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THE LIFE OF A PROFESSOR: STRESS AND COPING

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Abstract

The life of a professor is a balancing act, both professionally and personally. Professors must weigh the demands of research, publishing, teaching, and service with the requirements of their personal responsibilities. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the role of stress on the work-life balance of a professor. This study was conducted by an interdisciplinary research team and included participants from a wide-range of academic fields. A mixed-methods approach, utilizing an electronic survey composed of demographic questions, Likert-scale responses, and open-ended questions, yielded data related to the benefits and challenges of being a professor from 31 states in the United States as well as from other countries. Structured interviews were then conducted to reveal the coping strategies of the participants. In addition, this article incorporated embedded media in the form of audio sound bites and animated video, which provided the 'voice' of the faculty. The triangulated data revealed that lack of supports, both social and institutional, significantly increased the stress experienced by professors. Mechanisms for coping with stress that could be utilized by individual professors as well as institutional stress management strategies were discussed.

Introduction

According to a recent survey by CareerCast, the role of a university professor is reported to be one of the least stressful jobs and an envy of many career professionals (Kensing, 2013). However, as reported by The Chronicle of Higher Education (Berrett, 2012), almost half of all professors considered leaving higher education due to stress, lack of promotion, and dislike for their current working conditions. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) found that more than half (50.8%) of associate professors, 45.0% of full professors, and 48.6% of assistant professors considered leaving their institution in the past two years (Hurtado, Eagan, Pryor, Whang, & Tran, 2012).

A growing number of studies suggest that faculty members are vacating their current positions for stress-related reasons (AFT, 2009; Carey, 2012; Guttenplan, 2012; Mason, 2009). Kyriacou (1987) defined *faculty stress* as "the experience by a faculty of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a faculty" (p. 146). The circumstances leading to faculty stressors such as low pay, tenure, long-working hours, and overall organizational demands may also create an imbalance between work and personal responsibilities.

This study seeks to examine the specific stressors on higher education faculty. Although previous research has examined variables related to stress, little research has explored effective coping strategies for improving the work-life balance in higher education.

Through examination of these issues, we hope to contribute to the body of knowledge around faculty stress to enable institutions to establish needed programs and services to address the current challenges of faculty members. In addition, individual strategies to better achieve work-life balance will be explored.

In the following sections, we provide a review of the relevant literature focused on stress and the work-life balance of higher education faculty. We then present the methodology of the study, findings, discussion, implications, and future recommendations.

Review of Relevant Literature

Today's degree-granting institutions consist of 1.4 million faculty members who teach, research, and perform public service (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). Included in these numbers are .7 million full-time faculty, .7 million part-time faculty, and .3 million graduate assistants where almost half (47.1%) of the total faculty are made up of women. Besides classroom instruction, faculty members are typically responsible for teaching preparation, grading, office hours, department and committee meetings, grant-writing, research, and publishing, all of which can place considerable strains on the balance of work to life (see http://youtu.be/7EJ6ZwYlqT0).

Initially, many faculty members secured positions in institutions of higher education because they believed they could make a difference to students. However, Carey (2012) described teaching as "a cheap commodity" (para. 4) whereby the academic institution is designed to reward those who research rather than instruct. Hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions are increasingly based on grants and publications (van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). The pressure to research and publish has manifested itself in higher education leaving many faculty overwhelmed and disillusioned about their primary goal of educating students. It does not stop once a faculty member has reached tenure. According to Wilson (2012), recent data revealed that associate professors are some of the unhappiest people in higher education due to lack of time and social isolation. Kelsky (2013) documented her tenure process in a recent blog stating that "What starts out as an inspired quest for new knowledge and social impact can devolve into endless days in an airless room, broke, in debt, staring at a computer, exploited by departments, dismissed by professors, ignored by colleagues, disrespected by students" (para. 8). This distress noted by faculty is not new. In fact, Megaw reported in the principal document of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) *Statement on Workload* in 1966, that the pressures of higher education leave faculty dwindling "into ineffectiveness as scholar and teacher" (p. 385).

Over the last 30 years, colleges and universities have moved away from tenure-track appointments (Carey, 2012). As reported by the U.S. Department of Education (Snyder & Dillow, 2011), only 54% of faculty members occupy full-time positions. According to a survey by the American Federation of Teachers (2009), 47% of university faculty members were adjunct members, while almost 70% of community college faculty members were part-time. Guttenplan (2012) stated "a widening gap" is occurring, one in which top universities are devoted primarily to research while faculty at colleges are devoted to teaching. He indicated, those "who are lower in the academic pecking order… now constitute the large majority of the academic work force" (para. 2). Additionally, low pay and extreme work conditions have left faculty feeling disheartened. Yet, not everyone agrees; Levy (2012) suggested that teaching faculty members are overpaid, have more time off, and oftentimes, work fewer hours than their non-academic peers. However, Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) stated that today's faculty members, both women and men, work a minimum of 55 hours a week. In fact, the concept of faculty workload was recognized in higher education when The AAUP publicized the following sentiment nearly 50 years ago:

Faculty expect as a matter of course to serve in student counseling, on committees, with professional societies, and in certain administrative capacities, a heavy commitment in any of these areas, or service in too many of these areas at once, will of course impair the effectiveness of the faculty member as teacher and scholar (Megaw, 1966, p. 256).

Mason (2009) noted that higher education is adopting a business model mentality where instructors can be paid low wages and no benefits. According to Carey (2012), today's faculty members are "supremely talented and criminally underpaid" (para. 10). In fact, only 35% of contingent faculty reported having health insurance provided by their institution (AFT, 2009). The chronic reasons for this top down model include competition, technology, and scarce resources (Sampson, 2012).

In many institutions, women and people of color have felt discrimination such that the concept of the "glass ceiling" is seen as a barrier to women and minorities in their academic roles (Jackson & O'Callanghan, 2009). According to a United States Department of Education (USDE) report, full-time male faculty members earned nearly 9% more than their female colleagues (Bradburn, Sikora, & Zimbler, 2002). Findings in other parts of the world are similar. The Canadian Association of University Teachers reported that of all full professors employed in Canada; just over 20% are women earning 88.8% of the

average salaries of their male counterparts (CAUT, 2010). Additionally, the study provided evidence of a significant difference in unemployment rates between female minorities and the male population. At only 28 percent of all full professor appointments, Curtis (2011) reported that women continue to be outnumbered more than two to one in senior rank.

