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THE IMPACT OF DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN EMPLOYER-PROVIDED
INFORMATION AND EXPECTATIONS ON THE JOB SATISFACTION OF
GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

BY

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2006

THE IMPACT OF DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN EMPLOYER-PROVIDED
INFORMATION AND EXPECTATIONS ON THE JOB SATISFACTION OF
GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

ABSTRACT

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are a pervasive faction of the higher education community, however from a research perspective, they are virtually non-existent. For example, job satisfaction is a heavily researched body of literature and yet there is very little information covering the job satisfaction of graduate assistants. The purpose of this study is to expand on current industrial/organizational research by examining how certain factors (i.e., employer-provided information and expectations) affect the job satisfaction of graduate assistants. By identifying potential contributors to the job satisfaction of graduate assistants, the research strives to benchmark areas that work well while communicating those that require improvement.

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I am convinced that while a level of drive, experience and intelligence is required to reach most any goal, there is very little attained without the support of good people. I am fortunate to have had some positive, supportive people in my corner throughout my path to educate myself, and to each and every one I offer my deepest, sincerest thanks. I thank my parents, Calvin and Peggy Scott, for their unconditional love and for setting an example of what it means to work hard and live with integrity. I thank my grandparents, Allie Hazel Scott and Charlie Frank Marshall, for just being themselves. Thank you, Professor Richard Dool, for teaching me meaningful lessons of leadership and working with me to help me finish this. And to all other family and friends, too many to mention, thank you.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

It is the professed purpose of public and private universities across the country: that their graduate assistantship program provides “win-win endeavors” for the university and participating students (Seton Hall University Academic Affairs: Office of the Provost, 2005, p. 1). In return for financial assistance (i.e., tuition-remittance or stipends), students perform various duties for the university (i.e., teach undergraduate courses, conduct empirical research or assist administration). These duties are intended to “contribute to their academic and professional development” (Seton Hall University Academic Affairs: Office of the Provost, 2005, p. 3). Taken simplistically, it would appear that the graduate assistantship is a mutually beneficial experience for both parties. However, deeper investigation into this issue suggests that there are complexities within this relationship deserving further attention.

Background

Rising tuition costs make receiving some form of financial assistance commonplace, and receiving the highly-coveted graduate assistantship a blessing. Still, what may be lesser known is that graduate employees have been unionizing for more than three decades (Choy, Geis, & Malizio, 2002). In fact, an estimated 40,000 graduate employees are members of unions (Smallwood, 2001), protesting for a variety of benefits including “a living wage, better health care...and the basic right to bargain collectively” (Why Graduate Students are on Strike, 2005, p. 39). The issue in question is just this: Are graduate assistants employees or students?

The answer to this arguably philosophical question has a very real impact on the compensation of graduate assistants. Unionized graduate assistants (GAs) argue that their increasingly demanding professional or academic duties within the organization support deeming them employees first and students second. Conversely, university officials “traditionally maintain that graduate assistants are students, not workers,” a contention supporting more modest compensation and the use of “stipends as financial aid, not wages” (Choy et al., 2002, both p. 27). As a result, most GAs take on additional jobs or have alternate forms of financial assistance such as grants or loans (Choy et al., 2002; Smallwood, 2001). In fact, “among full-time, full year students with assistantships, at least 62% receive grants (averaging \$9,900 among those who receive them), and 36% took out loans (averaging \$13,800 among those who borrowed)” (Choy, et al., 2002, p. 24).

While the student vs. employee issue is certainly an interesting debate, detailed discussion of this matter falls outside the boundaries of my research. However, such a digression provides a suitable back drop for the discussion of the job satisfaction of GAs, which is a topic I not only find of personal interest but is also the subject of my thesis.

Relevance

For more than a year I have worked as a GA in the Deans office of a college of a major northeast university. During this time not one semester has passed without overhearing various complaints about the treatment of graduate assistants. Complaints varying from more trivial concerns such as being mistaken for a work-study, to the more significant, the most common of which pertains to graduate assistant job descriptions. More specifically, what is arguably the most prevalent concern among GAs is being asked to complete duties (usually menial) outside of their job description on a regular

basis, or that their daily responsibilities do not match their expectations of the job based on the job description. These concerns coupled with experiences of my own have led to the following lingering questions: Do graduate assistantships meet their intended purpose? Are GAs truly integral factions of the higher education community and in what ways? Are GAs truly dissatisfied with their role within the university, and if so, does anybody care?

With regards to that final question, judging by how little information is available on graduate assistants, one could easily assume the answer is no. Job satisfaction stands as one of the oldest, most belabored topics within industrial psychology and organizational communication research, and yet very little research on the job satisfaction of graduate assistants exists. In fact, what little research on GAs tends to focus on the effects of job dissatisfaction in GAs; specifically, how adverse attitudes contribute to their intent to unionize (Zinni, Singh, & MacLennan, 2005). In other words, there is virtually no research on the relationship of job satisfaction and GAs, particularly with respect to the factors which may lead to GA job dissatisfaction in the first place.

Adding to this discussion of a gap in research on GAs is the realization that very little statistical information about GAs is being collected. Unquestionably, some of this information gap can be attributed to general confusion about what GAs are and what GAs do. Point and case, while Peterson's, one of the most highly respected sources for graduate information, accurately explains that there are three different forms of GAs ("teaching assistants," "research assistants" and what they call "administrative interns"), it would appear that the federal government is unaware of these distinctions (Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 2004, p. 4). A detailed search into this government's web site and you will find only one category designated for GAs called "graduate teaching assistants," while the employment statistics for GAs "who primarily

perform non-teaching duties, such as laboratory research, should be reported in the occupational category related to the work performed” (both from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Division of Occupational Employment Statistics, n.d.). All of this basically means that the statistical data for GAs who conduct research (i.e., research assistants) or assist administration (i.e., general graduate assistants) are lumped together in some other unidentified category with workers who perform similar functions within an organization (though not necessarily even within the university setting).

Similar statistical shortcomings have been found with the data collected by other government agencies, namely the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Though NCES does collect detailed statistics on graduate assistants, such information is limited to teaching assistants and research assistants (Choy, Geis, & Malizio, 2002). Also, adding confusion to this issue is the fact that statistics on “first-professional students,” which are students attaining their first professional degrees in fields such as medicine (M.D.), law and other specialized health fields (i.e., “chiropractic, dentistry, optometry, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, podiatry, and veterinary medicine”), is included in the research on GAs (Choy et al., 2002, p. iv). The obvious concern with this inclusion is that first-professional student information will somehow distort GA statistics.

The reasons behind the statistical gap are unknown, although it is likely that funding sources and the manner in which such financial data is collected plays a part. While many graduate assistantships are funded through the federal government, there are graduate assistantships that are funded through alternate means. Moreover, although “federally funded research grants are used to cover research assistantships,” the fact that “assistantships are awarded by academic departments rather than financial aid offices, [makes] it difficult to collect accurate information” about graduate assistantships (Choy

et al., 2002, both p. 11). Also, while not explicitly stated, one may question whether the fact that graduate assistantships usually only last for 2-5 years (the former pertains to masters level assistantships and doctoral assistantships to the latter) may influence whether accurate data is being collected on GAs. The “transitory” -nature of the graduate assistantship experience has been mentioned as one of the many reasons why GAs should not be viewed as university employees (Stimpson, 2000, para. 38). Determination of the impact of these potential influences on the statistical accuracy of GAs will require further investigation.

Summary

While the causes of such statistical and empirical gaps in the graduate assistantship literature remain unknown, it is arguable that they send a message of graduate assistant-unimportance that challenges the notion that GAs “advance [the university’s] mission of educating students to be servant leaders...” (Seton Hall University Academic Affairs: Office of the Provost, 2005, p. 1). Although some limited effort has been made to investigate a potential outcome of GA job dissatisfaction (e.g., the formation of graduate unions), it is important to recognize that more research is still necessary to understand how job dissatisfaction is created and displayed in the GA population. In other words, there may be other potential products of GA job dissatisfaction deserving investigation, just like more research is needed into the potential antecedents of job dissatisfaction in GAs as well. The conduction of more research on the job satisfaction of GAs will help to provide a more cohesive picture of the graduate assistantship experience and serve to give voice to an often overlooked population within the higher education community.

Research Objectives

It is the purpose of this study to evaluate the level of job satisfaction of GAs in a major northeastern university. More specifically, the study will evaluate whether job descriptions mediate the relationship between graduate assistant expectations and job satisfaction. More simply put, the research question this study will address is:

- Do discrepancies between expectations and employer-provided information affect job satisfaction?

The two hypotheses this study will examine are:

- Hypothesis 1: There are discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations.
- Hypothesis 2: Discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations negatively affect the job satisfaction of GAs.

Definition of Terms

1. **Employer-provided information** is any written or verbal information (including a job description) given to an applicant so that they may better understand their position or the inner workings of the organization they are entering.
2. **Graduate assistants** refers to a) graduate students who perform various duties for the university community for 20 hours a week (i.e., teach classes, conduct research or assist administration) in return for tuition remittance and usually stipends, or b) graduate student workers who conduct administrative duties to support the work of university officials.
3. **Teaching Assistants** are graduate assistants who “conduct small classes, deliver lectures, correct class work, grade papers, council students and supervise laboratory groups” (Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences, 2004, p. 4).

4. **Research Assistants** are graduate assistants who “assist the research activities of a faculty member” (Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Science, 2004, p. 4).
5. **Turnover** is the “leaving behavior of employees when they sever their association with the organization” (Pearson, 1995, p. 405).

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study deals with an inherent setback in covering the subject of job satisfaction. While there are innumerable variables which impact job satisfaction, the author wishes to capture only those that pertain to employer-provided information or graduate assistant expectations. This is to say, while potentially valid sources of job dissatisfaction, it is not the intent of this research to examine any job dissatisfaction which may result from any interpersonal or work relationships that exist outside of the graduate assistantship.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Organizational entry is the process by which an individual becomes a member of an organization. While often described as “a two-sided process in which individuals choose organizations and organizations select individuals,” it is arguable that greater control of this process lies with organizations, who coordinate the recruitment of employees, set standards for entry and make selection decisions based on applicant-performance potential and organizational needs (Wanous, 1980, p. 18). Moreover, because the organization’s recruitment philosophy (i.e., whether it is more traditional or realistic) often influences the amount and validity of organizational information that is dispersed to applicants, organizations also influence applicant decisions of whether to join an organization (Wanous, 1980).

It is the goal of this chapter to highlight the impact of this organizational influence on applicant membership decisions, with particular emphasis on how employer-provided information (descriptions in particular) impacts applicant beliefs (i.e., expectations) about the job and the organization. Moreover, the chapter will discuss what long-term effects this initial organizational influence has on employee job satisfaction, as represented in current literature. It is intended that this literature review will provide the suitable background for discussion of how these elements of organizational entry and membership (employer-provided information, expectations and job satisfaction) relate to the graduate assistantship-experience.

Employer-Provided Information

Employer-provided information (EPI) is an umbrella term for any written and verbal information given to prospective employees of an organization to orient them to the position. The job description is likely to be the most commonly practiced form of EPI, and it is the primary focus of this section. The remaining elements of EPIs are covered much later in the literature review during the discussion of realistic job previews (RJPs), which are loosely described as any written or verbal information given to the prospective employees outside of an actual job description.

Description Basics

In a perfect world, an organization would never post a job opening without job analysis, an internal investigation determining “if it is actually necessary to hire an additional employee...or if the work load could be shifted to alleviate [the need for a] replacement” (Luszcz & Kleiner, 2000, para. 2). The job analysis would help to identify the type of skills and education needed to complete the objectives of that position, and ensure that these objectives line up with the strategic goals of the organization (Luszcz & Kleiner, 2000). This internal research would provide all the supporting information for creating a job description that is useful to and appropriate for the organization and the prospective employee.

Job descriptions are organizational roadmaps for prospective and current employees that define the responsibilities of a particular position. As they commonly vary in length and appearance, “there is no single formula for a good job description” (Karon, 1995, p. 84). Some are “mere outlines covering generalities,” while others are “finely tuned blueprints that detail specific duties and how employees will perform them, the exact percentage of time employees will spend on each task, and what equipment they

will use” (Joinson, 2001, both from para. 5). Common elements include the job title, a summation of the tasks required, and a depiction of the bare bone skill sets and education needed to carry out the job successfully (Justice, 2005; Karon, 1995; Luszcz & Kleiner, 2000; Perry & Kleiner, 2002).

Among various factors, two common influences on the variability of the job description is its dependence on the type of industry or organization (Joinson, 2001), and the type of the position (Karon, 1995). It is not uncommon for large corporations to use what is called the “skill-block” method of job descriptions, which “delineate specific responsibilities and skills needed for each level of advancement within the organization” (Joinson, 2001, para. 15). However, particularly, in highly volatile fields, like the world of information technology, providing such detailed job descriptions often prove useless or ineffective, since “the job evolves faster than [the description]” (Joinson, 2001, para. 16). As a result, such companies often opt for more generalized depictions of positions, grounded by “[competencies or] sets of behavior that won’t change, even as the means of executing them evolve with technology” (Joinson, 2001, p. 19). In this case, a more generalized, competency-based description allows the organization to provide useful, accurate information that is more likely to “withstand changes in technology and customer needs” (Joinson, 2001, para. 13).

Meanwhile, others say it is not only the industry that determines the level of detail a description involves, but that the level of the position, influences descriptions as well (Karon, 1995). Karon (1995) maintains that higher-ranked supervisors require more broad-based descriptions, while lower-ranked employees need precise accounts of their responsibilities. This is because as a director, their job has a more “big-picture” perspective, requiring the employee to “find creative solutions to enterprise problems rather than boast detailed knowledge of specifics...” (Karon, 1995, p. 84). Meanwhile

with lower-ranked “straight production-mode” positions, a person is needed “who can do one thing well,” necessitating a detailed depiction of responsibilities (Karon, 1995, p. 84).

