaboration ($\alpha = .83$), six for job variability ($\alpha = .07$), nine for supervision

($\alpha = .89$), four for compensation ($\alpha = .73$), and six for daily tasks ($\alpha = .31$). Due to the low internal consistency scores, data obtained with the job variability and daily tasks subscales were not utilized for the quantitative analyses. Composite scores were created for the remaining three subscales by summing scores from each item in the subscales.

Procedure

The Senate of Academic Staff at the UW-Stout distributed the survey via e-mail to the 530 UW-Stout employees. The survey was hosted on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The data collection period took place from April 1, 2016 to April 10, 2016. First, the participants were provided with an informed consent page, which reminded them that they could exit the survey at any time without repercussion and let the participants know about the benefits and costs of participating in the research. If the individual elected to not participate in the study, then they were taken to a screen that thanked them for their time. If the individual did elect to participate in the study, then that participant was taken to the survey. The survey began with the job satisfaction survey measure and the item developed to measure explicit job satisfaction. Next, the participants were presented with the measure that the researchers developed based on thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with the UW-Stout staff. The last part of the survey consisted of demographic items. After participants completed the survey, they were taken to a screen that thanked them for their time.

Results

Prior to testing the hypotheses, mean scores were obtained for both explicit and implicit job satisfaction of university staff. The average score for explicit job satisfaction was 4.31 ($SD = 1.23$). The average score for implicit job satisfaction was 3.79 ($SD = 0.73$). These means and the standard error of the means for implicit and explicit job satisfaction are presented in Figure 1.

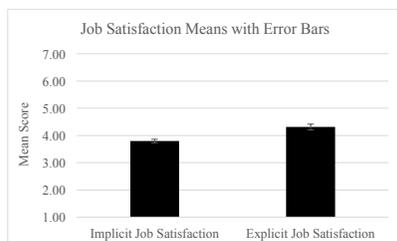


Figure 1. Job satisfaction averages with error bars.

Regression models were utilized to test the hypotheses. However, before testing the hypotheses, the statistical assumptions of regression

models were tested to ensure that regression analyses were appropriate for analyzing the data. More specifically, the assumptions of homoscedasticity and normality of residuals were tested for each of the regression models. Homoscedasticity is the assumption that values around the regression line are approximately equal in variance. Normality of residuals is the assumption that errors are normally distributed in a regression line. P-P Plots, which display the values around the regression line, utilized z-scores for residuals and predictors for two regression models to test these assumptions. Both assumptions were met. Thus, there was no tendency for error in either regression model. For both regression models, collaboration, supervision, and compensation were set as predictors. The first regression model was created to predict implicit job satisfaction. The second regression model was created to predict explicit job satisfaction.

Before the regression models were run, a bivariate correlation was conducted to see if implicit and explicit job satisfaction were related. Based on this analysis, implicit job satisfaction was positively associated with explicit job satisfaction, $r = .74, p < .001$. Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed.

To test the second and third hypotheses, composites for collaboration, supervision, and compensation were utilized to predict implicit job satisfaction and explicit job satisfaction. These composites were created by summing items in each subscale. The first regression model explained 79% of variance for implicit job satisfaction ($R = .89, F(3, 124) = 159.45, p < .001$). Collaboration significantly predicted implicit job satisfaction ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). Supervision also significantly predicted implicit job satisfaction ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). Compensation was another significant predictor of implicit job satisfaction ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). Thus, the second hypothesis was also confirmed.

The second regression model explained 57% of variance for explicit job satisfaction ($R = .75, F(3, 124) = 53.66, p < .001$). Supervision significantly predicted explicit job satisfaction ($\beta = .51, p < .001$). Compensation also significantly predicted explicit job satisfaction ($\beta = .55, p < .001$). However, collaboration ($\beta = .22, p = .076$) did not predict explicit job satisfaction. Thus, the third hypothesis was partially supported.

As part of an exploratory analysis, means of sums for subscales in the job satisfaction survey were obtained for the UW-Stout and general United States (U.S.) higher education norms, which were obtained from Spector (2011). Figure 2 presents means of sums for subscales in the job satisfaction survey. In general, these scores were similar for the UW-Stout and U.S. higher education norms. Figure 3 presents means of sums for overall scores

from the job satisfaction survey. The University of Wisconsin, Stout was similar to the U.S. higher education norms in overall job satisfaction.