The overall balance of work to life is a challenge for most faculty but even more difficult for women. The fear of failure in a demanding work environment, according to Mason (2009), has caused many women to delay childbearing in favor of tenure. Many women who chose to postpone the tenure process in favor of raising their families take part-time positions with less pay and fewer benefits. Although most faculty members reported in the HERI study that they were able to achieve a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives, 17.3% still found the balance challenging (Hurtado, et al., 2012). Many of the reasons cited related to difficulties outside the institution such as managing household responsibilities, lack of personal time, care of self, spouse, or elderly parent, and child-rearing.

According to Azeem (2013), the relationship of stress and burnout has been studied extensively among those who teach in K-12 settings. However, very few studies have been conducted with university teachers in order to understand the stress in the higher education environment. According to Gappa and Austin (2010), it is vital to the quality of an institution to ensure that faculty members are not only satisfied but also motivated in their academic roles. Curtis (2011) suggested that "If we are actually to change this situation of persistent inequities, we must investigate the sources of each of these differences and find remedies for them" (p. 6). The justification of this study is based on the premise that faculty should have a voice in developing strategies, both personal and institutional, to reduce stressors and attain improved work-life balance.

Methodology

In this study, a mixed-methods research approach was employed. A mixed-methods study draws from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while reducing the weaknesses of each (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, as Creswell and Clark (2006) suggested, using a mixed-methods approach "reduces adversarial relationships among researchers and promotes collaboration" (p. 18).

The intent of this two-phase, sequential mixed-methods study was to identify the specific stressors in higher education in relation to the demographics of higher education faculty members and also to identify strategies for improving work-life balance. For the purpose of this study, the term "professor" refers to both tenure and non-tenure track faculty members who are or have been engaged in teaching in higher education.

The following research questions guided this study: (1) What are the primary concerns of professors? (2) What are the benefits associated with professorship? and (3) How do professors balance their professional and personal lives? Before beginning the research, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity was maintained based upon university IRB protocols.

In the following sections we will first discuss the data collection followed by the demographics of participants, data analysis and findings of quantitative survey items, data analysis and findings of open-ended survey questions, data analysis and findings of follow-up interviews, discussion, implications, limitations, and then concluding with future recommendations.

Data Collection

To recruit participants for the study, the researchers used a combination of both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. First, participants were invited to take part in the study through a research flyer emailed to colleges and universities across the United States. Additionally, the flyer was posted on social media sites such as LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and Scoop.It. Research suggested that professors visit social networking platforms for teaching advice, professional connections, and other relevant academic information, and thus was utilized as a recruiting tool in the current study (Milners, 2009; Ranieri, Manca, & Fini, 2012). For the survey, participants of all ranks were recruited from August 2013

– October 2013. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire in Qualtrics (Qualtrics.com) which consisted of 14 demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity, rank), 23 Likert scale questions, and two open-ended questions regarding the benefits and challenges of being a professor: (1) What are some of the benefits of working in your current position?; (2) What are some of the challenges/concerns of working in your current position? In addition, the last question of the survey asked if participants would like to be contacted regarding their responses. In order to comply with the Institutional Review Board's requirements that participation be completely voluntary, no forced response questions were used. Without forced responses, the number of participants who responded to each question varied with the demographic and quantitative questions.

Secondly, the researchers conducted email, phone, and in-person interviews with professors who asked for a follow-up to the initial survey. Structured interviews consisting of four open-ended questions regarding coping strategies to balance their work and personal life were asked of participants. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. The questions asked of participants were:

1) How do you balance your professional and personal lives?
2) What does your department, college, or institution do to help you cope with stress? If they do not, how should your institution help faculty members cope with stress?
3) What do you need personally to help you in balancing your professional and personal life?
4) As a new faculty member in your first job, knowing what you know now, what advice would you want to be told?

The oral interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure that the confidentiality of the individuals' participation was maintained, actors read unidentifiable excerpts from the transcript, which were recorded by the researchers and then converted to mp3 sound files.

Demographics of Survey Participants

Participants were asked to provide a variety of information related to personal and professional demographics. There were 168 participants from 31 states in the United States, with the largest participant groups coming from Texas (27%) and Utah (15%). In addition, 8% of the participants were from countries other than the United States. The sample included responses from both genders, with 36% male and 64% female. Marital status included 75% married, 14% single, and 10% divorced. The participants also represented a wide range of ages (see Figure 1). The majority of the participants were between 30 and 59 years old with approximately 18% being over 60.
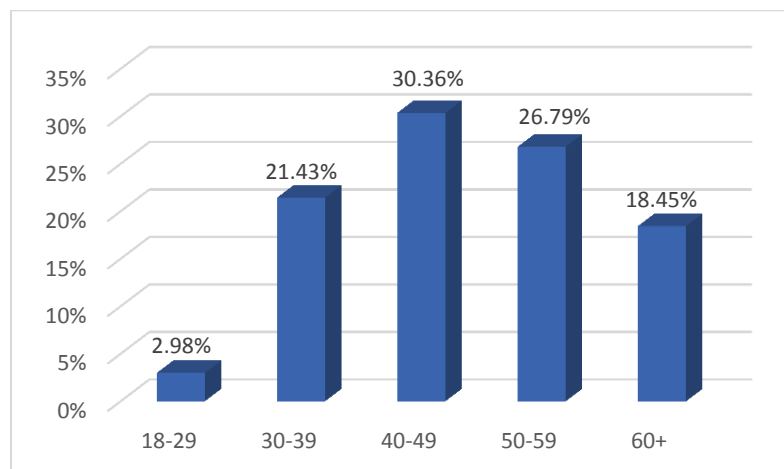

Figure 1. Age Range of Participants

The primary ethnicity reported was White/Caucasian, 89%, with 4% each Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino(a), and 3% each Asian and other. Additionally, 30% spoke a language other than English, including Spanish, German, Japanese, French, and Russian.