At any rate, a well-crafted job description can fulfill many functions for an employee, throughout the progression of their involvement with an organization. During an interview, it is often the description that is used by the hiring manager to determine what qualifications are needed by the applicant (DeCamp, 1992; Perry & Kleiner, 2002) and to “encourage consistency with regard to the hiring process” (Luszcz & Kleiner, 2000, para. 5). Particularly if signed, the description serves as a tangible agreement between the employee and the organization (Joinson, 2001; Justice, 2005; Karon, 1995), “articulating the expectations of both parties” (Karon, 1995, p. 84).

Once hired, the description is ideally a reference tool used by the new employee, to help them understand their role within the organization (Joinson, 2001). In fact, managers and employees both use the job description--to outline career paths and to know when it is appropriate to promote (Doucette, 2002; Joinson, 2001). And lastly, as it is desirable for the job description to be in agreement with the goals measured in the performance review, the description can also serve to reinforce standards of performance and quality to which the employee is held accountable throughout the year (Doucette, 2002). In sum, at their best, job descriptions are “living, breathing documents” that help orchestrate the transition of a recruit into a seasoned employee of an organization (Doucette, 2002; Karon, 1995) and are communication tools for delineating how employee inputs lead to successes for the individual and the organization (Doucette, 2002).

Organizational Constraints to Keeping Descriptions/Job Information Accurate

Despite the varied benefits of the job description in principle, in practice, the description frequently proves useless within the organizational context. A large reason for their ineffectiveness pertains to the fact that most descriptions are inaccurate (Doucette, 2002; Joinson, 2001; Karon, 1995, Hunt, 2002). While their sole purpose is to delineate one's role within the organization, a common complaint is that most "don't explain what happens on a particular job" (Hunt, 2002, p. 15).

This point appears very counterintuitive without understanding the fact that most companies do not conduct thorough job analyses of their positions on a regular basis (Cardy & Dobbins, 1996). According to Hunt (2002) often, it is not until "an incumbent in the job who has performed well is about to be promoted, or when that person is leaving for some other reason when the job starts talking to you," meaning that a company begins to realize the need for an accurate job description (p. 15). Only then do the most adept companies begin surveying fellow co-workers to determine what the position entails (Hunt, 2002; Perry & Kleiner, 2002). Some companies do this in an informal manner, while others conduct detailed work assessments that gauge trends in the personality of individuals that were most successful with the job (Hunt, 2002). In addition, 360 degree feedback surveys are conducted, which collect the input of staff and supervisors associated with the person holding that position (Hunt, 2002).

Needless to say, there are many times when an organization will fail to conduct job analyses at all (Doucette, 2002; Karon, 1995). Often, organizational constraints like limited time, limited money or general workload demands prevent organizations from ensuring that job descriptions are current (Cardy & Dobbins, 1996). Also, just like an industry may be more prone to change than another, an organization itself may be similarly more prone to internal changes (i.e., mergers or leadership shifts) that will affect

maintaining the accuracy of job information (Buckley, Fedor, Carraher, Frink, & Marvin, 1997). As a result, stripped of their recency, job descriptions become a common source of frustration for new employees (Cardy & Dobbins, 1996).

Traditional Recruitment and the Accuracy of Employer-Provided Information

Besides “organizational constraints,” there is another common cause of inaccuracy in job descriptions that is an arguably greater source of frustration among employees. This is when in an effort to make the job or the organization appealing to job candidates, job descriptions are “written with the slipperiness of classifieds and personals” (Sanderberg, 2003, p. B1), or organizations will “emphasize the positives” (Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Wiese, & Carraher, 1998, p. 452) of a job and the company in order to keep desirable candidates from self-selecting out of consideration for the position (Buckley et al., 1998; Luszcz & Kleiner, 2000; Meglino, Denisi, & Ravlin, 1993). Such inaccuracies in job descriptions are often derivative of entire recruitment processes that commonly support presenting ‘deficient,’ or (“on a much less typical-[basis]”) ‘biased’ information (Wanous, 1980, p. 35). In other words, traditional recruitment philosophies which are often the organizational norm, are more preoccupied with “recruiting as many candidates as possible,” usually by omitting negative information or to a lesser degree by “injecting bias into information given out,” rather than “effective selection and retention” (Wanous, 1980, p. 34 and 35 respectively).

As Wanous (1980) argues, traditional recruitment is often “in conflict with the organizational ability to retain newcomers” for many reasons (p. 35). The first reason pertains to organizational survival of personnel departments. Personnel departments that maintain lower selection ratios (i.e., hiring a drastically lower number of job candidates than those who apply) can therefore “justify the need to spend money on a personnel department to do employee selection” (Wanous, 1980, p. 35). Whereas, if a company

having a higher acceptance of applicants (a higher selection ratio), will give the appearance of decreased need for a department to organize and coordinate employee selection and acceptance, or “less justification of [personnel department] budgets” (Wanous, 1980, p. 35).

While Wanous’s (1980) first argument lends truth from a strictly business/accounting perspective (that focuses on cost-benefits analysis), his argument appears like a cynical perspective of personnel departments without discussion of other reasons for the traditional recruitment philosophy. Attracting as many applicants as possible helps the personnel department justify its existence through lower selection ratios, but it also “gives the organization control over the influx of newcomers...[which] is an easy way to reduce the risk involved in bringing a newcomer on board” (Wanous, 1980, p. 36). Put simply, organizations believe “that [the better] an organization appears to those outsiders, the more applicants it will receive,” giving the organization a greater variety of applicants to match to organizational needs (Wanous, 1980, p. 36).

While this matching of organizational needs to applicants is a given within the recruitment and selection process, Wanous (1980) argues that the traditional perspective (supporting organizational control of what information is passed on to applicants and which applicants are chosen for organizational membership) leads to virtual disregard of the “matching of human needs and organizational climates” (p. 23). In other words, since the overarching goal of traditional recruitment is to tout the benefits of organizational membership (without inclusion of the negative aspects of the job) and to merely match employee skills (or performance potential) to the requirements of the position, employee needs (for accurate and complete information by which to determine the suitability of the position and organization) go unobserved and for the most part, unmet.

Organizational Recruitment and Candidate-Dependence on Accuracy

Alas, the tradition of ‘selling the organization’ begins early in the hire process, with the creation of an advertisement for the position (e.g., Buckley et al., 1997). In an attempt to lure top candidates, recruiters will commonly use embellishments to announce job openings (Luszc & Kleiner, 2000; Sanderberg, 2003). For example, according to Sandberg (2003), a recruiter will say the job fosters “‘character building’ when it really means the job stinks”, say the job involves ‘mentoring’ when it really means “you’ve got a staff so inept you’re a babysitter”, and claim that there it is a ‘team working environment’ when in reality the job has “noisy cubicles” (all quotes from p. B1). Invariably, the use of artful sales tactics are not only to attract the attention of job applicants, but are such common components of organizational recruitment repertoires, they are used during the actual interview process (Buckley et al., 1997; Buckley et al., 1998; Jackson, 1999; Luszc & Kleiner, 2000; Taylor, 1994).

From the start of the interview, job candidates are participants in a game of “bluff,” where both parties (the candidate and the organization) “seek to make [themselves] look attractive and gather information about [one another]” (Buckley et al., 1997, para. 9). To some degree, this “mask-wearing” (DeCamp, 1992) is expected (Decamp, 1992; Jackson, 1999; Wanous, 1980), however, usually it is the organizations who maintain the upper-hand, in that they have the ability to investigate the accuracy of candidate-provided information and can control the candidate’s access to information about the company (Buckley et al., 1997).

Candidates for a position are usually given written or verbal ‘sales material’ about the company (Taylor, 1994). This usually serves the purpose of giving the unfamiliar applicant some baseline information about the organization or the occupation, which may be of particular importance depending on the applicant’s knowledge of the workplace.

This dependence on complete, accurate information has been duly noted among college students just entering the job market because they usually have limited work experiences to draw from (i.e., Phillips, & Crain, 1996; Wanous, 1980). However, there is reason to believe that even with solid work experience, an applicant may still require organizational information because of sheer ignorance of industry-specific demands or constraints. A good example is in the trucking industry. Though many individuals may be superficially aware of what truckers do, such knowledge is limited in that they do not “know the complexity of truck driving, the heavy physical and emotional job demands [it entails]” (Taylor, 1994, p. 461). Incidentally, this lack of knowledge often puts the applicant at a disadvantage in that they are somewhat dependent on the organization to give them the accurate information necessary to determine the suitability of the position (Wanous, 1980).

This concept of applicant information-dependence is supported by Buckley et al. (1997), who notes that while organizations have numerous ways in which to verify the truthfulness of the applicant (i.e., through background and reference checks and examination of credit histories), the applicant has “few similar methods by which to verify the integrity of employer-provided information” (para. 18). Applicants rarely have opportunity to speak with former employees and are not given open access to current employees to complete a thorough investigation of the information provided (Buckley et al., 1997). Moreover, when applicants are given the opportunity to speak with the employer, applicants often “shy away from tough questions like working conditions and policies that might jeopardize their chances [of getting the position]” (Jackson, 1999, p. 10). Similarly, Buckley (1997) states that during the interview, “recruits perceive little opportunity to conduct ‘reference checks’ of the recruiter’s past hiring experiences...[for

fear] that an employer would react incredulously” knowing that the recruit was questioning the integrity of the organization (para. 18).

It is important to stress that this dependence on the organization for accurate information is not limited to those who are unfamiliar with the industry or the specific occupation. Though a more seasoned, interview-savvy candidate will be more successful in “divining information about the job and organization from the [interview] process” (Buckley et al., 1997, p. 5), to some degree, all applicants are at the mercy of organizations to provide factual information about the particular position and how it fits within the inner-workings of that specific organization (Buckley et al., 1997). This is because deciphering such information would require either extensive investigation into the culture of the organization, or membership and eventual socialization into that culture altogether (Schein, 1992).

Other Potential Causes of Inaccurate Descriptions

While not as commonly discussed within the literature on descriptions or the overall hiring process, there are other potential causes for inaccuracies in employer-provided information that do not originate from some level of deceit (Buckley et al., 1997). First, it is possible that the recruiter may not be knowledgeable enough of the specifics pertaining to the job and therefore may inadvertently omit the negative information necessary to evaluate the position (Buckley et al., 1997). Surprisingly, such can be true of the supervisor of the position, who may not have a detailed understanding of how his or her constituent fulfills their responsibilities (Buckley et al., 1997). The supervisor may therefore fail to convey this information to the applicant during the interview process (Buckley et al., 1997).

Secondly, even a seasoned employee may fail to make the recruit aware of the negative aspects of the position (Buckley, et al., 1997, Buckley et al., 1998). Reasons for

this may revolve around a fear of “being punished or of being disloyal” to the organization (Buckley et al., 1998, p. 452). Alternately, the long-term employee may not remember the negative aspects of a position (Buckley et al., 1997), especially after becoming “accustomed...to coping with the difficulties...overtime” (Buckley et al., 1998, p. 452). And finally, the possibility cannot be ignored that the seasoned employee may not inform the new recruit because they “never have experienced [perpetual] negative aspects of the job” (Buckley et al., 1997, para. 11). Taken all together, it seems plausible that although an organization may be devoted to providing truthful, complete depictions of the job and the company to the candidate, because attainment of this goal is dependent on the knowledge, memory or experiences of the particular individuals conducting the hire-process, inaccurate information may be disseminated.

Expectations

Expectations Basics

If the primary purpose of the job description and all other employer-provided information is to give the applicant an idea of the responsibilities of the position and how the organization works, than there is also an underlying assumption being made about its role in forming newcomer expectations about the job and the organization. The assumption being, that the expectations of newcomers are influenced in part by the information provided by organizations (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995; Karon, 1995; Wanous, 1980; Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992).

Most all newcomers to an organization enter with general expectations about the company and “their own ideas about what their prospective jobs entail” (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995, p. 2). Expectations vary from person to person, organization to organization. That is to say, newcomers expect that membership in a particular

organization can help in the achievement of varying rewards like level of pay, promotion, supervisor relations, and peer group interaction, among other rewards (Porter & Steers, 1973).

These rewards are usually easily relatable or matched to various immediate and long-term needs (Vanderberg & Scarpello, 1990). Wanous (1980) discusses the grouping of these needs into three categories, “existence,” “relatedness” and “growth.” Existence needs focus on an individual’s “desire for very tangible, material things,” while relatedness deals with the individual’s social involvements (Wanous, 1980, p.12). For example, the need for a specific salary, benefits or safety standards fall under the existence needs category, while the desire to work with people that respect you or provide open communication and support are types of relatedness needs (Wanous, 1980). Growth needs, on the other hand, deal with “an inward orientation toward one’s self,” like the desire for interesting or autonomous work (Wanous, 1980, p. 12). The growing complexity of each category (i.e., existence to relatedness to growth needs), and its range from more extrinsic to intrinsic qualities, helps to delineate how wide-spanning an individual’s expectations about a job or a company can potentially be. The greater ability with which a company appears in being able to meet these needs, the greater potential that an applicant will be motivated to vie for the available position (Wanous, 1980).

Impact of Employer-Provided Information on Expectations

Though it is true that research suggests that applicants use employer-provided information to assess whether various needs will be met, this dependence on employer-provided information can vary based on level of knowledge and experience (Wanous, 1980). Similar to an earlier discussion, about the greater dependence of applicants on employers to provide accurate information when there is greater naiveté about a career field, the less organizational or industry-specific knowledge the applicant brings to that

position, the more likely it is that the applicant will depend on that employer-provided information to base job-related expectations (Wanous, 1980). For example, much of the research shows that with recent college graduates, the “transition from student of higher education to employee is often difficult because of the differences between students’ expectations and employment realities” (Phillips & Crain, 1996, p. 21).

However, again, just as with the previous discussion about applicant-dependence on employer accuracy, there is reason to believe that even without being a recent graduate, an applicant may have similarly inflated expectations generated by a general lack of knowledge about a particular company. (Wanous, 1980) states that “the greatest disconfirmation of expectations by reality occurs for one’s first job [within a company], rather than for later jobs held within the company” (Wanous, 1980, p. 27). The reason for such decreased disconfirmation in veterans is that they are both more able to “switch to jobs that are closer to expectations” and possess “insider experience [that] teaches individuals what to expect” (Wanous, 1980, p. 28). In other words, without ‘insider experience’, many applicants find themselves prone to believing the often skewed information of recruiters, which contribute to inflated expectations and excessive optimism about the organization or the position (Wanous, 1980).