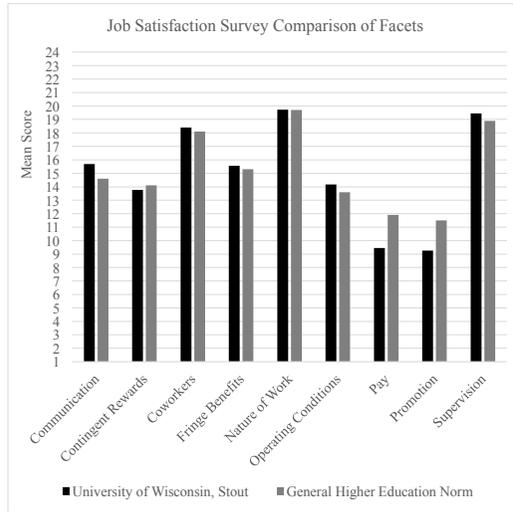


Figure 2. Job satisfaction survey comparison of facets.

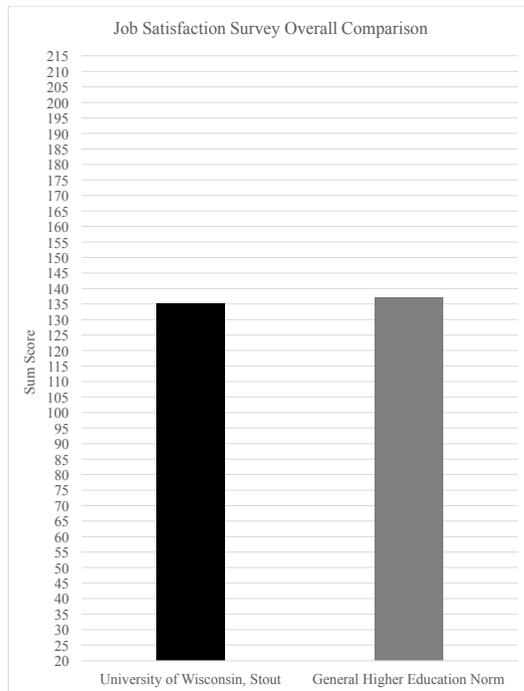


Figure 3. Job satisfaction survey overall comparison.

Discussion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that university staff at the UW-Stout feel generally satisfied with their jobs. Employees feel that the university treats them well and supports their positions. The University of Wisconsin, Stout is also seen by university staff as having an effective and positive work environment, which may contribute to the university's success and productivity. Of the five themes identified from the staff interviews, supervision and compensation emerged as the most impactful characteristics of university staff job satisfaction due to being predictors of both implicit and explicit job satisfaction.

Supervision was viewed by university staff as one area that greatly affected their job satisfaction. Employees noted that they typically had a positive working experience with their supervisors and that administration is receptive to feedback. This positive experience for university staff led to higher job satisfaction levels. However, a standardized way for university employees to offer feedback to their supervisors does not currently exist at the UW-Stout. In general, administering employee feedback has been at the discretion of each department. A campus-wide system can ensure that each employee has an opportunity to offer feedback to their supervisors, which may lead to a better working relationship between supervision and employees. In turn, this feedback system can foster better job satisfaction for academic staff employees.

Compensation also had a significant impact on university staff job satisfaction. If university staff feel adequately compensated they may be satisfied with their jobs. At this time, an increase in salaries is unlikely at the UW-Stout, and within the UW-System, due to the budgetary restrictions imposed across the State of Wisconsin education system. However, the majority of those surveyed indicated that they recognized that a monetary increase is not feasible. Therefore, in place of monetary increases, university administration should explore possible fringe and non-monetary benefits to increase university staff job satisfaction.

Daily tasks, job variability, and collaboration were other components of job satisfaction identified in this research, so the UW-Stout administration may want to investigate new ways to improve satisfaction in these areas across the campus. Supervision and compensation were however the most prominent of the findings in this research, and this indicates that the UW-Stout should ensure supervisors across the campus have the tools and training necessary to provide quality leadership in their respective offices and departments. In addition, the university should make attempts to provide compensation adjustments when possible. It is expected that efforts aimed

at both supervision and compensation will be the most direct method for addressing and increasing university staff morale.

Limitations

A few limitations from the study should be noted. First, only four university staff interviews were performed during the qualitative research component of the study. Therefore, not all divisions and departments were represented in these interviews, nor did the interviewees represent a large proportion of the UW-Stout university staff population. Second, not all of the departments were represented in the survey data. In addition, some divisions and departments were overrepresented or underrepresented by the data. This sample representativeness limitation may have been due to a lack of campus awareness regarding the current study. Finally, self-reported data was collected for the survey. Therefore, it is possible that there are inaccuracies in the data due to self-serving biases.

Future Directions

Future investigations into the satisfaction of university staff should be designed to include more departments in the qualitative interviews. This will aid in capturing diverse satisfaction perspectives from across the campus and will better inform quantitative measure development. In addition to taking steps to increase inclusion in the interview process, future investigations should attempt to reach university departments and divisions that were underrepresented in this research. In taking these steps, a future study of university staff satisfaction will more clearly capture campus climate experiences and better aid in developing effective and meaningful campus interventions for improving satisfaction.

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