The sample included participants with educational backgrounds including Masters Degrees and Doctorates of Education (Ed.D.), but the majority, 71% had earned Doctorates of Philosophy (Ph.D.). Their positions in higher education included 30% Assistant Professors, 25% Associate Professors, 18% Full Professors, and 27% in other positions. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison between the academic ranks of participants in the study and the 2011 U.S. Department of Education's national proportions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), in each rank. Although proportions differed slightly, they did not differ significantly.
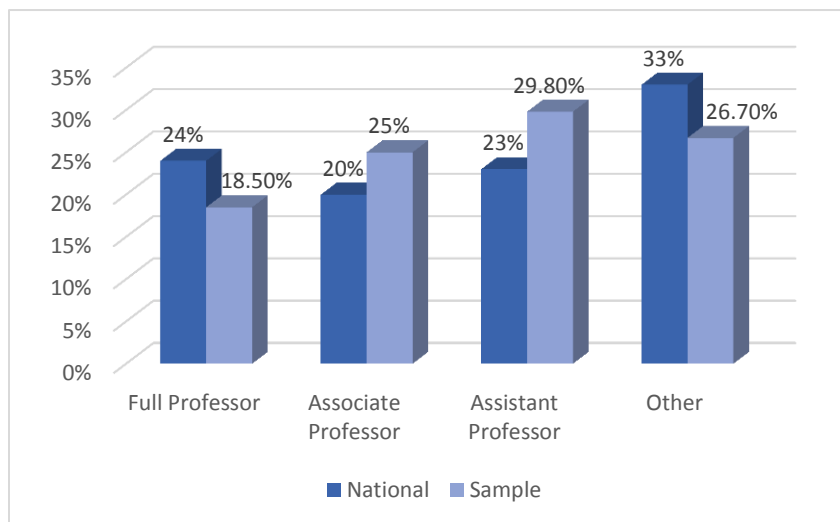

Figure 2. Comparison of Sample to National Academic Ranks

The faculty members were employed at a variety of institutions including 38% national research institutions that include undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degree programs; 36% at regional teaching institutions that focus on undergraduate and master's degree programs; 13% liberal arts colleges; and 14% at other institutions including community colleges and technical colleges, and 72% employed at public universities. In addition, participants represented academic fields including the humanities, social sciences, applied sciences, and formal sciences.

Participants employed in higher education ranged from five or less years to over 30 years (see Figure 3). Over half the participants, 59%, have been employed in higher education for more than 10 years. Given that approximately 53% of the participants are at the rank of associate or full professor, and that it generally takes five or more years to achieve these ranks, the years of experience in higher education aligns with reported ranks. Data also indicated that approximately 40% were still in their formative years in the profession.

Findings

Data Analysis of Quantitative Survey Item Responses

Participants were asked to indicate the number of hours per week they worked, both on and off campus, and these were combined to produce a total number of work hours. A set of t-tests and one-way ANOVA designs were used to compare demographic categories on the number of hours worked per week. Chi Square analyses were used to determine if select demographic categories (type of institution, rank, gender, degree, marital status) differed in the level of their agreement with 18 individual Likert scale statements regarding various experiences in higher education.
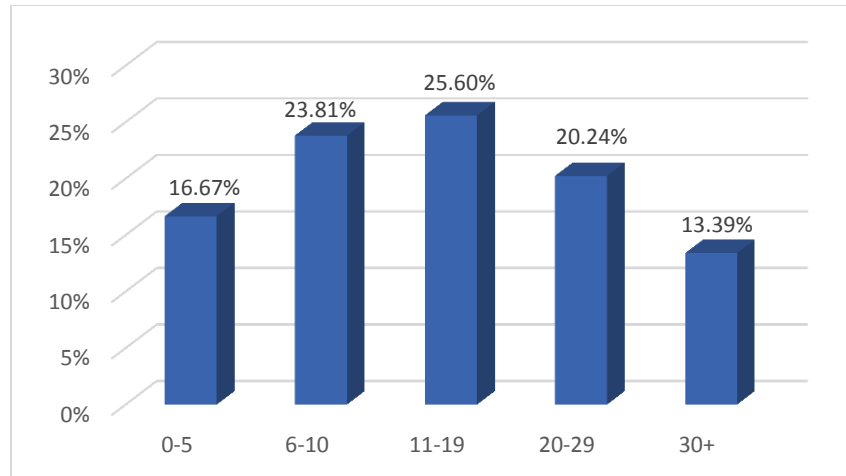
Figure 3. Years of Experience of Participants

The responses to 12 of the statements regarding positive aspects of work conditions were averaged to produce a continuous measure of positive experience, and responses to 5 statements regarding potential negative aspects of the work setting were averaged to produce a measure of negative experience. A series of t-tests and one-way ANOVA designs were used to compare the various demographic categories for each of these dimensions.

Finally, respondents were asked to rank the importance of grants, publications, teaching, community service, and institutional service at their institutions. Mean rank assigned was determined for each, and then ranks given were compared across the same demographic categories using Chi Square analyses to determine if any of the five demographics predicted assigned importance.

Findings of Quantitative Survey Item Responses

The mean number of hours reported for on-campus work was 32.85 (SD = 13.03), and for off-campus work was 21.73 (SD = 13.3). When combined, the mean hours worked formed a fairly symmetrical, though leptokurtic distribution, wit

h a mean of 54.35 hours (SD = 16.57). The only demographic to demonstrate significant differences in total work hours was marital status, with married participants reporting 52.78 (SD = 14.61) hours worked per week and non-married participants reported working 58.83 (SD = 21.08) hours, t (159) = 2.02, p = .045.