It is interesting to note, that regardless of a particular applicant’s knowledge-set, the literature suggests that there is variability of accuracy for employer-provided information (Wanous, 1980). That is to say, even though newcomers tend to have heightened expectations in general, there is some variability in how grounded some of their expectations are to reality. Wanous, (1980) states that more extrinsic needs (e.g., salary or benefits) tend to agree more with reality (i.e., tend to be more accurate), ~~invariably because of the~~ ease with which it takes for applicants to check on this information (i.e., during interviews or discussions with employees). More intrinsic

factors (e.g., personal growth attained through the job) are usually subjective or “too abstract for [applicants] to obtain solid information” (Wanous, 1980, p. 30).

At any rate, the overarching conclusion within the literature is that the combination of overly positive newcomer expectations and often inaccurate (overly positive or incomplete) employer-provided information leaves “reinforced unrealistic expectations” as the unfavorable result (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995, p 2).

Consequences of Unrealistic Expectations

The interface of newcomer (applicant) expectations and the experiences of the new employee are considered at length through Porter and Steers (1973) met-expectations hypothesis. Through a two-fold proposition, Porter and Steers’ speculate that: (1) new employees will compare post-hire experiences with their pre-hire expectations, and that (2) “when an individual’s expectations are not substantially met, his propensity to withdraw would increase” (Porter & Steers, 1973, p. 152). In other words, individuals naturally compare their initial expectations of what a job or organization will be like to what the job or organization is like in reality. These real-life experiences can either support or disconfirm pre-entry expectations, while “the discrepancy between what a person encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter” contributes to the respective satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the employee (Porter & Steers, 1973, p. 152). Confirming experiences are anticipated to lead to increased job satisfaction (hence the term, “met expectations”), while disconfirming experiences are hypothesized to generate dissatisfaction and the eventual physical withdrawal of an employee from the organization (turnover).

One distinction of Porter and Steers (1973) met expectations hypothesis deserves further attention before discussion of the use of this hypothesis in current research.

Porter & Steers (1973) clearly states that not all expectations should be considered important enough to lead to job dissatisfaction or have a “uniform impact on [the] withdrawal decisions” of employees (Porter & Steers, 1973, p. 152). On the contrary, “only those expectations for important aspects of the job or organization are included in the met expectations hypothesis,” as there are a host of expectations that could be deemed “irrelevant or inconsequential” (Poland & Davis, 1992, p. 289 for both). Determination of the importance or relevancy of different expectations is individual-specific, since “different employees can have quite different expectations with respect to payoffs or rewards in a given organizational or work situation” (Porter & Steers, 1973, p. 152).

The met expectations hypothesis is a highly-regarded theory by organizational practitioners and human resource professionals; however, as a stand-alone theory, it has been scarcely-researched within industrial/organizational literature (Poland & Davis, 1992). However, research on an employer intervention strategy, the realistic job preview (RJP), makes use of a multitude of theories, including met expectations, to explain its effectiveness in reducing employee turnover. More simply put, the RJP literature has served to “keep the [met expectations] topic alive [since] RJP represents one way of creating met expectations” (Poland & Davis, 1992, p. 288).

Realistic Recruitment and the Realistic Job Preview

Traditional recruitment processes which support organizational control over selection and the misinformation of prospective employees, act to ensure the availability of large selection pools for matching applicant abilities to position requirements and organizational needs (Wanous, 1980). However, this heightened control is at great expense to the individual and potentially an even greater expense to the organization because of a greater possibility of employee turnover generated by unmet expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Wanous, 1980) and a mismatch between newcomer needs and

organizational climates (Wanous, 1980). Meanwhile, on the other end of the spectrum resides realistic recruitment, which by “presenting the outsider with all pertinent information without distortion,” gives the applicant optimal opportunity to gauge whether the organization and position will meet individual needs, and provides a baseline for setting employee expectations (Wanous, 1980, p. 37).

The primary tool for this form of recruitment is the realistic job preview (RJP), which can be generally described as “any method to give recruits a balanced picture of the job they are considering for employment” (Roth & Roth, 1995, para. 2). From booklets, to one-on-one sessions or videotapes, (among its numerous other forms), the RJP provides not only positive information of available benefits like “training and development or the opportunity to use acquired skills,” but job-specific or company-related negative information that could be potentially discouraging to a newcomer to the organization (Roth & Roth, 1995, para. 2). Ideally, the resulting “insider’s or skeptic’s view” of the job and organization has mutual benefits for the company and individual, and is an organizational intervention tool supported often within the human resource profession (Jackson, 1999, p. 10).

Since its inception in the mid 50’s and burgeoning popularity of use by practitioners in the 80’s and 90’s to present day, the RJP represents a large body of research that supports understanding how to present “an openness and honesty in spirit” among organizations to prospective employees (Roth & Roth, 1995, para. 21). The RJP has been researched for a variety of organizational purposes, though the prevailing use of the RJP is to lower the often inflated expectations of new recruits, as a way to reduce new employee dissatisfaction (e.g., McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985). RJPs ideally provide organizations the opportunity “to ‘vaccinate’ new recruits, or to make [their] expectations...more congruent with real job experiences”

(Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995, para. 1), a result which, if Porter and Steers' (1973) met expectations theory is correct, leads to a greater potential for increased confirmations of expectations, followed by increased job satisfaction.

Other RJP Uses or Benefits

The increase in realistic information by the RJP has been associated with other processes within organizational entry and membership including employee self-selection and coping mechanisms. More specifically, application of RJP's have been linked to increased dropout rates among applicants from the recruitment process (Premack & Wanous, 1985), presumably because of how increased realism provides applicants the ability to self-select out of jobs that somehow do not meet their expectations or needs (Wanous, 1980). Initially, this increase in dropout rates may appear to be a confirmation of employer fears that increased honesty about the negative aspects of the job or organization will result in a wave of organizational undesirability (Buckley et al., 1998). To some degree, this notion has been corroborated by the literature. For example Bretz & Judge (1998) found that the most qualified applicants left the job because they had other job opportunities, while less qualified applicants stayed in the running because they lacked that ability.

However, an increase in dropout rates among new recruits can also provide mutual benefits for the individual and the employee. By increasing the amount of realistic job information provided to applicants, the employer can effectively "discourage a [prospective] employee who is less likely to survive on a job from accepting extended job offers" (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995, para. 1). In other words, employers benefit because they save the time, money and organizational effort associated with hiring an individual that would have ended up quitting the job anyway (Sandberg, 2003). Meanwhile the applicant benefits as well because they have been given the opportunity to

make an informed decision about the suitability of the position, a decision “they can believe [has been] made...without coercion or strong inducements” (Wanous, 1980, p. 42). Moreover, much of the literature supports the notion that greater positive affect toward an organization and lower turnover will result for applicants who forgo the opportunity to opt out of the running for a position after hearing the negative job information (Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Sandberg, 2003).

Another proclaimed benefit of the RJP is its use as a coping tool for new recruits (Buckley et al., 1998; Vanderberg & Scarpello, 1990)—particularly with jobs where turnover is a common problem, like entry level or low paying positions (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Simply put, knowing the negative aspects of the job beforehand helps to prepare new recruits for adverse situations or the difficult demands of the position (Buckley et al., 1998; Roth & Roth, 1995; Sanderberg, 2003; Vanderberg & Scarpello, 1990). This advance preparation has been linked to job satisfaction because there is a decreased likelihood that the new recruit will be shocked and turned off when met with a setback of the job (e.g., Buckley et al., 1998). Also, so long as the job preview includes information that helps to clarify the expectations of the position (Premack & Wanous, 1985), there is some evidence supporting an increase in performance (Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985). This impact on performance has been debated, however. For example, Taylor (1994) found that administering a RJP did not increase truck driver performance whatsoever.

At any rate, an overarching suggestion by the literature is that RJPs may have many potential uses within the organization, as an employer intervention for deflating employee expectations, as a self-selection tool for new recruits, or as a measure for ~~increasing new employee~~ coping behaviors. All of these benefits have been suggested as likely ways to increase the job satisfaction of employees, decreasing turnover among new

recruits (i.e., Premack & Wanous, 1985) or helping to establish the foundation for longer term employment relationships in effect (Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Despite all this evidence, support for the RJP has not gone undisputed. In fact, enough conflicting information has surfaced about RJP research that the usefulness of the RJP and the met-expectations hypothesis has been questioned.

Shortcomings of RJP Research

Throughout the years, there have been a variety of research (actual studies and numerous meta-analyses, e.g., Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1999; Meglino, DeNisi, Youngblood & Williams, 1988; and Taylor, 1994; or, McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Premack & Wanous, 1985; and Wanous et al., 1992, respectively) investigating the effectiveness and potential uses of the RJP within organizations. RJP research has been conducted within a breadth of fields, using a host of participants varying from MBA graduates, to U.S. military recruits, to individuals entering the trucking industry, among others (see Irving & Meyer, 1994; Meglino et al., 1988; Taylor, 1994). However, though RJPs have been emphatically supported by human resource and organizational communications practitioners, support for RJPs within academia has been equally varied, with little consensus except where potential short-comings may lie.

Consistent with Porter & Steers (1973) met expectations hypothesis, a majority of RJP research involve some comparison of discrepancies between prior expectations and post-hire experiences of individuals. However, a large amount of controversy has surrounded most RJP research because of variability in the “operational definition of this discrepancy and the appropriate statistical analysis” of this difference (Wanous et al., 1992, p. 289).

Though common sense lends to the collection of data on pre-entry expectations and post-entry experiences at two different points in time (i.e., before and after the recruit

joins the organization), assumingly the inherent difficulty (financial and time commitment) associated with acquiring all the pre-entry expectations and post-hire experiences of prospective employees, leads most researchers to collect information on both these measures at the same time (once the individual has become a new employee). This act alone introduces potential threats to validity and reliability because researchers are relying on the memory of participants (which are subjective, easily influenced and sometimes wrong) and treating it as fact or truth (Irving & Meyer, 1994; Irving & Meyer, 1999; and Wanous et al., 1992).

Adding more controversy is the fact that most researchers make use of a statistical analysis procedure called residual difference scores. Residual difference scores are intended for measurement of the same data at different time points. Many researchers profess that the use of residual difference scores is empirically inappropriate because though expectations and experiences are similar variables, are not the same (Irving & Meyer, 1994; Irving & Meyer, 1999; Hom et al., 1999). These methodological limitations have been said to “make the investigation of the effect of met expectations on work attitudes and behaviors misleading...and that the use of difference scores and retrospective measures of met-expectations have resulted in an overstatement of support for the hypothesis” (Irving & Meyer, 1994, p. 94).

It seems that criticism of RJP research is not just empty stabs at met expectations hypothesis. For example, in an effort to prove how failing to measure pre-entry expectations and post-entry experiences are separate constructs, Irving & Meyer (1994) conducted a longitudinal study where each variable was measured and treated as separate constructs, analyzed using polynomial regression analysis. A major finding of this study was that “post-entry work experiences alone contribute significantly to the prediction of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover” (p. 948), all of which suggests

that met-expectations may not heavily affect the job satisfaction of new employees and that “organizations should instead focus on providing new recruits with positive work experiences rather than confirming pre-entry expectations” (Irving & Meyer, 1994, p. 948).

It should be noted that many other studies have surfaced in response to these methodological issues, each with their own explanation as to why RJPs or the met-expectations hypothesis is or is not valid and useful. For example, Hom et al. (1999) reanalyzed data from a previous study (i.e., Hom et al., 1998) after (Irving & Meyer, 1999) found that Hom et al. (1998)’s “use of ‘residual gain scores’ to measure met expectations...creates the same problems as does the use of difference scores” (Irving & Meyer, 1999, p. 85). Irving & Meyer (1999) made the overarching conclusion that Hom et al. (1998) was yet another group of researchers to overstate the role of met-expectations in job satisfaction, and that their measures “create [artificial] relations between met expectations and one or more component variables (i.e., coping behaviors or attributions of employer honesty) of the difference score [besides just job satisfaction]” (p. 88).

At any rate, Hom et al. (1999)’s reanalysis of their “residual gain scores” produced results suggesting that “met-expectations is a critical mediating mechanism, having direct effects on job satisfaction and indirect effects on organizational commitment, withdrawal cognitions and actual turnover through job satisfaction and other medication mechanisms” (i.e., coping efficacy and perceived employer honesty) (p. 98). Moreover, Hom et al. (1999) made the suggestion that greater investigation may be warranted on how the level of experience with the occupation may affect the need or perceived usefulness of the RJP and that discrepancies in results could potentially deal

more with an issue of continuing replications of studies rather than “displacing a well-entrenched doctrine such as met expectations theory” (p. 112).

Job Satisfaction

Job Dissatisfaction and Turnover

Though the verdict may still be out as to the effectiveness of RJPs and the role of met expectations within industrial/organizational literature, employers have taken greater consideration of job satisfaction and its impact on employee behaviors within the organization (i.e., Wanous, 1980). This is because job dissatisfaction can have very negative consequences for an organization, particularly with respect to the performance, organizational commitment and job survival of employees, among other behaviors (i.e., Hom et al., 1999; Wanous, 1980). However, of all the behaviors linked to job dissatisfaction, turnover has gained the most attention, primarily because “it is a practical problem that is exclusively field oriented” (Popvich & Wanous, 1982, p. 570). That is to say, turnover is a common obstacle for employers, to which organizations attribute a significant amount of financial burden every year (DeCamp, 1992; Jackson, 1999; Perry & Kleiner, 2002; and Wanous, 1980).