Participants were then asked to indicate their agreement with a number of different statements concerning aspects of their job. Responses could vary from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), with 3 being a neutral response. See Table 1 for mean responses to these statements. Chi Square analyses were used to determine if a subset of the demographic variables (type of institution, rank, gender, degree, and marital status) related to the extent of agreement with each item. Because of the number of comparisons, an alpha of .01 was employed. Only one of these analyses produced significant results with that criterion. A significant gender difference was obtained for the item "I am able to balance my personal and professional life" with males agreeing more than females with that statement, $\chi^2(4) = 13.58$, $p = .007$.

For the averaged responses to the 12 positive statements concerning various aspects of academic life, a response of 3.0 would represent a neutral stance overall, higher would indicate general agreement with the positive statements, and lower would indicate general disagreement with them. The mean for the 12 items formed a fairly normal distribution, with a mean response of 3.44 (SD = .46). One-way between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t-tests were computed using this variable as the dependent measure and the various demographic groups as quasi-independent variables. The mean response to the combined positive statements varied as a function of gender, with males having

a higher average (M = 3.55, SD = .51) than females (M = 3.39, SD = .42), F (1, 164) = 5.51, *p* = .032. There was also a significant difference for marital status, with married respondents indicating greater agreement with the positive statements (M = 3.5, SD = .45) than unmarried respondents (M = 3.28, SD = .46), *t*(165) = 2.70, *p* = .008). No other demographics (rank, type of institution, degree) were found to relate to the extent of agreement to job-related positive statements.

Table 1. Mean Agreement with Job Related Statements

Please indicate your agreement with the following:	Mean*	Std. Deviation
My salary is adequate for my position.	2.90	1.27
I am able to balance my personal and professional life.	3.49	1.12
I feel that I make a difference in the lives of my students.	4.42	.70
My students like me.	4.24	.67
My performance (academic) evaluations are favorable.	4.48	.63
My institution provides up-to-date technology training and access to technology resources.	3.79	1.07
I have had formal training on how to write and publish scholarly papers.	3.20	1.37
I understand copyright laws in regards to using images, figures, and tables in articles.	3.89	.931
My institution has taught me how to use survey platforms/tools.	2.32	1.11
I understand the laws surrounding plagiarism and self-plagiarism.	4.16	.814
My institution has taught me how to write grants.	2.17	1.11
I am concerned about religious intolerance in my workplace.	2.04	1.15
I am concerned about homophobia in my workplace.	2.06	1.03
I am concerned about bullying in my workplace.	2.33	1.26
There is too much pressure to publish.	2.93	1.24
I have been assigned a formal mentor.	2.27	1.31
Although I have been assigned a formal mentor, I choose to be mentored by another colleague.	2.48	1.02
I am worried I might lose my job.	2.29	1.28

*All means are based on 168 responses except for the next to last statement which drew 167 responses.

For the averaged responses to the 12 positive statements concerning various aspects of academic life, a response of 3.0 would represent a neutral stance overall, higher would indicate general agreement with the positive statements, and lower would indicate general disagreement with them. The mean for the 12 items formed a fairly normal distribution, with a mean response of 3.44 (SD = .46). One-way between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t-tests were computed using this variable as the dependent measure and the various demographic groups as quasi-independent variables. The mean response to the combined positive statements varied as a function of gender, with males having a higher average (M = 3.55, SD = .51) than females (M = 3.39, SD = .42), F (1, 164) = 5.51, *p* = .032. There was also a significant difference for marital status, with married respondents indicating greater agreement with the positive statements (M = 3.5, SD = .45) than unmarried respondents (M = 3.28, SD = .46), *t*(165) = 2.70, *p* = .008). No other demographics (rank, type of institution, degree) were found to relate to the extent of agreement to job-related positive statements.

Responses to five statements regarding negative aspects of work conditions (worry about religious tolerance, homophobia, bullying, publication pressure, fear of job loss) were averaged. A response of 3.0 would represent a neutral stance on these, higher would indicate it is a concern, and lower would indicate it is not a concern. The mean for the five items formed a fairly normal distribution, with a mean response of 2.33 (SD = .79). Job rank was significantly related to averaged negatives, with Assistant Professors reporting more agreement with the negatives (M = 2.58, SD = .87) than either adjuncts (M = 1.94, SD =

.57) or Associate Professors, (M = 2.10, SD = .69), F (4,145) = 4.08, *p* = .004). Marital status was significant, with married respondents agreeing less with the negative statements (M = 2.23, SD = .75) than non-married respondents (M = 2.60, SD = .83), *t*(164) = 2.68, *p* = .008. No other demographics (gender, type of institution, degree) were found to relate to the extent of agreement to job related negatives.

Lastly, respondents were asked to rank the following in terms of importance at their college: grants, publications, teaching, community service, and institutional service. The lowest mean ranking (greatest importance) was given to teaching (2.69), followed by institutional service (2.97), and publications (2.98). Seen as less important were community service (3.11) and grants (3.24). Again, using an alpha of .01, only one Chi Square analysis indicated a relationship to the five demographic variables listed above. As would be expected, the type of institution reported by the participant was related to their rating of the importance of teaching, with national institutions rating it less important and liberal arts colleges rating it as more important, $\chi^2 (20) = 38.64$, *p* = .007.

Data Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Questions

For the two open-ended questions in the survey, the data were analyzed through an inductive and comparative approach as described by Merriam (2009).When data is analyzed inductively, "researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). A comparative approach is used to determine similarities and differences in the data.

To begin the analysis, the faculty member's excerpts from each open-ended question were downloaded from Qualtrics into a word processing document hereafter referred to as a *transcript*. A team of two researchers was assigned to independently analyze each transcript by first examining each *unit of data* (a meaningful segment of information, see Merriam, 2009, p. 176) and comparing it with the next unit in the transcript to look for "recurring regularities in the data" (p. 177). Each researcher then assigned a code to the units of data and then combined similar codes to form categories.

Once the data in transcripts were assigned to categories, teams of two researchers held a face-to-face meeting and compared their categories for the purpose of reaching consensus on categories and then combined the final categories to form broad themes. According to Merriam (2009), the use of a team of researchers is referred to as "peer examination" (p. 220) and enhances the trustworthiness in the findings of the study.

Findings of Open-Ended Survey Questions

The first open-ended question asked the participants, *What are some of the benefits of working in your current position*? There were 154 responses collected from the survey for this question. Analysis of the data yielded seven broad themes that were subsequently ranked in descending order from the most to the least often stated. The seven themes were descriptively named: *Flexibility, Rewards of Working with Students, Relationships with Colleagues, Academic Freedom, Support from Administration, Intrinsic Benefits, and Extrinsic Benefits*. Because of the quantity of rich data, comments were reduced by "taking only a few texts or parts of texts" (Silverman, 2000, p. 829) and purposively selected to illustrate each of the seven themes (Table 2) from the perspective of the professors about the benefits of working in their current position.

One of the benefits identified by respondents of being a professor is the *Flexibility* it allows. Professors commented that "extensive holidays and self-directed flexibility" and "flexible hours outside of class" were advantages of being a professor. With the growth of online courses and research tools, many professors are now able to work at home and with more flexible schedules. In addition to having flexible schedules, *Working with Students* was noted as a reward of being a professor. Many professors enter the profession to make a difference in the lives of their students. Professors who work with motivated students found interaction with their students as a benefit as evidenced from these comments:

"My students are the reason I love my job," and "love working with my students. [It is] very rewarding to see their growth."

Beyond working with students, *Relationships with Colleagues* are also a benefit to being a professor. Professors who had positive interactions and support from their peers and administration valued the relationships with colleagues as illustrated by the responses: "We have a high level of collegiality in our department" and "[an] excellent relationship with [the] department chair and colleagues." *Academic Freedom*, which allows for and requires self-direction, was noted as the fourth theme. "Academic freedom is not a simple concept…there is general agreement that it is meant to protect researchers and scholars from those in positions of power and authority" (Masri, 2011, p. 2). Participants noted that academic freedom provided benefits that included having a "high level of autonomy in directing the course of research" and "I have enormous freedom to remain true to my own teaching and research interests."

Support from Administration, while important for developing a collegial environment and supporting academic freedom, was also viewed as an additional benefit by the participants. For example, one participant stated, "I am free to do the research I choose to do, and there is college and university-level support for that research, even in tough financial times".

Participants noted both *Intrinsic* (theme 6) and *Extrinsic* (theme 7) benefits. Research on professors indicated that motivation included "a desire to increase one's professional reputation, to increase job mobility, to increase salary, and to leave a permanent mark on the…profession" (Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011). *Intrinsic* benefits were reported as: "I am able to 'start over' every semester to improve my performance, try new things, and experience new people" while extrinsic benefits included having "optional teacher retirement and social security."

Table 2. Benefits of Faculty Members in their Current Position

#	Name of Theme	Explanation/ Rule for Inclusion	Selected Faculty Member Extracts
1	Flexibility	Flexibility was the most often stated benefit by faculty member	• I also appreciate the flexibility to work from home some rather than spending 40+ hours in the office. • Flexibility both in scheduling, physical presence on campus and course content. • The hours I work outside of class are flexible.
2	Rewards of working with students	Faculty member reported they enjoy quality students and improving their lives	• I enjoy the students and the perspective I gain from a younger population. • Working with students is very rewarding. • My students are the reason I love my job. • Love working with students. Very rewarding to see their growth.
3	Relationships with colleagues	Faculty member reported that collegiality was important to them	• My colleagues are some of the most passionate, hard-working people I know. • Excellent relationship with department chair and colleagues • We have a high degree of collegiality in our department.
4	Academic freedom with teaching and	Faculty member reported academic	• Freedom to pursue my academic interests • Freedom to do the research I want to do

	research	freedom was an important benefit	• I have enormous freedom to remain true to my own teaching and research interests, and do not have to try to adjust them to meet current funding priorities.
5	Support from chairs, deans, and other leadership positions	Faculty member reported it was important to receive support for research and travel	• Adequate research resources and a great department chair makes a lot of things easier at work. • I am free to do the research I choose to do, and there is college and university-level support for that research, even in tough financial times. • There is some support for travel.
6	Intrinsic benefits	Engaging work, variety, and a continuous learning atmosphere were important benefits	• Remaining in a learning environment • I am energized by the atmosphere of learning and the desire to keep learning and growing as professionals. • Intellectually engaging.
7	Extrinsic benefits	Faculty member reported benefits of pay, retirement, tuition support, health benefits, and job security	• Our health benefits and incentives are excellent. • Tuition discount for attending classes. • Decent salary.

Challenges and Concerns

The second open-ended question asked on the survey was, W*hat are some of the challenges/concerns of working in your current position*? There were 155 responses collected from the survey for this question and analysis yielded eight broad themes emerging from the data. The eight themes were named: *Work-Life Balance Issues, Internal Politics, External Politics, Online Teaching and Classroom Technology Issues, Student Issues, Advancement, Tenure and Promotion Issues, Economic Pressures, and Increased Research and Publishing Expectations*. These data themes, rule for inclusion, and selected faculty member extracts are provided in Table 3 and further described below.

The first broad theme named *Work-Life Balance Issues* contains extracts from faculty members who remarked that they are overloaded with work duties that spill over into their personal time. For instance, one faculty member said: "I enjoy all of my job responsibilities but when you put them all together, it is unrealistic to achieve in a balanced manner." Another faculty member remarked: "For me, the work-life balance is the most difficult aspect. There is no definite end to the work day." This theme is supported in the literature. According to Mamiseishvili (2010), "growing demands placed on faculty work…make it harder for faculty members to balance competing demands and responsibilities and achieve equally high levels of productivity in all aspects of their work" (p. 80).

A second theme that emerged from the data and termed *Internal Politics* included comments from faculty members who reported that they experienced a lack of desired support from administrators, divides between the various ranks of faculty, a lack of collegiality, and oftentimes no voice in decisions that affected them. For instance, one faculty member reported a challenge/concern in their current position: "[the] lack of administrative support" while another remarked they were challenged by "competitive and bullying colleagues." A third faculty member reported, "There is a new Provost, and

perhaps a new president in the next couple of years, and in my experience, that can bring about many changes, wanted and unwanted."