The estimated impact of turnover within organizations varies, depending on the source. Perry & Kleiner (2002) estimates that turnover costs organizations a total of “30-50% over the new hire’s salary” (p. 6), while DeCamp (1992) states that direct and indirect costs of hiring new staff totals approximately double the vacant employee’s salary. Meanwhile with a dollar estimate of \$15,000 to \$50,000 per position, Jackson (1999) offers the most comprehensive list of expenses associated with turnover which include:

planning and co-ordination to analyze a job, preparation of recruitment ads, executive searches, travel and relocation costs, the immediate loss of organizational and technical knowledge, project delays while searching for a replacement, and productivity delays associated with the new employee learning the job, or veteran employees tacking up the slack and participating in the selection/orientation process. (p. 10)

Despite current estimates of the impact of job satisfaction, it is unknown how much of this cost can be attributed to inaccuracies in information provided to the applicant, or unmet expectations. However, according to Jackson (1999), of the top six reasons for untimely newcomer turnover, two of them appear as though they could be avoided by a more accurate relay of information before hiring.

More specifically, while it may be simply unavoidable that an “employee simply accepts a position until a better offer comes in,” or that some “employees discover that although they sweet talked hiring parties into believing they had top-notch skills, they can’t or don’t want to do the work,” there are at least two top reason for untimely newcomer turnover that could be avoided with employer honesty (Jackson, 1999, p. 10). The reasons are: (1) “if an applicant dislikes the working conditions and they were presented more advantageously during the interview,” or (2) “if the employee dislikes the person they work with or for because the supervisor acted charming during the interview but turned rude and hostile on the job” (both from Jackson, 1999, p. 10). Perhaps DeCamp (1992) says it best:

There is no lack of competent professionals in this country. The reason behind 85% of job changes is organizational incompatibility. Disgruntled employees may have good reason to think they have been sold a bill of goods, not because of

deliberate falsehood, but because the hiring process failed to match the applicant to the real job, the real management style, the real corporate culture. (p. 45)

Diverging Beliefs about the Positive Effects of Employee Job Satisfaction

Considering that researchers have been successful at quantifying the negative effects of job dissatisfaction with turnover, one might automatically assume that comparable attention is being placed on the positive effects of job satisfaction as well. To some extent this is true in that some researchers have found that higher job satisfaction has been linked to positive effects for the organization (i.e., Bavendam Research Incorporated, 2000; Brooks, 2000). More specifically, in a study by Bavendam Research Incorporated (2000), higher job satisfaction in employees was found to lead to greater concern for the quality of work, and increases in productivity, organizational commitment and retention rates. Similarly, Brooks (2000) found that “there was a direct and quantifiable link between employee variables like job satisfaction, enthusiasm, commitment, capability and internal service quality and customer variables like satisfaction and loyalty” (p. 41). Moreover, what made the relationship between ‘employee variables’ and ‘customer variables’ so important, is that they were both directly linked to the financial success of the organization (Brooks, 2000).

Despite such support for these positive effects of job satisfaction, there are many researchers that continually insist that “the time and energy required to improve satisfaction [in employees] seems impractical and out of place today” (Crow and Hartman, 1995, p. 34). This is because an overall belief that many organizations are just assuming that increased job satisfaction will increase productivity when in actuality the causes of employee job satisfaction are so multifaceted that there is a very small amount of factors that can be influenced by any actions within the organizational context (Crow and Hartman, 1995). Crow and Hartman (1995) offer individual differences like “a

predisposition to happiness or dissatisfaction,” which seems to plague employees regardless of the organization or work setting, as an example of an attitudinal difference, which is unlikely to change irrespective of any organizational acts to improve satisfaction. They insist that “work habits and attitudes to employers are in the long run fairly stable...and though we may briefly celebrate a happy or satisfying event with some positive behavioural change or even by picking up the pace at work, the change is generally short-lived” (p. 34).

Middleground on Positive Effects of Less Employee Job Dissatisfaction

Given the divergence in beliefs on whether there are positive organizational effects associated with job satisfaction in employees, it is surprising that there does appear to be some middleground within current literature. There is resounding agreement among most all perspectives that “negative is stronger than positive” or, that “dissatisfaction seems to be more motivating than satisfaction” (Bavendam Research Incorporated, 2000, p. 1). Perhaps, Crow and Hartman (1995) put it best with the concession that “the feelings associated with a job-related gain are short-lived, whereas the feelings associated with job-related loss linger on and tend to drag us down” (p. 36).

Interestingly enough, within this concession lies the happy medium in job satisfaction research. This is because although there is much disagreement over whether increased job satisfaction leads to organizational improvements, the effects of “the absence of job dissatisfaction” cannot be denied as a strong influencer on employee performance, which ties directly back to organizational bottom line (Crow and Hartman, 1995, p. 36). Moreover, Crow and Hartman (1995) go as far to say that “a primary role of management should be to remove road-blocks to effective performance...eliminate obvious sources of dissatisfaction and provide an environment free as possible of internally generated job dissatisfaction” (p. 38).

Summary of Current Literature

Organizational entry is a complex process by which the actions or decisions of new recruits and organizations influence whether a relationship between the organization and applicant is forged (Wanous, 1980). However, arguably, the increased control an organization exerts over the recruitment of applicants, specifically with respect to the amount and validity of information that is disseminated, can have a profound impact on whether a recruit decides to join the organization or if the new employee will be satisfied with their job (Wanous, 1980). The previously presented literature review details this complex organizational relationship, that is, the relationship between descriptions, expectations and job satisfaction. Here are the highlights, which are anticipated to have some relevance to the graduate assistant experience:

- Descriptions and other employer provided information can play an important role in communicating the expectations of the position and orienting the new employee to the organization.
- Commonly descriptions are often inaccurate because of infrequent job analysis or because of traditional organizational recruitment processes that focus more on organizational needs than those of the individual.
- Employees often enter a job with very inflated expectations, particularly when one has limited experience or knowledge of the position.
- Misinformation (caused by information gaps or biased information) often negatively impact employee expectations, leading to an increased potential for disconfirming post-entry experiences.
- Disconfirming post-entry experiences are hypothesized to affect employee behavior, job dissatisfaction specifically.

- One of strongest links in response to job dissatisfaction is turnover, which is very heavily observed by organizations because of the financial burdens associated.
- In an attempt to prevent this expense, many organizations have begun to incorporate RJPs into their recruitment process, in an attempt to provide new recruits with a more realistic perception of the job and the organization.
- However, conflicting evidence remains as to whether RJPs are effective in reducing employee expectations and whether this actually reduces turnover.
- There is conflicting evidence about the importance of ensuring employees are truly satisfied at work.
- Greater evidence is available suggesting that the absence of dissatisfaction (rather than increased job satisfaction) is a worthy goal for employers that will effectively lead to gains in employee performance, which link directly to profits for organizations.

Graduate Assistant Organizational Entry

Introduction

The present literature review provides a suitable starting point for discussion of the organizational entry, membership and job satisfaction of graduate assistants.

However, given this breadth of research, the limited amount of research on GAs (see discussion in Chapter 1) places constraints on the how relatable this research is to the actual recruitment and membership experiences of most graduate assistants. Still, given GA research shortcomings, there are certainly various aspects of the recruitment process can be assumed universal without too many concerns about generalizability. With this in mind, when feasible, the author will make an effort to delineate which aspects of

organizational entry are possibly characteristic of the author's university and which are likely to be representative of most all graduate assistant experiences.

Recruitment of GAs

It would be difficult to verify what form of recruitment permeates most universities, however, the author deduces that since the ability "to attract newcomers" is likely to be in agreement or conflict with the "effective selection and retention of them" (realistic or traditional recruitment respectively), the determination of a university's recruitment philosophy is likely to be related to the level of accuracy and completeness information is disseminated about GAs (Wanous, 1980, both p. 34). Certainly, the way in which a university chooses to make such information available for the consideration of GAs is an important factor as well. In other words, a university that seems very open in their manner of distributing complete, accurate information to its audience would most likely be a university that practices realistic recruitment. However, a university that is more preoccupied with "the practice of 'selling' the organization to outsiders," by focusing predominately on advertising the positive aspects of the organization or by not making accurate or complete information about the organization or position available, would most likely be an organization with more traditional recruitment proclivities.

Using this rationale, it seems likely that no single recruitment philosophy would be the norm for selection and recruitment of graduate assistants, that each university would have their own stance on the issue. For example, North Carolina State University (North Carolina State University Graduate Teaching Assistants' Handbook, n.d.) has a detailed website which offers information about the application process, duties and expectations of their graduate employees, along with various reports, brochures and handbooks that help to paint a comprehensive picture of what the graduate assistantship will be like at that university. Meanwhile, Seton Hall University provides more limited

information to prospective GAs about the graduate experience, exemplified by the fact that very little information is available online and the university only recently created a graduate assistant handbook in Fall 2005.

At this time, the accuracy of such employer-provided information is unknown; knowledge of this will assist in determining what kind of recruitment process is prevalent in this university, if not most all universities with graduate assistants.

GA Expectations

Again, very little information is available on this within the literature; this study hopes to shed light on GA expectations, i.e., determining what form of needs (existence, “relatedness” and “growth”) are the most important with respect to acquiring the graduate assistantship (Wanous, 1980). The author anticipates that the existence need of tuition reimbursement is a great motivator, arguably one of the largest motivating factors for students to become graduate assistants in the first place. Moreover, considering the fact that even when issued a stipend, the amount is usually so modest, tuition remittance is really the major form of reimbursement. The author anticipates that consistent with the literature, (i.e., Wanous 1980) graduate assistants will have the most grounded expectations pertaining to payment. Determination of what other expectations prospective GAs bring to the position, and whether these expectations are at all affected by the information given about being GAs, is another goal of the research.

GA Job Satisfaction

In principle, GAs, like most all employees, have the ability to exert some control of the organizational process by choosing to remain in consideration for a position or by their ability to quit the job at anytime. However, considering the fact that for most GAs, quitting their position would mean dealing with the hefty financial burden of paying tuition, it is the belief of the author that few GAs voluntarily leave their assistantship.

The more appropriate, ultimate aim of this research is to determine whether GAs are dissatisfied, and if so, what aspect of these feelings are attributable to discrepancies between GA expectations and employer-provided information.

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature focused on a variety of themes that could affect the job satisfaction of graduate assistants. To test these conclusions, the author will conduct quantitative research using an online survey.

The survey was developed for review and approval of Seton Hall University's Institutional Review Board in January 2006. The survey was approved for use in February 2006.

The survey consists of 36 questions; twenty-five substantive and eleven demographic. The substantive questions were designed to obtain data on the subjects' perceptions and experiences as a graduate assistant, including: their recollection of pre-entry expectations, what (if any) employer-provided information was provided during the recruitment stage, specifics pertaining to their recruitment experiences and their recollection of experiences once they had effectively entered the graduate assistant position. The demographic questions seek to classify the subjects' gender, age, what type of graduate assistant role they play or played (i.e, GA, TA, or RA) and for what particular field of study they are or were pursuing. Twenty of the questions use the Likert scale for measurement; the others are "yes/no" or multiple choice, with opportunity for clarification of answers in a free response section next to the question or at the close of the survey.

The author believes that the contents of the survey will answer the research question, "Do discrepancies between expectations and employer-provided information affect job satisfaction?" as well as the subsidiary questions:

1. Are there discrepancies between employer-provided information and the expectations of GAs?
2. If discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations exist, do they negatively affect the job satisfaction of GAs? In what ways?

The survey will target all current and past graduate assistants at a major northeastern university, who have been GAs for at least one semester. Since this study will be a comparison of the how graduate assistantships were represented to GAs (i.e., employer-provided information) and their expectations of the position as they relate to job satisfaction, GAs are the primary subjects of the survey. The author believes that making one semester as a GA is a sufficient requirement for participation in the study. Such a requirement is necessary to obtain meaningful data pertinent to the research and subsidiary questions. The author holds that GAs will be willing to participate, as the results could provide valuable insight into the organizational entry and membership process of graduate assistants, while providing an opportunity to showcase the experiences of an under-researched population within the higher education community.

Initial subjects will be identified by using a starter-list of GAs available in the Deans office of a college at the university. The GAs will be invited to participate in the study via an email request that explains the purpose of the study and includes a link to the online survey. Participation is voluntary and all responses are confidential; the email will indicate this as well. The participation of other GAs—those not on the list—is anticipated through recruitment by those who have participated. The survey-invite will encourage participants to forward the email to other prospective participants.

Using a web-based survey service called Zoomerang, the survey will be posted online for a period of 30 days during February and March 2006. The site may be accessed on the internet at <http://info.zoomerang.com>. The online survey method was

selected to obtain the maximum number of participants, to retain the anonymity of the participants, to create a convenient way for participants to complete and return the survey, and to provide the author with an accurate means to collect and analyze the data.

Zoomerang will collect the responses and provide the initial results.

The desired response rate is 50-100 out an approximate pool of 160 subjects (an estimated number of GAs at the university in Fall 2005); although potentially, the pool could be infinitely larger depending on the number of participant-referrals. Partial answers will not be accepted for final data analysis.

The author expects the research to prove that job descriptions mediate the relationship between graduate assistant expectations and job satisfaction, that a discrepancy between graduate assistantship descriptions and the expectations of prospective graduate assistants exists, that this discrepancy is largely due to omissions or biases in descriptions that affect the expectations of graduate assistants, and that this discrepancy negatively affects the job satisfaction of graduate assistants. The author also hopes that the survey will serve to begin discussion about how the job satisfaction of graduate assistants can be improved to boost the overall organizational outputs of the institution.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Survey Responses

To examine the research question, “Do discrepancies between expectations and employer-provided information affect job satisfaction of GAs?”, a web-based survey was distributed. Within two weeks of launching the survey, over 65% of the minimum goal of 50 respondents was reached. By the close of the survey, 54 GAs had completed the survey, for a response rate totaling 108%.



Below is a quantitative breakdown of the survey questions with some initial analysis. This analysis and the associated questions are generally organized by which aspect of the thesis they were examining (i.e., demographic questions, job descriptions and employer-provided information, expectations, job satisfaction, and so on). As the questions are organized for ease of discussion, they do not appear in the order they were for the actual survey. While discussed, free response questions are not listed here; these questions can be viewed in Appendix A, where the survey is presented in its entirety.




Participant Demographics

The only stipulation for participation in this study was to have been a graduate assistant for at least one semester. The following demographic questions were asked in order to develop a profile of the subjects who participated in this research project.