The third theme that emerged from the open-ended question was *External Politics.* This theme included reports that higher education is receiving less funding at the state level while state politicians are simultaneously dictating policies. Faculty members reported that the top down managerial model is prohibitive. For example, one participant said, the "Arkansas legislature is increasingly micromanaging higher ed., making this job more bureaucratic every year."

Online Teaching and Classroom Technology Issues was the fourth theme that emerged from the data. This theme included reports from professors about increased pressure to teach online courses without necessary resources as well as reports that professors feel pressure to utilize technology in the classroom or to teach online. For instance, one professor reported "the loss of meaningful interaction as online offerings increase." This is echoed in the literature: "many academics report a strong sense of missing the face-to-face contact with students and perceive a struggle to maintain student engagement" (Dyment, Downing & Budd, 2013, p. 135).

The fifth theme emerging from the data was *Student Issues* characterized by the lack of student commitment to course work, students' poor behavior, and the pressure on professors to pass poor performing students. Also, student complaints were indicative of this theme. For instance, one professor remarked that one of the challenges in their current appointment included, "problems with student discipline and classroom management." The literature supported this theme in that "large numbers of students continue to admit to cheating and large numbers of faculty witness cheating in their classrooms" (Burrus, Jones, Sackley, & Walker, 2013).

The sixth theme that emerged from the data was *Advancement, Tenure and Promotion Issues* and included lack of advancement, confusion of promotion and tenure requirements, and the weight of student evaluations upon promotion and tenure. For example, one faculty member remarked that they were confused by, "inconsistent standards across the university…for what is expected in scholarly productivity and teaching" and another said, "Student evaluations and the weight that they count toward promotion and tenure."

Economic Pressures is the seventh theme that emerged from the faculty member data. This theme included the faculty members reporting insufficient workplace facilities as well as a general concern about financial and economic issues. For instance, one faculty member reported, their "Salary is abysmal" and another questioned, "How can young faculty advance with no travel funds or research support?" Additionally, one faculty member commented about stress of bringing in additional funding, "[there is] too much pressure to support salary with grant money, [and the] threat of salary reduction if I don't bring in grant money to cover salary."

The last theme that emerged from the open-ended question on the survey was *Increased Research and Publishing Expectations*. One faculty member remarked, "Publication hurdles are high" while another said they are challenged by, "Having enough published articles in the 'right' professional journals for promotion."

Table 3: Challenges and Concerns of Faculty Members in their Current Position

#	Name of Theme	Explanation/ Rule for Inclusion	Selected Faculty Member Extracts
1	Work-life balance issues	Faculty members overloaded with work duties that spill over into their personal time	• It is impossible to lead a balanced life during the school year. We teach…we publish, we serve on institutional and school committees, we have an advising load, we sponsor clubs, we are asked to volunteer to participate in extracurricular activities • I work all day at school and every evening at

			home plus weekends and I still have an endless to-do list
2	Internal politics	Lack of desired support from administrators	• Lack of administrative support • We are a small, regional teaching college with illusions of being a Tier 1 research university
		Divides between the ranks	• Divides between professors of different ranks • It seems that my colleagues who do very little and fail to perform well on college committees are rewarded by being assigned less responsibility.
		Lack of collegiality	• I would prefer a more collegial environment where people are encouraged to collaborate rather than compete
		No voice in decisions	• Lack of shared governance • Good old boy network
3	External politics	Higher education of less importance with state politicians	• Concern about anti-education political climate within Texas • I work in a state that has a political system designed to do a governor's bidding. In the past several years the governor has been excessively anti-higher education and we have seen funds cut to the bone
		Top down management policy is prohibitive	• Our president and dean have bought into some of the fads of the day and both speak in sound bites • Current transitional phase with several top administrators new to the region, new to the institution with new visions of what we, the faculty, ought to be doing
4	Online teaching and classroom technology issues	Pressure to teach online courses without needed resources	• Pressure to deliver online education without the preparation to really do it as effectively • Shift to 100% online courses and, even though I have done that, I do not feel we adequately teach or cover all that is necessary for our students
		Overemphasis on technology in the	• Over-emphasis on technology and increasing pressure to learn new technologies

		classroom	• Lack of technology…understaffed IT department, institution slow to make changes
5	Student issues	Lack of student commitment	• Mediocre graduate students • Students are often poorly prepared and unmotivated. • Problems with student discipline and classroom management
		Pressure to pass students not performing	• Feeling the need to get students to pass the course to retain them • Pressure to inflate grades and ignore academic rigor
6	Advancement, tenure and promotion issues	Lack of advancement opportunities	• Little hope for advancement in my current position. I cannot transfer to a tenure track without moving to a different university. • Very little opportunities for advancement
		Faculty member reported promotion and tenure confusion	• Sometimes it is confusing to faculty members on this campus about the expectations that administrators and tenure/promotion committees have.
		Weight of student evaluations for promotion and tenure	• Student evaluations and the weight that they count toward promotion and tenure. It is difficult to maintain the quality and rigor of teaching with the "popularity contest" that student evaluations have.
7	Economic pressures	Workplace facilities or resources not sufficient	• Internet accessibility issues. The university is working on increasing bandwidth and adding more WIFI on campus. We are a small town, 3 hours from major urban areas. • Class size has increased significantly; limited classrooms with ability to hold the large number of students. Limited in tech and teaching items available
		Faculty member concerned about financial and economic issues	• Too much pressure to support salary with grant money, threat of salary reduction if I don't bring in grant money to cover salary • Need to work a night job to support family • Pressure to compete with other state institutions
8	Increased research and publishing expectations	Faculty member reported that expectations for publishing is on the rise	• Importance placed on research over teaching • There is also a huge pressure to publish but very little support to do so • Narrowing view of what counts as "quality" or "impactful" scholarship

Data Analysis of Interviews

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to provide their email address if they wanted to be contacted for further information. Sixteen participants responded that they would be interested in a follow-up to the initial survey and provided an email contact. Following the email contact, six participants agreed to a follow-up interview. As a result, four participants completed a structured interview through email while one was interviewed by telephone, and one in-person. Both the telephone and in-person interviews were audio recorded. The email responses and the two audio recordings, which were subsequently transcribed verbatim, were each transferred into a word processing document, hereafter referred to as a written *transcript*. A team of researchers followed the same data analysis procedures as they did open-ended questions through independently analyzing each transcript, examining key themes, and then meeting face-to-face to compare the transcripts to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Follow-up Interviews

The demands of a professor's work life – research, publications, teaching, and service –can be difficult to balance with the demands or desires of a personal life. In the structured interviews, faculty members stated they were overworked and found it difficult to balance their work and personal lives which confirmed the survey findings (see Table 4). For example, one participant remarked, "Right now it's not very balanced because of curriculum and tenure-track things such as writing and service…curriculum/program development takes a lot of time, and it does not count for tenure. There is not much of a personal life." Other participants found that guarding their time was an effective strategy as they worked only on certain days a week and created "sacred lines in the sand" or "carve(d) out time," suggesting that the balance between work and personal life must be a conscious decision and actively protected. This participant reaction was captured in the following audio recording https://db.tt/BmWvZrLn. Another participant remarked, "I carve out time for my family, very specifically routines and schedules to make sure family needs are taken care of." This decision to guard personal time; however, often results in feelings of guilt deferred work responsibilities.

Most faculty members stated that although the institutions should be more supportive and concerned about stress, they believed this was often not a priority. Institutional supports included providing wellness programs and social activities designed to promote stress reduction. "There are different clubs and activities. It is very common that the day you want to do something to relax, you have a meeting, an activity with a co-worker, something important that you need to finish." While some participants stated that wellness programs were helpful, others did not see this as being highly valued. Participants whose institutions did not include gym memberships or wellness programs recommended that a gym onsite or time to be physically active would be beneficial as described by one of the participants in the following sound bite https://db.tt/iXRcNVIW . Others reported that mentoring and support groups would be beneficial and additional participants responded that it would be valuable to have a stress program "similar to what they do for people with drug and alcohol problems."

Workload was reported as a stressor for many professors. Participants stated that workload needed to be more equitable. Others suggested that it was beneficial to have teaching assistants to help with grading. "The university could look at workload balance and realize how much pressure it is…I don't know what they could do, but what I wish they would do is help us with our grading." The data suggested that when professors perceived an inequitable balance of workloads, stress increased. Greater transparency on the part of the administration as to how workloads are allocated and rewarded would help to reduce this stress.

The most important advice faculty members mentioned they would have wanted to know before beginning their first faculty member position was to "say 'no' gracefully," have a clear understanding of expectations, and to make a conscious effort not to let work overtake their personal life as documented by a participant in the following recorded statement: https://db.tt/puXvNVBi. A participant stated, "I would like to know what expectations are because those really aren't clear and could determine a lot of how I use my time." Having a mentor trained in guiding professors who are new to their position was reported as a successful means of coping with the pressures of being a professor. It was also reported that an

inequity existed between the roles of female and male faculty members in regards to the work-life balance. For example, one participant stated, "I would just like to be better connected to other people who are also in my situation." Female participants, particularly in male-dominated fields, reported they believed that being able to discuss their everyday lives with other females in similar positions would be beneficial in creating a better balance between their work and personal lives. This sentiment was captured in the following recording https://db.tt/OmZTkpzJ.

Table 4: Coping Strategies of Faculty Members for Work-Life Balance

#	Question	Response Summaries	Selected Faculty Member Extracts
1	How do you balance your work and personal life?	Faculty member reported it is difficult to manage a work-life balance Faculty member suggested protecting time for personal responsibilities	• Difficult to balance, demands a lot out of business hours, works 10 hours a day for 6 days. • I have decided I will not work one day a week - even check emails. • I divided my week. I know that I am here 4 days and the rest of the days are to relax and enjoy time with my family of friends. I force myself to leave our campus.
2	What does your department, college, or institution do to help you cope with stress? If they do not, how should your institution help faculty cope with stress?	Faculty member reported that they believe there are no activities provided that help reduce stress	• My school does nothing. All they care about is increasing enrollment and rankings. Our enrollment has dramatically increased without hiring more professors, but still they want you to do more interactions with students and take on more work. • Does not do anything to help with stress. Could be clearer about tenure and promotion guidelines because I am not sure how much service is enough service. • I just wish that I could figure out how to manage better the pressure of always checking this off. It's just that ongoing pressure.
3	What do you need personally to help you in balancing your professional and personal life?	Faculty member reported wellness programs and social activities are offered to reduce stress Faculty member reported that	• Wellness program that has occupational health and safety inspections of work areas, exercise physiology sessions, monthly massages, social activities such as group walks at lunchtime, etc. • I would like a gym or exercise area on site; that way I could fit exercise in whenever possible • I need examples of other people who are doing this well. • Divide assignments in a fair way.

		universities should examine work-load issues	Sometimes there are different projects and our bosses [always] ask the same people to take over those tasks.
4	As a new faculty member in your first job, what advice would you want to be told?	Faculty member reported a clear understanding of expectations was needed	
		Faculty member reported the need for mentors	• Before accepting new responsibilities, find out how many committees you are expected to be in. It is not bad to say no or to talk to your peer and see how many things or what responsibilities they have. • My dissertation chair, he's been a mentor for a long time. He sat me down and told me. He said these things you can expect, but I just didn't' realize. I wasn't surprised, but I'm lucky that I don't have a husband or kids. I don't have that pull like many faculty members who have children and all those other commitments. I don't know how they do it.
		Faculty member reported understanding how to balance work with personal life was important	• How to say "no" gracefully • Make sure you do not let your work load over take you. Take a day off a week and do nothing related to school. If possible, take the whole weekend off.

Discussion and Implications

A somewhat surprising finding from the quantitative data was that responses to individual items did not differ significantly across tenure ranks. The experiences measured tended to be similarly perceived at differing career stages. Thus, regardless of rank, this study identified that there is a problem in the work-life balance of professors. This is noted by Berrett (2012) in the following statement:

> Hopes for a fresh start on a new campus were felt at all levels of the professoriate. Nearly half of all professors responding to the survey said they had considered leaving their institution, but only one-quarter reported having received a firm job offer, highlighting the lack of job mobility for faculty (p. 27).