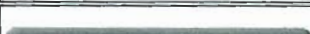
According to the following question, only one participant was a former GA; the remaining 53 were currently GAs. The next question shows that 42 respondents were graduate assistants, 11 were teaching assistants, and only 1 was a research assistant. In

general, the ratio of GAs to TAs and RAs seems to be consistent with the actual ratios of the student body. By far, there are more GA positions (spanning academic departments and various administrative offices) than TA positions (for which there are only a handful positions available per academic department). The pool of RAs at this university are limited to the few positions available in just one graduate science department, where their compensation is covered by research grants.

26. Are you currently a graduate assistant?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes		53	98%
No		1	2%
Total		54	100%

27. What type of graduate assistant are you?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
(TA) Teaching Assistant		11	20%
(RA) Research Assistant		1	2%
(GA) Graduate Assistant		42	78%
Total		54	100%

More females completed this survey than males; to be exact, 57% to 43% respectively.

32. What sex are you?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Male		23	43%
Female		31	57%
Total		54	100%

47% of the GAs surveyed were under 25 years old, while 40% were between 25 and 29 years. 8% were between 30 and 34 years old and 6% were forty or more years old. No GAs were in the 35-39 years age bracket.

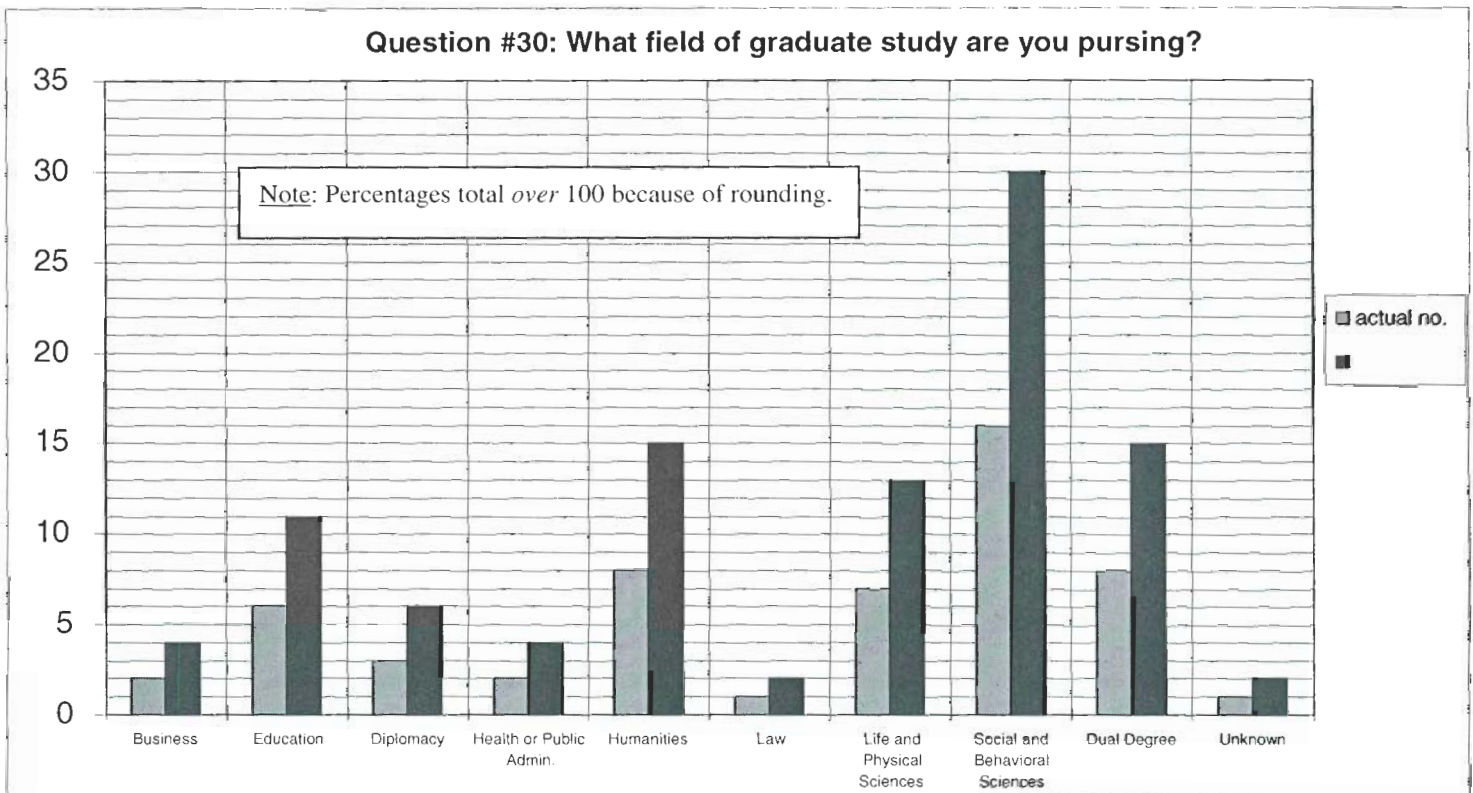
31. What age are you?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Under 25 years		25	47%
25-29 years		21	40%
30-34 years		4	8%
35-39 years		0	0%
40+ years		3	6%
Total		53	100%

According to the following question, the participants came from a wide-range of experience levels as a GA. 15% of those surveyed were GAs for one semester, 35% were GAs for two semesters, 19% for three semesters and 26% had been GAs for four semesters. 6% had been GAs for five semesters or more. Buckley et al. (1997), suggests that as the length of employment increases, an employee can get comfortable with the negatives of a job that initially may have bothered them. However, cross tabulations of the length of time as a GA and various job satisfaction questions showed no variability in response.

28. How long have you been a graduate assistant? Check the box for the longest time period completed.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
One semester		8	15%
Two semesters		19	35%
Three semesters		10	19%
Four semesters		14	26%
Five semesters or more		3	6%
Total		54	100%

Most participants (67%) were pursuing a masters degree, 19% a dual masters degree, and 13% a doctoral degree. There was one GA (2%) who was pursuing a J.D. and selected other for this question.



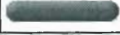

29. What type of graduate degree are you pursuing?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Masters		36	67%
Doctoral		7	13%
Dual Degree		10	19%
<input type="button" value="VIEW"/> Other, please explain:		1	2%
Total		54	100%




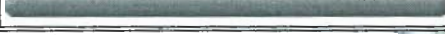
As can be seen in the above chart, for this study, it appears that GAs were pursuing a variety of fields of study. According to the following question, 30% study the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 25% study the Humanities, 13% Life and Physical Sciences, and 10% Education. 6% study Diplomacy, 4% Business or Health or Public

Administration, and 3% Law. 15% were pursuing Dual Degrees, while 2% (1 GA) selected "Other," without further elaboration.



According to the survey, a majority (59%) of the GAs surveyed were pursuing their graduate degree within six months to a year after completing their bachelors. 9% returned to school one to two years after their bachelors, 22% after two to six years, and 9% returned after six or more years.

33. How many years after receiving your bachelors did you pursue this graduate degree?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
6 months - 1 year		32	59%
over 1 year - 2 years		5	9%
over 2 years- 6 years		12	22%
over six years+		5	9%
Total		54	100%

81% of GAs surveyed did not have another paying job outside of being a graduate assistant, while 19% did have another paying job.

34. Do you have another paying job outside of being a graduate assistant?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes		10	19%
No		44	81%
Total		54	100%

However, 44% of GAs surveyed receive other forms of financial assistance. 56% do not receive any other forms of financial assistance. While this response suggests that a majority of GAs need the graduate assistantship to afford their graduate education, a later question under the job satisfaction section covers the distinction of whether GAs feel financially tied to their graduate assistantship.

35. Do you receive other forms of financial assistance outside of your graduate assistantship?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes		24	44%
No		30	56%
Total		54	100%

9% of those who do receive financial assistance receive grants, while the majority (74%) receives loans. 17% (four participants) selected “other” for this question to indicate that they receive assistance from their parents, departmental scholarships or a “monthly allocation of \$250” from an unspecified source. The remaining person of this four indicated that the question did not pertain to them; the individual checked “N/A.”

36. Do you receive (check all that apply):		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Grants	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	9%
Loans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	74%
Other aid, please explain:	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	17%

Job Descriptions and Employer-Provided Information Questions

According to the literature review from Chapter 2, the level of accuracy of job descriptions and other employer-provided information is strongly related to the recruitment philosophies of an organization (Wanous, 1980). An organization with more traditional recruitment perspective is more likely to omit negative information or overemphasize the positives, measures that focus more on ensuring that the optimum




number of candidates is recruited, rather than the needs and expectations of these recruits (Wanous, 1980). Meanwhile, an organization with realistic recruitment practices will try to give the most balanced and open presentation of the position so that new recruits have enough information necessary to determine suitability (Wanous, 1980).



With this in mind, the ultimate goal of these employer-provided questions was to shed some light on the recruitment of GAs, to determine, given their current knowledge of the job, whether they felt they were given enough information to determine the suitability of the position, and how accurate that information actually was.

The following questions were asked with the intention of determining exactly what employer-provided information GAs were supplied with, at what time.






According to the survey, while 44% of participants received a job description before accepting the position, and 21% received one afterwards, 17% never received a job description at all. Additionally, only 26% of respondents received some other form of information about the position; 74% did not receive any.





In responding to question #3, fifteen respondents further elaborated about the kind of other employer-provided information supplied before accepting the position. Face-to-face discussions or oral descriptions were the most common method of orienting the prospective GA to the position, while a select few indicated that they received a departmental brochure or training of some sort.

1. When did you receive a job description for your graduate assistantship?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
before accepting the position		24	44%
after accepting the position		21	39%
never received one		9	17%
Total		54	100%

3. Besides a job description, was there any other information (e.g., brochure, web site, etc.) about your position that was provided to you by your employer before accepting the position?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes		14	26%
No		39	74%
Total		53	100%

The next questions assess how useful GAs found the various information provided by their employers. According to the survey, 57% of respondents found the job description very or somewhat useful, 13% found it not useful or somewhat not useful, 11% were neutral and 19% selected N/A. Meanwhile, for other information outside of the job description, 26% found it very or somewhat useful, 4% found it somewhat not useful and 6% were neutral and 65% of respondents selected N/A. In other words, of those GAs who received other employer-provided information, 74% found it very or somewhat useful, 16% were neutral, while the remaining were neutral. No respondents selected that the other employer-provided information was not useful at all.

2. How useful do you believe this job description was in orienting you about your position?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Very useful		12	22%
Somewhat useful		19	35%
Neutral		6	11%
Somewhat not useful		5	9%
Not useful		2	4%
N/A		10	19%
Total		54	100%

4. How useful do you believe this other information (provided by your employer) was in orienting you about your position?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Very useful		10	19%
Somewhat useful		4	7%
Neutral		3	6%
Somewhat not useful		2	4%
Not useful		0	0%
N/A		35	65%
Total		54	100%

The purpose of the following questions was to assess whether GAs felt that the employer-provided information gave a balanced picture (i.e., including both positive and negative information) about what it would be like to be a graduate assistant. 52% strongly agreed or agreed that the job description gave a balanced picture, 17% strongly disagreed or disagreed, while 11% were neutral. 20% selected N/A for that question.

Moving on to assessing the other information provided by the employer, 39% agreed or strongly agreed that this information gave a balanced picture of what it would be like to be a graduate assistant, 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 19% were neutral. 26% selected N/A for that question.

6. The job description helped to give me a balanced picture (i.e., including both positive and negative information) of what it would be like to be a graduate assistant.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		7	13%
Agree		21	39%
Neutral		6	11%
Disagree		7	13%
Strongly Disagree		2	4%
N/A		11	20%
Total		54	100%

7. Besides the job description, other information provided by my employer helped to give me a balanced picture (i.e., including both positive and negative information) of what it would be like to be a graduate assistant.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		6	11%
Agree		15	28%
Neutral		10	19%
Disagree		5	9%
Strongly Disagree		4	7%
N/A		14	26%
Total		54	100%

The next few questions were intended to assess whether GAs feel that the job description was complete and accurate.






8. The job description appropriately matches the work I do as a graduate assistant on a daily basis.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		6	11%
Agree		24	44%
Neutral		4	7%
Disagree		7	13%
Strongly Disagree		6	11%
N/A		7	13%
Total		54	100%

55% of surveyed GAs agree or strongly agree that the job description appropriately matched the work they do as a GA on a daily basis, 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while seven% were neutral. Thirteen percent selected N/A for that question.






Interestingly enough, despite the previous assertion by the majority that the job description matched their daily responsibilities, a startling 72% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that they would have included more information than provided in their job description. Only 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed on this question, 15% were neutral.

9. If I were to write a job description for my position, I would include much more information than I was provided.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		18	33%
Agree		21	39%
Neutral		8	15%
Disagree		6	11%
Strongly Disagree		1	2%
Total		54	100%





The following questions assess overall whether GAs felt they were being given enough information about the position before accepting their positions. 53% agreed or strongly agreed that they had, while 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 19% were neutral.

14. My employer provided me enough information about what it would be like to be a graduate assistant before I accepted the position.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		11	21%
Agree		17	32%
Neutral		10	19%
Disagree		9	17%
Strongly Disagree		6	11%
Total		53	100%






However, despite majority agreement that GAs had been given enough information before accepting the position, according to the next chart, 47% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that there were pieces of information that they wish they had known before accepting the graduate assistantship. 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 25% were neutral.

15. There are pieces of information I wish I had known before I accepted the graduate assistantship.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		9	17%
Agree		16	30%
Neutral		13	25%
Disagree		11	21%
Strongly Disagree		4	8%
Total		53	100%

According to the literature, it is the omission of negative rather than positive information that misleads new recruits and impacts job satisfaction (e.g., Wanous 1980). Therefore, the following question was included to determine how severe any potentially hidden negatives may have been. According to the survey, only 10% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that if they knew the negative aspects of their position, they would not have accepted the graduate assistantship. 70% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this question, while 20% were neutral.

16. If I knew the negative aspects of my position I would not have accepted the graduate assistantship.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		3	6%
Agree		2	4%
Neutral		11	20%
Disagree		14	26%
Strongly Disagree		24	44%
Total		54	100%

The next question was asked to determine how important it was to know the negative aspects of the position to GAs. Of surveyed GAs, 46% agreed or strongly agreed that knowing the negative aspects of their position before accepting the graduate assistantship would have helped them cope with different work challenges. Meanwhile, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 33% were neutral on this question.