The findings of the current study illustrate that faculty members work long hours and are under enormous institutional pressures, and this is consistent with the literature (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Wilson, 2012). The opposing stresses of trying to balance work and personal life, (as illustrated in the word cloud in Figure 4), are leading professors to consider leaving higher education. The literature suggests another alternative in finding that female faculty members seek part-time employment to better achieve a work-life balance (Mason, 2009; Hurtado et al., 2012).

The research findings highlighted that collegiality impacts stress; it provides social support for the faculty member, or, when lacking, adds considerably to perceived stress. Perhaps similarly, married participants reported increased job satisfaction and better work-life balance which may also signal social support. However, family responsibilities and the division of labor were not measured and may have added substantially to the difficulties in trying to find a balance between work responsibilities and personal responsibilities. In their book which explored work and leisure patterns, Jacobs and Gerson (2009) described research findings that more highly educated households spend more hours in employed

work and in childcare than less educated households, and that working women continue to shoulder more of the domestic and care burdens than their male counterparts (Mason, 2009). This may help explain the finding in this study that males were more likely than females to agree with the statement that they were able to attain a balance between work and their personal lives.

Note: The words in this word cloud are representative of content themes only and do not signify a quantifiable representation of the data.

Figure 4. Opposing Stresses of Professors

Based upon the findings, the researchers recommend several institutional approaches to help professors cope with the responsibilities and stressors of working in higher education. The tenure system has changed very little over time and is a holdover from the days of ivory towers and single-earner households. According to Gappa and Austin (2010), "As new faculty members become more diverse in their backgrounds and lifestyles, they bring…complex individual priorities and circumstances that require a renewed institutional focus on work–life balance, mentoring, a sense of scholarly community, and employment equity" (p. 4). In order to attract and retain professors, institutions must create flexible methods to achieve tenure and promotion, which may include hastening or extending tenure review for faculty members based upon their individual needs. One possible suggestion is that institutions create alternative tenure tracks—one for teaching faculty members and one for research faculty members. In addition, professional development in the areas of grant writing, publishing, and course-development should be established to support faculty members as they meet the demands of teaching and scholarship. Also, wherever possible, providing professors with faculty mentors who have similar backgrounds and interests may improve collegiality, confidence, and early and productive scholarship. This mentor–protégé relationship should include the proper resources, mentor training, and incentives. However, since it is often difficult to find a suitable mentor, especially when a faculty member is a minority, female, or in a teaching position with low numbers of faculty members to assign as a mentor, alternative mentoring models should be considered. For instance, through the emergence of *virtual mentoring* enabled by contemporary technology, such as video conferencing and social media (in combination with traditional phone calls and emails), new faculty members have increased access to an appropriate mentor not available to them otherwise (Bierema & Hill, 2005; McWhorter, 2010; Zey, 2011).

A system of incentives and rewards needs to be considered in order for professors to feel valued by their institutions. As faculty members are expected to take on new roles (recruitment, retention, additional

committee work, incorporating added technology into teaching), there needs to be a loosening or diminution of traditional expectations and timelines creating more flexibility in the work–life balance. The improved system might include creating balanced course assignments and flexible workloads in order to assist in helping to alleviate family responsibilities while allowing for more personal time.

The impact of tightening state budgets and the overall economic forecast of an institution may contribute to the perception of faculty member stress. Administration must be transparent with faculty members in regards to the financial health of the institution. Additionally, as a business model is put in place at many universities, program restructuring may contribute to the replacement of full-time faculty members with part-time faculty members. Institutions must address compensation challenges such as salary equity and compression issues. Pay compression has an impact on pay equity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (McNatt, Glassman, & McAfee, 2007). Also, the creation of equitable salaries compared to other fields outside of higher education must be considered. While it may be cost effective in some cases, a number of negatives, such as lower morale and institutional commitment may be incurred.

Surprisingly, both tenure-track and tenured professors indicated a substantial amount of stress. The ranks did not differ significantly in their perceptions of job-related stressors.

Based upon the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there are a variety of stressors in a faculty member's life. A deeper understanding of stress on higher education faculty members and its effects on work-life balance will help both the institution and the individuals. Strategies identified by participants as effective for reducing stress included exercising, learning to say "no," guarding personal time, having clearly-defined expectations, and improving social connections with mentors and colleagues.

Limitations

By using a purposive or snowball sampling approach, the representative participants may limit the external validity or generalizability of the study. Because respondents were not forced to complete questions, the number of responses varied. Additionally, because survey data were self-reported by faculty members, respondent bias is conceivable.

Another limitation to the study was the research may not be representative of all sub-populations, disciplines, or institutions. For instance, although the sample was predominantly female, there was an underrepresented number of both male and female minorities at all ranks. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the national average of minorities in higher education was 21% in 2011. In this study, only 11% of minority groups participated. These underrepresented faculty members, who may have had concerns about religious tolerance, homophobia, or bullying, were largely absent. Additionally only 13% of females had achieved an institutional rank of full professor. A more diverse sample may have exposed more of the challenges of a glass ceiling in regards to both gender and race.

The timing of the study was also a limitation. Participants may have been less likely to participate in the research, perceiving time constraints, as the survey was distributed at the beginning of a semester. Lastly, the follow-up interviews were limited to a few participants. The study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size as the findings may vary substantially when more diverse groups are represented. While this study does present limitations, the stressors that impact faculty cannot be discounted.

Future Recommendations

More research is needed to uncover the effect of today's economy on the stress of the professor. Additional studies should explore the finding of collegiality and its role in ameliorating stress, and the bolstered social support that appears among the married participants as this was not found in the literature review and was an interesting finding from the study. It is also necessary to evaluate coping strategies for all ranks and further evaluate how the work-life balance changes as faculty move up the ranks from assistant to full professorship. However, this study should be replicated with additional interviews in order to recognize additional coping strategies and acquire a "voice" from a broader population.

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