13. I feel that knowing the negative aspects of my position before accepting the graduate assistantship would have helped me to cope with different work challenges.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		5	9%
Agree		20	37%
Neutral		18	33%
Disagree		8	15%
Strongly Disagree		3	6%
Total		54	100%

Expectations Questions

According to Chapter 2, most new recruits enter a job with pre-conceived expectations or assumptions about what the job will be like (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995) and usually these expectations are inflated (Wanous, 1980). Details as to what kind of expectations a person brings to their work is limited, as expectations are person-specific (Wanous, 1980). However, previous work experience (Wanous, 1980), and to a greater degree, employer-provided information is anticipated to have a substantial impact on the expectations made (Adeyemi-Bello & Mulvaney, 1995; Karon, 1995; Wanous, 1980; and Wanous et al., 1992).

Since GAs are an under-researched population, the primary purpose of the expectations questions were to create some baseline for GA expectations. The questions under this section dealt with determining just what kinds of expectations GAs brought to

their work experiences, where the expectations may have originated from, and to what degree they were met.

The question below is the first time the topic of expectations is introduced in the survey, so an attempt was made to make it more thought-provoking or engaging. The question asks participants to first recollect what their initial expectations were about being a graduate assistant with respect to six work-related areas, and then to judge whether they felt these expectations were met.

63% percent of graduate assistants felt that their expectations involving compensation had been met, while 11% did not. Meanwhile, 26% felt their expectations were being met somewhat. These results are consistent with much of the literature, which suggest that more extrinsic qualities like compensation are more likely to agree with reality (Wanous, 1980).





On the other hand, the literature also suggests that newcomer expectations for more intrinsic needs are often inconsistent with reality (Wanous, 1980). However, the results for personal interactions (an intrinsic need) were not in agreement with the literature. 72% of participants felt that their interaction with coworkers met their expectations, while 13% did not. 15% felt that their expectations in this area were somewhat met. Similarly, 67% felt that their relationship with their supervisor met their expectations, while 11% did not. 22% felt their expectations concerning the relationship with their supervisor were somewhat met.

The last three sections examine the work GAs are expected to do, the variety, quality and responsibility level. 61% felt that their expectations for variety of work had been met, 9% felt they had not and 30% felt they had been somewhat met. Similarly, 56% felt that the quality of work met their expectations, 20% felt that it did not, and 24% felt these expectations were somewhat met. And lastly, 52% of GAs felt that the level of responsibility for their positions met their expectations, while 26% felt that they had not and 22% felt that they had somewhat been met.






5. Think back to before you were a graduate assistant. For each of the listed categories below, what expectations did you have about what the position would entail? For each expectation, indicate whether it was met by checking the appropriate box.

<i>The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option</i>	1 Yes	2 No	3 Somewhat	4 N/A
1. Compensation	63% 34	11% 6	26% 14	0% 0
2. Interaction with Coworkers	72% 39	13% 7	15% 8	0% 0
3. Relationship with Supervisor	67% 36	11% 6	22% 12	0% 0
4. Variety of Work	61% 33	9% 5	30% 16	0% 0
5. Quality of Work	56% 30	20% 11	24% 13	0% 0
6. Level of Responsibility	52% 28	26% 14	22% 12	0% 0





The next question is asked in the event that an area of expectations had not been addressed in the previous question. 76% of graduate assistants surveyed agree or strongly agree that all of the expectations that they felt were most important to them as a graduate assistant had been met at least satisfactorily. 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 11% selected neutral for this question.

12. All of the expectations that I felt were most important to me about being a graduate assistant have been met at least satisfactorily.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		18	33%
Agree		23	43%
Neutral		6	11%
Disagree		5	9%
Strongly Disagree		2	4%
Total		54	100%

The following question assesses whether GAs felt that had a good idea of what was expected of them before beginning their positions. 69% of them agreed or strongly agreed that they did, while 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they did not. 15% of GAs were neutral on this question.

11. I had a good idea of what was expected of me as a graduate assistant before beginning the job.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		8	15%
Agree		29	54%
Neutral		8	15%
Disagree		6	11%
Strongly Disagree		3	6%
Total		54	100%

The last question was asked to assist in judging whether the hypothesis was proved or disproved. 35% of surveyed participants agreed or strongly agreed that there was a discrepancy between the information provided by their employer and their expectations. 55% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 7% selected neutral for this question. 2% of the respondents selected N/A.

17. There was a discrepancy between the information provided by employer and my expectations of the graduate assistantship.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		2	4%
Agree		17	31%
Neutral		4	7%
Disagree		13	24%
Strongly Disagree		17	31%
N/A		1	2%
Total		54	100%




Job Satisfaction Questions

You will recall that the literature was less definitive about the effects of job satisfaction in the workplace. Increasing job satisfaction was under great dispute, although there was agreement that the absence of job dissatisfaction was a worthy goal (e.g., Bavendam Research Incorporated, 2000; Crow & Hartman, 1995). Meanwhile, Porter and Steers (1973) hypothesized that when the most important expectations of a new recruit went unmet (i.e., the recruit is met with many disconfirming experiences), their job satisfaction decreases, increasing the propensity for turnover.






As was mentioned in the expectations section, little research exists on GA job satisfaction, with the exception of the factors that lead to their formation of unions (ie., Zinni et al., 2005). The ultimate purpose of this research was to gauge the satisfaction of GAs, in hopes of determining what precursors of GA job dissatisfaction exist. These next

set of questions probe the job satisfaction of GAs and how useful they have found their graduate assistantship.






85% of surveyed GAs agreed or strongly agreed that they are happy to be a graduate assistant. 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 7% were neutral.

18. I am happy to be a graduate assistant.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		31	57%
Agree		15	28%
Neutral		4	7%
Disagree		2	4%
Strongly Disagree		2	4%
Total		54	100%





Similarly, 66% of surveyed GAs agreed or strongly agreed that being a graduate assistant has been personally enriching, 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 17% were neutral on this question.

20. Being a graduate assistant has been personally enriching.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		19	35%
Agree		17	31%
Neutral		9	17%
Disagree		5	9%
Strongly Disagree		4	7%
Total		54	100%





59% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that being a graduate assistant has helped to prepare them for their career. 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 20% were also neutral on this question.

19. Being a graduate assistant has helped prepare me for my career.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		19	35%
Agree		13	24%
Neutral		11	20%
Disagree		6	11%
Strongly Disagree		5	9%
Total		54	100%






Similarly, 78% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that being a graduate assistant was a positive contribution to their educational experience. 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 13% were neutral on this question.

21. Being a graduate assistant has been a positive contribution to my educational experience.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		22	41%
Agree		20	37%
Neutral		7	13%
Disagree		2	4%
Strongly Disagree		3	6%
Total		54	100%





The next question was asked to assess whether GAs felt like there was anything missing or deserving attention within the graduate assistantship experience. 80% of surveyed GAs said that they agreed or strongly agreed that there were things that could be changed about the graduate assistantship program to make being a GA better. 7% disagreed and thirteen were neutral on the question. No one strongly disagreed on this question.

23. There are things that could be changed about the entire graduate assistantship program that would make being a graduate assistant better.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		16	30%
Agree		27	50%
Neutral		7	13%
Disagree		4	7%
Strongly Disagree		0	0%
		54	100%

The next question was asked to determine if GAs felt university administration care about their job satisfaction. 24% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that administration did not care, while a surprising 39% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 37% participants were neutral on this question.

24. University administration care about the job satisfaction of graduate assistants.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		4	7%
Agree		9	17%
Neutral		20	37%
Disagree		9	17%
Strongly Disagree		12	22%
Total		54	100%

As was mentioned in the discussion of the survey’s demographic questions, although there are questions which cover the financial support of GAs, the author felt it necessary to know whether the GAs themselves felt financially tied to their graduate assistantship. According to this question, 72% of GAs agreed or strongly agreed that they could not afford to go to this school without the graduate assistantship. Fifteen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 13% were neutral.

2. I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree		31	57%
Agree		8	15%
Neutral		7	13%
Disagree		6	11%
Strongly Disagree		2	4%
Total		54	100%

Cross Tabulation of Questions

In order to assist in analysis of GA job satisfaction, the author selected certain questions covered in earlier sections for cross tabulation. Some interesting results develop in the cross tabulation of the first set of questions, which compare participant satisfaction with various aspects of their positions to their financial need for the assistantship.

According to the question below, of the 31 GAs that strongly agreed that they were happy to be a GA, 17 (or 54.8%) also strongly agreed that they can't afford to go to the school without the graduate assistantship. Similarly, six of the total 31 GAs (or 19.4%) agreed that they cannot afford to go to the school without the graduate assistantship.

Moreover, out of the 15 that agreed that they are happy to be a GA, 9 (or 60.0%) strongly agreed and 2 (or 13.0%) agreed that they cannot afford to go to the school without having the graduate assistantship.

I am happy to be a graduate assistant.:						
	Total	I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.:				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total	54	31	8	7	6	2
Strongly Agree	31	17	6	3	3	2
Agree	15	9	2	2	2	0
Neutral	4	2	0	1	1	0
Disagree	2	1	0	1	0	0
Strongly Disagree	2	2	0	0	0	0

The next question compares the financial need of GAs to finding graduate assistantships personally enriching. Of the 19 participants that strongly agreed that their positions were personally enriching, 10 (or 52.6%) also strongly agreed and 6 (or 31.6%) agreed that they could not afford to go to the school without having the graduate assistantship.

Out of the 17 that agreed that being a GA has been personally enriching, 10 or (58.8%) also strongly agreed that they cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship. None of the total 17 that agreed that being a GA has been personally enriching agreed that they could not afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.

Being a graduate assistant has been personally enriching.:						
	Total	I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.:				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total	54	31	8	7	6	2
Strongly Agree	19	10	6	2	1	0
Agree	17	10	0	3	3	1
Neutral	9	5	2	1	0	1
Disagree	5	2	0	1	2	0
Strongly Disagree	4	4	0	0	0	0

Similar results were found with the comparison of graduate assistant need to whether being a graduate assistant had been a positive contribution to the GA educational experience. Of the 22 that strongly agree that being a graduate assistant has been a positive contribution to their educational experience, 13 (or 59.0%) strongly agreed and 6 (or 27.3%) agreed that they could not afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.

Of the 20 GAs that agreed that being a graduate assistant has been a positive contribution to their educational experience, 7 (or 35%) strongly agreed and only 2 (10%) agreed that they could not afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.

Being a graduate assistant has been a positive contribution to my educational experience.:						
	Total	I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.:				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total	54	31	8	7	6	2
Strongly Agree	22	13	6	2	1	0
Agree	20	7	2	4	5	2
Neutral	7	6	0	1	0	0
Disagree	2	2	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	3	3	0	0	0	0

For all of the before-mentioned cross tabulations, no information about those who disagreed or strongly disagreed (with the specific job satisfaction question being compared or that they could not afford to go to school without having the graduate assistantship) was analyzed because the size of these groups were too small to draw statistically significant comparisons.

Review of Free Response Questions

Despite some inherent difficulty in analysis, the author decided early on to include free response questions in the survey. This is because although job satisfaction has been a heavily researched topic for over 40+ years, there is still much disagreement over its source (e.g., Crow and Hartman, 1995). Moreover, considering the fact that GAs are an under-researched pool of subjects with respect to most any industrial-organizational topic, the author felt this presented additional need for the usage of free-response questions in the survey. Simply put, in the event that the research question was not fully proven, the author felt it was inherently important to allow as much opportunity as possible to examine GA job satisfaction, in hopes that it would help in devising other research questions to add to the this body of literature in the future.

The usage of free response questions in this type of study presented their own challenges. To preserve the integrity of the research, there is a balancing-act in how information is presented so that generalizations can be made without overshadowing those comments that are unique. This is particularly true in analyzing the final content-laden question of the survey, Question #25, which asks that “participants include any lingering comments about the graduate assistantship experience”. All other free-response questions were covered to some degree in other sections, however, a complete view of the responses for Question #25, are available in Appendix B.

Thirty GAS (or 56% of participants) submitted some form of free response; however a majority of the comments were a paragraph long. As a result, tallies of comments were taken, and comments that seemed to sum up GA responses in each particular area were highlighted. A chart of the tallies appears below:

Type of Comment/Comment Area	Number of Times Mentioned in Section
Pay is too low	9
Job/Input not what expected/desire to be treated like regular employee	5
Lack of Administration Support	4
Valued part of Office	3
Application Process Reform	2
Assistantship Period should be shortened	2
Lots of Departmental Support	2
Need for Graduate Student Organization/Peer supports	2
Office problems with other University workers	2
Parking Pass Reform	2
Positive Experience	2
Reform training for Gas	2
Desire to constantly learn	1
Interesting survey	1
Lack of space and resources (i.e., computers)	1
Need management and Leadership changes in office	1

By far, the most common free response dealt with compensation—that it needed to be increased. A sample comment appears below:

“...I do not want to seem ungrateful – I am very happy to have my tuition covered by my position. However, the stipend barely covers my rent and without additional

funding (a part time job) I would not be able to attend graduate school. Thus, I am going to school full time, working 20 hours a week for the University, and working between 15 and 20 hours a week elsewhere. I have no life, but I am doing what I love so its ok[ay]. I think the stipend should be increased to \$1000. That would pay for rent, food and transportation.”

There were quite a few graduate assistants, like the one above who noted setbacks of the program, but definitely felt they were appreciated and valued members of their offices. Two of these comments appear below:

“I feel that my experience has been more positive than that of my peer graduate assistants. I am fortunate to have gained experience in a field in which I am interested and to have had an incredible level of responsibility...”

“My role has been unique. I have been given literally unprecedented authority in my position. At 20 hours a week. I am running the program with my director. I have had access to materials and information far beyond what was standard.”

However, according to the free responses, and as the GA above stated, more often than not, it appears that many GAs who completed the free response questions were not happy with their positions, for various reasons indicated below.

The second most common GA free response was that the position did not match their immediate expectations of the job or that they felt capable of doing more than what they were actually doing. A sample response appears below:

“I feel I was led to believe that I was to be an asset to the staff but instead I was used to help in their daily duties rather than improving on my communication skills for a Masters degree I would receive.”

Apparently some dissatisfaction among GAs, according to the free responses dealt with the inner-workings of the offices where they worked:

“...These offices are set in their ways and do not want to change even when you bring ideas. It is very hierarchical. Basically, it is a feeling of disrespect and negativity all around when all we need is open communication and support as GA’s. The way they train GA’s or give us seminars, they should do the same for employees so they know how they should or should not, what to expect and not to expect from GA’s.”

Similarly, according to free response questions, some dissatisfaction appears to stem from confusion about GA job descriptions, either by GAs or fellow staff:

“As a GA, I want to help as much as possible, but my ‘helping’ (in the beginning) would often conflict with my immediate supervisor’s job description and she felt that I was ‘trying to take over her job.’ She became very defensive and I had to back down from things as silly and seemingly insignificant as filing. There have been a number of ‘turf war’ issues and although many have subsided, it still lingers beneath the surface...”

Besides complaints about working with university staff, according to GA free responses, another popular comment was that university administration did not support GAs. This comment does coincide with the majority response on a job satisfaction question asked previously in the survey. GA complaints about administration vary from the more trivial (i.e., “not enough assistance in regards to when records/papers/immunization/checks need to be submitted or picked up.”) to the more significant, the both of which is exemplified with the comment below:

“Many of us feel that the university, other than the department we work for, does not care about the graduate assistants. Paperwork and files are constantly being lost. We are billed for classes when we are supposed to be covered under our assistantship. Some teaching assistants go 1-6 months without getting a paycheck. The university has already tried to take our assistantships away from us for the summers and ours bosses had to fight

for our jobs and our stipends. As a whole I am very disappointed with the way the rest of the university (outside of my department) treats the graduate assistants.”

Other negative comments about the GA experience seemed to fall within the logistical category, that is, how GAs were recruited and how the various benefits (or lack there of) were disbursed or the inconvenient time-frame for actual assistantships. A few of them appear below:

“The application process is un-transparent, undemocratic, and badly set up. The process needs to be revamped entirely, from putting together a searchable database of openings, to a more efficient, and transparent method of applying and interviewing. As it stands now, the application process varies widely from department to department and often is at the whim of various administrators.”

“Grad[uate] assistants should be provided discount parking passes because they are required to be on campus just as employees and in some cases, issued laptops for their jobs.”

“Many of our degrees require internships which, because of our working hours during the school year, can only be fulfilled during the summer. Because many internships have specific time frame[s] from June through August our G.A. positions inhibit us from accepting these internships. I believe it would benefit most students for the G.A. position to run September to May therefore allowing them the time needed to fulfill their internship requirements and get summer employment.”

Again, to review a complete list of the comments offered for this free response question, see Appendix B.

Summary of Results

GA Profile

Examination of the varied survey responses generated a general profile of GA participants. The typical respondent was more likely to be a GA than a TA or RA, and a female under age 25 or between 25-29 years. She is likely to have pursued her bachelors within a year of graduating with her bachelors and is most apt to be pursuing her masters in Social or Behavioral Sciences or possibly Humanities—often as part of a dual degree. She has been a GA for anywhere from two to four semesters, does not have another paying job, but may receive some other form of financial assistance like government grants.

Job Descriptions and Employer-Provided Information

According to survey results, more GAs either receive a job description after accepting the position or never receive one at all than those who actually receive it beforehand. Moreover, most GAs are not given other employer-provided information before accepting their position, but of those who are, most are given detailed oral descriptions of their responsibilities than any other form of employer-provided information.

Of those who received job descriptions, most found at least some use to getting them. Most found the job description gave a balanced picture of their position and matched the work that they do on a daily basis. Similarly, of those GAs that received other employer-provided information, a majority felt the information was useful, gave a balanced picture and appropriately matched the work that they do.

Things got more complicated with deeper evaluation of the job description. Whatever the GAs felt they had gained in accuracy with the job description, they felt it was lacking with regards to its completeness. More specifically, a majority of GAs felt

that they would have provided more information if they had created the description and that there were pieces of information they wish they had known before accepting the position.

However, whatever information may have been left out of the job description, most GAs felt that the negatives of their job were not so severe that they would have declined their position. They did feel that knowing this negative information would have helped in coping with the challenges of their work.

Expectations

All GAs seemed to have a variety of expectations about their positions and a majority felt that those that were assessed were being somewhat or entirely met. More specifically, a majority of GAs felt that their expectations about compensation, level of interaction with coworkers, relationship with their supervisor, and the quality, variety and level of responsibility of their jobs had been met or somewhat met. Moreover, most felt that all of the expectations that were most important to them were being met at least satisfactorily.

And lastly, although a majority GAs do not believe that there was a discrepancy between the all the information provided by their employers, over a third of GAs surveyed believe that a discrepancy did exist.

Job Satisfaction

According to the multiple choice questions, the resounding result is that GAs are very happy, very satisfied with their positions. A majority felt their positions are personally enriching, positively contribute to their educational experience, and prepare them for their future careers.

However, an overwhelming majority of GAs who assert that they are happy with their positions also admit that they need their positions to pay for school. This

preliminary evidence suggests that GA responses of job satisfaction may be influenced by financial need.

At any rate, most GAs felt that there were things that could be changed to make being a GA better. A majority felt that University administration do not care about the satisfaction of GAs, and there were many who neutral on the subject as well.

Examination of free response questions suggest that there are definite aspects of the graduate assistantship that deserve attention. The three most commonly offered responses were that the pay level is too low, that many GAs felt that their job is not what they expected or that they wish to be treated like a regular employee, and that they lacked support from university administration.

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY

Review of Findings

How ironic that even with seemingly clear-cut evidence of GA job satisfaction, perplexing questions still remain. It is not that I am unhappy to know that a majority of surveyed GAs are happy with their positions and feel their job expectations have been met. On the contrary, this is encouraging news.

However, I can't forget the very negative comments that comprised most of the free response section. The stark contrast of these responses and those of the rest of the survey demand attention. I have considered the possibility that the reason the free response section could have seemed so negative is because it was viewed as a venting opportunity for the disgruntled, and an unnecessary redundancy for those who already indicated that they are happy with their positions. And still, the skeptic in me was not satisfied with this explanation. I decided to dig a little deeper before making a final conclusion about the validity of my research question, "Do discrepancies between expectations and employer-provided information affect the job satisfaction of GAs?" Using specific examples from the survey, a brief discussion of my thoughts on each aspect of my research question (i.e., employer-provided information, expectations and job satisfaction) along with analysis of my hypotheses follows.

Employer-Provided Information

As Chapter 4 clearly indicates, GA participants felt that their job descriptions were accurate but lacked completeness. Deeper analysis suggests there is more to this

estimation. In Question #6, a majority of respondents selected that they believe their job descriptions gave a balanced picture of what it would be like to be a GA. Similarly, most GAs selected that the job description appropriately matches their daily work (Question #8). Meanwhile, in Question #9, the majority felt that if they were to write a job description for their position, they would have included more information than was provided. Taken altogether, it seems impossible that GAs could feel that their job descriptions can be both balanced and match their work appropriately, while still believing they needed to include more information.

However, it is possible that GAs believe that their employers omitted equally negative and positive information, thereby still leaving a more balanced representation of the position. Or, if it was just negative information that was omitted, GAs may not think it was significant enough that they felt betrayed after being hired. The latter seems more likely because it agrees with most of the literature which focuses on the negative information that is omitted from job descriptions (e.g., Wanous, 1980). This explanation also agrees with the majority of GA respondents who claim that the negatives of the position (which were arguably left out of their job descriptions) were not so severe they wouldn't have accepted their positions had they known beforehand (Question #16).

Another tricky area for analysis of employer-provided information is where a majority of GAs first assert that their employer provided them enough information about what it would be like to be a graduate assistant before accepting the position (Question #14), and then say that there are pieces of information they wish they had known before accepting the position (Question #15). It is possible that although they still feel there is information missing from the job description (which corresponds to their response to

Question #9 as discussed above), GAs feel they were provided with enough information through other employer measures such as one-on-one sessions. Of course, as should be understood from previous chapters, these other measures are considered RJPs. And according to the literature, RJPs assist in orienting the prospective employee, by giving them a more realistic preview of the position e.g., McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Phillips, 1998; and Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Incidentally, the only problem with this theory is that most of the GAs who completed this survey indicated that they did not receive RJPs. Certainly this discrepancy and the potential benefits of using RJPs on the GA population deserve further investigation.

Expectations and Job Satisfaction

The overwhelming result with respect to GA expectations was that all expectations that were assessed (i.e., expectations about compensation, level of interaction with coworkers, relationship with their supervisor, and the quality, variety and level of responsibility of their jobs) had been met or somewhat met (Question #5). Moreover, most of the surveyed GAs felt that all of the expectations that they felt were most important to them about being a GA had been met at least satisfactorily. This is positive news, however, in retrospect there were a number of questions I wished I had asked that would have helped to get a deeper understanding of GA expectations.

For example, I failed to ask whether GAs felt they entered their positions with overly high expectations about the position. The literature suggests that heightened expectations are the norm until reality sets in (e.g., Wanous, 1980). Moreover, recall that Porter and Steers (1973) suggest that unmet expectations lead to job dissatisfaction. If **GAs did not enter with high expectations, then they are less likely to be disappointed.** Moreover, if by some chance GAs enter with low expectations about their positions, then

it seems likely that they would have overly high job satisfaction. Additionally, a mid-range level of expectations about their job, met with an overly positive reality might excite GAs as well. This is only a conjecture of course, and is not substantiated by the research, but it certainly agrees with common sense. The point of this discussion is just that the level of expectations is a key consideration that was inadvertently overlooked and could really have larger impact on job satisfaction.

Another related question I wish I had asked, is the degree to which they felt that they had previous work experience that was similar to their graduate assistantship. The reasoning behind this question would be that it would assist in determining where GA expectation levels were before beginning their positions. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature suggests that the less amount of experience in a particular profession or field, the more reliance a new recruit has on employer-provided information to draw expectations about what the experience will be like (e.g., Phillips & Crain, 1996). A majority of the GAs that participated in this study were relatively young (i.e., under age 25 or between 25-29 years) and were returning for their graduate degree within six months to a year after receiving their bachelors degree. Considering their young age and a presumed limit of work experience, is it possible that the GAs surveyed may not have had enough experience to have had that many different or complex expectations about the graduate assistantship?

Following this reasoning, their primary expectations as stipulated by their employers would have simply been that they receive a stipend and tuition remission, and that they generally do whatever else is expected of them by their supervisor. As such, it is questionable that these limited expectations would arouse too much prolonged dissatisfaction with their positions. But as was mentioned previously, **since I failed to ask** these questions, I am left to wonder.

And finally, there is probably one other lingering thought with respect to the expectations and job satisfaction of GAs. I wonder if it is possible that the very high scores for Question #5 (which examines six dimensions of expectations) are more a representation of current satisfaction more so than the juxtaposition of current and past expectations. In other words, sometimes it is difficult to remember what your previous views or expectations were about a particular job—especially if you did not know that you were going to be asked about them. As a result, when asked, a well-intentioned person may give feedback that deals more with their more recent experiences than past experiences or even past expectations. The literature corroborates much of this. Much of the RJP research mentions the pitfalls of trying to gauge current and past expectations at the same time, the inherent confounds involved (e.g., Irving & Meyer, 1994). Also, it was a pivotal result of Irving & Meyer (1994)'s research, that met-expectations may not be needed so much as allowing employees to have positive post-hire experiences.

Given the above discussion, I would recommend that future research investigate the spectrum or magnitude of expectations and gauge where GAs feel their previous work experience levels match up to their graduate assistantships.

Hypotheses Analysis

To examine the research question, “Do discrepancies between expectations and employer-provided information affect job satisfaction?,” the following hypotheses were created:

- Hypothesis 1: There are discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations.
- Hypothesis 2: Discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations negatively affect the job satisfaction of GAs.

The organization of the research question elements in the previous subsections (i.e., employer-provided information vs. expectations and job satisfaction) seem to give away my understanding of how employer-provided information, expectations and job satisfaction relate.

It is my belief that based on the study results, there are discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations. Despite some of the setbacks in the analysis of expectations alone, a majority of GA responses support the notion of a discrepancy. Many surveyed GAs never received a job description or never received them after accepting the position. Also, most of the participants were in favor of the inclusion of more information in the job description. And as was mentioned in Chapter 4, at least a third of the GAs surveyed believe that a discrepancy did exist. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was proved.

However, based on the previous job satisfaction discussion and the overwhelmingly positive survey results, **I do not believe there is sufficient evidence suggesting that discrepancies between employer-provided information and expectations negatively affect GA job satisfaction.** Hypothesis 2 was disproved.

Limitations

I have already discussed what areas I feel will need further research in order to shed more light conceptually on the subject of GA job satisfaction. However, there were a few limitations that I feel should also be taken into consideration when planning this future research; the limitations appear below:

While it was certainly was a relief to reach my minimum goal of 50 respondents, to fall short of my ultimate goal of 100 subjects presented statistical limitations which

affected the analysis of my results. For example, as explained in the Chapter 4 results, when I cross tabulated various job satisfaction questions with Question #22, “I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship”, there lacked enough participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed (with the specific job satisfaction question being compared or that they could not afford to go to school without having the graduate assistantship). To compare the very small dissenting group (which was usually less than 10 in number) to that of the majority would have been inappropriate, statistically speaking. And while I cannot assume that with more participants I would have automatically had a comparative number of dissenting subjects to compare to the majority, an increased number of participants would have helped in deciphering if the subjects were indeed representative of the entire pool of GAs on this university. Put simply, I don’t know if feeling financially tied to their graduate assistantship is somehow affecting GAs’ report of happiness. My gut says this is not an outrageous leap, but there simply is not enough evidence to be sure.

A similar issue of generalizability is raised but on a wider scale with respect to the demographics of survey subjects. Most were within the age ranges of under 25 years or the 25-29 years bracket and had entered graduate school almost immediately after completing their undergraduate studies (i.e., between 6 months to 1 year). Choy et al. (2002) results initially seem to agree with this data in that a majority of the GAs pursuing a masters degree in non-Education fields were female and had more traditional enrollment patterns” (i.e., enrolled in graduate school soon after receiving their bachelors) than those in other M.B.A. and education master’s programs (p. 5). However, deeper analysis of Choy et al.’s (2002) results show that while as a group they seemed to return to school sooner than GAs in other programs, there was great within-group variability across this dimension. More specifically, while 25.8% of non-Education masters’

students returned to graduate school within less than a year, 26% waited between 1-2 years, 23.9% between 3-6 years and 24.4% had a seven or more year gap before returning to graduate school. This variability alone suggests that there may be great differences between the GAs who participated in this study, and those computed for the NCES study. More research is needed to determine if GAs at this university have their own idiosyncrasies or whether it is possible to find a more representative sample that will produce more generalizable results.

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

When I began this research study, I was very unsure about the topic and how people would respond to it. So for the most part, I wouldn't discuss it unless asked. However, when forced to answer the inevitable question (i.e., "What are you doing your thesis on?"), I was met with a range of reactions—some were immediately supportive, others were shocked, while the rest were less than encouraging and borderline resentful. However, by fortune of repeated inquiries, I became increasingly comfortable with the discussion. I began to realize that not only was GA job satisfaction a worthy topic, but something I felt personally about.

On this campus alone, there are an estimated 160 graduate assistants performing a range of duties for the university community. We each have a variety of experiences—different responsibilities, different schedules, differing lives unified by a similarity in existence. Yes, we are all "transitory" workers (Stimpson, 2000, para. 38). We all put in twenty hours a week for a set number of years in pursuit of graduate education. But this seemingly transactional relationship we forge can and arguably does play a larger role within our educational experiences and the **university as a whole**.

As this study delineates, from the GA-perspective, this relationship appears to be primarily a useful one. For example, many GAs find their positions positive, enriching experiences that contribute to their educational and career aspirations. Moreover, it cannot be ignored, that the graduate assistantship program also provides a much needed resource: an opportunity to attain graduate education for those who might otherwise not be able to afford it. Speaking as one of those people, I consider it a blessing to have been able to receive such a gift.

However, one would be remiss to assume that just because GAs benefit from the program, that the program is beyond improvement. Using the survey results I have generated the following list of recommendations:

- **Greater transparency in the hiring process and in orienting about the GA experience.** Many incoming graduate students enter with multiple questions about the graduate assistantship program, questions that go unanswered often until after they are hired for an actual position. As a result, most graduate students enter into these agreements blindly—happy to know that their tuition is covered, but often with very little understanding about what their position entails or what being a GA involves. A university that is committed to promoting a flourishing relationship between graduate assistants and the university must set the framework through open communication and honesty. Allow GAs the same options most job applicants expect with any position: the opportunity to judge whether the specific position and the experience will meet their expectations and needs. While secrecy leads to confusion, miscommunication and resentment, through transparency, any hidden or harbored animosity will naturally dissipate.

- **Increased Opportunity for GAs to support one another.** This point easily relates to the previous one in that it involves an increase in the relay of information to GAs. GAs know one another on campus, but currently it is more by accident or happenstance than any organized effort by the university. Moreover, not having a complete list of GAs (their names and email addresses) severely inhibited my ability to get my research study to all potential subjects. I was told it was an issue of privacy, but if GAs were asked during orientation to voluntarily join a contact list, this issue can be alleviated. And the benefits would be innumerable to GAs and the university, because GAs could use each other for general support and stress relief. Such networking is cornerstone to the kind of positive relationships that can only strengthen feelings of unity and inclusion between GAs and the university.
- **Provide an unbiased 3rd party to turn to when mediation is necessary.** While a majority of the GAs surveyed claimed to be happy with their position, the fact remains that there were some that were not. And while job satisfaction does not appear to be a problem for this university now, it can be a problem in the future. Rather than just taking relief in the current situation, the university should act proactively to show support and interest in GA job satisfaction. To that effort, some kind of official, unbiased third party needs to be made available for GAs in the unfortunate event that there is a problem with their position that cannot be ironed out by their immediate supervisors. As it stands now, those GAs that have severe problems endure it, not knowing who they can talk to, who they can trust. A third party would help to alleviate the problems before they escalate to the detriment to the GA and any other parties involved.

- **Increased conversation between GAs and university administration.**

Despite the overly positive survey results with regards to job satisfaction, a need for this point was presented in the multiple choice and free response sections of the survey. The facts are clear: many GAs believe that university administration do not care about them and that administration do very little on GA behalf. This is not to say this belief is true. For example, it is very possible that there are some university resources designated to address each of the potential problem areas for which I have made recommendations. However, if GAs are unaware of it, then the resources might as well not exist. This research has provided a rare opportunity to know exactly what GAs are thinking on campus and I would invite any of the powers-to-be to take advantage of it. They can either create resources to address these potential problems, or take heightened measures to publicize that these resources are available on campus for GAs.

The last recommendation for increased communication between GAs and university officials actually relates back to the central purpose of this study. With all of the pitfalls and shortcomings of this research, its clear strengths surround around its ability to benchmark the program's benefits and areas of improvement. The research is simply a starting point for communication about GAs and their role within the university community. When I think about my experience as a GA and then having seen this idea blossom from a general question into an actual research study...I am intrigued by the potential for continued conversation and investigation. I feel incredibly honored to have been a graduate assistant and feel privileged to have been able to participate in the discussion.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Graduate Assistantship Experience Survey

This research project is being conducted to fulfill requirements for a Masters Degree in Corporate and Public Communication at Seton Hall University. Your responses will be kept completely anonymous, as no personally identifying information will be collected. Also, none of your responses will be shared with any third parties. This survey should take ten minutes to complete. Thank you for your participation!

Directions: After reading each question, choose the answer that is most appropriate. If a particular question does not relate to your experience as a graduate assistant, select "N/A", where provided. Please include comments where space is provided.

1. When did you receive a **job description** for your graduate assistantship?
 before accepting the position *after* accepting the position never received one

2. How useful do you believe this **job description** was in orienting you about your position?
 Very Useful Somewhat Useful Neutral Somewhat not useful Not useful

3. Besides a job description, was there any other information (e.g., brochure, web site, etc.) about your position that was **provided to you by your employer** before accepting the position? Yes No

If yes, please explain what the information was:
 Comments: _____

4. How useful do you believe this other information (**provided by your employer**) was in orienting you about your position?
 Very Useful Somewhat Useful Neutral Somewhat not useful Not useful

5. Think back to before you were a graduate assistant. For each of the listed categories below, what expectations did you have about what the position would entail? For each expectation, indicate whether it was met by checking the appropriate box.

Category of Expectations	Was the expectation met?			
	Yes	No	Somewhat	N/A
Compensation				
Interaction with Coworkers				
Relationship with Supervisor				
Variety of Work				
Quality of Work				
Level of Responsibility				

Directions: For the following questions, assess your level of agreement with each statement based on your experience as a graduate assistant. If a particular question does not relate to your experience as a graduate assistant, check the "N/A", where provided. Please include comments where space is provided.

6. The **job description** helped to give me a balanced picture (i.e., including both positive and negative information) of what it would be like to be a graduate assistant.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Not Applicable

7. Besides the job description, **other information provided by my employer** helped to give me a balanced picture (i.e., including both positive and negative information) of what it would be like to be a graduate assistant.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Not Applicable

8. The job description appropriately matches the work I do as a GA on a daily basis.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Not Applicable

9. If I were to write a job description for my position, I would include much more information than I was provided.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I would have included the following information in the job description for my assistantship:

11. I had a good idea of what was expected of me as a graduate assistant before beginning the job.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. All of the expectations that I felt were most important to me about being a graduate assistant have been met at least satisfactorily.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. I feel that knowing the negative aspects of my position before accepting the graduate assistantship would have helped me to cope with different work challenges.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. My employer provided me enough information about what it would be like to be a graduate assistant before I accepted the position.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. There are pieces of information I wish I had known before I accepted the graduate assistantship.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. If I knew the negative aspects of my position I would not have accepted the graduate assistantship.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. There was a discrepancy between the information provided by my employer and my expectations of the graduate assistantship.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly

18. I am happy to be a graduate assistant.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. Being a graduate assistant has helped prepare me for my career.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. Being a graduate assistant has been personally enriching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. Being a graduate assistant has been a positive contribution to my educational experience.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. I cannot afford to go to this school without having the graduate assistantship.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

23. There are things that could be changed about the entire graduate assistantship program that would make being a graduate assistant better.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. University administration care about the job satisfaction of GAs.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

25 Please include any lingering comments about the graduate assistantship experience here:

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

26. Are you a currently a graduate assistant? Yes No

27. What type of graduate assistant are you? (TA) Teaching Assistant (RA) Research Assistant
 (GA) Graduate Assistant

28. How long have you been a graduate assistant? Check the box for the longest time period completed.
 one semester two semesters three semesters four semesters five semesters or more

29. What type of graduate degree are you pursuing? Masters Doctoral Dual Degree Other, please explain: _____

30. What field of graduate study are you pursuing?
 Humanities
 Social and Behavioral Sciences
 Life and Physical Sciences
 Education
 Business
 Health or Public Administration (not Business)
 Law
 Dual Degree or Other, please explain _____

31. What age are you? under 25 years 25-29 years 30-34 years 35-39 years 40+ years

32. What sex are you? male female

33. How many years after receiving your bachelors did you pursue this graduate degree?
 6 months-1year over 1 year-2 years over 2 years-6 years over six years+

34. Do you have another paying job outside of being a graduate assistant? Yes No

35. Do you receive other forms of financial assistance outside of your graduate assistantship? Yes No

36. Do you receive (check all that apply): grants loans other aid, please explain: _____

Thank you! Your participation is much appreciated!

APPENDIX B

Free Response Question #25

25. Please include any lingering comments about the graduate assistantship experience here:	
#	Response
1	I am very interested in having a place for grad assistants to go, whether it be physically, as in a lounge, or on the web as in updates about school/admin life sent to grad assistants. I was unpleasantly surprised to find that there is not any sort of graduate assistant organization through which g.a.'s can join their voices. What would help g.a.'s most, I think is an understanding imparted by previous g.a.'s and their supervisors that this is a somewhat tricky environment in terms of office/personality politics. As a g.a. I want to help as much as possible, but my "helping" (in the beginning) would often conflict with my immediate supervisor's job description and she felt that I was "trying to take over her job." She became very defensive and I had to back down from things as silly and seemingly insignificant as filing. There have been a number of "turf war" issues and although many have subsided, it still lingers beneath the surface. I thought I would be working more with the person who interviewed me for the position, but I am instead working more for his secretary. All considered, it's not a bad position, but it took me a little while to gain my footing and figure out the personalities for whom I work. This is unconfirmed, but I think there may be issues between the local union group and graduate assistants in general.
2	I thought that I would have more input in my job. I am upset that the job seems to be sort of "shut-up and put-up" with it. Grad. Assists. are thought of as "not knowing enough", and not taken into consideration. I am indebted up to my ears, because the pay is so minimal, I need to get hefty student loans to be able to support myself. My job description has unofficially changed twice. The university does not provide enough space/material support like: adequate office space, phone lines, computers, additional email quota, etc.
3	We should have a union so we can voice our complaints and we can feel equal. If we are called to do the work and take on certain levels of responsibility, then it can not be sometimes we're treated like employees and other times (ie when we have complaints) as "just students". If employees can freely criticize us, they should be just as quick to compliment and better our relationship with each other. This is a small campus so we run into each other and other administrators a lot and I feel at times I can't be as honest bc things are not kept confidential or I would be treated or looked at unfavorably bc I had a complaint against my employer and took it to a third party. I think we should be able to have a round table discussion with other g.a.'s and a ga advisor who is sympathetic to our needs every 6 months to voice our opinions (good or bad) which is then published and sent out to employers about what can be done better. I think that just because they hire you and know you need the money for school, they abuse you knowing they can just fire you if you complain a lot and get a new GA. These higher up "bosses" are not sympathetic nor do they listen to small things you have to say but rather just push my suggestions into a corner and even if it is not taken, they can treat me nicer since I had taken an initiative to make the office work better or more efficient. These offices are set in their ways and do not want to change even when you bring in ideas. It is very hierarchal. Basically, it is a feeling of disrespect and negativity all around when all we need is open communication and support as GA's. The way they train GA's or give us seminars, they should do the same for employers so they know how they should or should not, what to expect and not expect from GA's.
4	The pay for the TA graduate assistant is much below where it should be.
5	Not enough assistance from administration in regards to when records/papers/ immunizations/checks need to be submitted or picked up
6	I feel I was lead to believe I was to be an asset to the staff but instead I was used to help in their daily duties rather than improving on my communication skills for a Masters degree I would receive.
7	I feel that my experience has been more positive than that of my peer graduate assistants. I am fortunate to have gained experience in a field in which I am interested, and to have had an incredible level of responsibility. I went through three bosses, though, so that was difficult. But, that prepared me for life in the real world, where change is inevitable. I feel that, because my graduate assistantship is almost over, people in my dept. care less about my job satisfaction now than they did in the earlier stages. However, I have always had a good relationship with my supervisor and my colleagues. In addition, I feel that -- given the level of responsibility I do have on the job -- I wish I would be brought in for more decisions. I think that sometimes I'm being taken advantage of because I am a contracted employee and will do whatever they tell me to. But they expect so much and I feel that I meet and exceed expectations, that I wish they would treat me more like a full-time employee. Maybe this is a more recent development since having a new boss, b/c recently a new person was brought into our "team" and I was told I'd be partly responsible for training him, and I was given zero notice and had no input.
8	I feel that the assistantship should be throughout the school year only, and not extend 2 months past the end of the spring semester. I am required to complete an internship before graduating and would like to do it over summer break. However, many companies that I wish to intern at have set specific dates for the internship that lasts over the entire summer break. Because my assistantship extends into my summer break, I am not able to work at those locations. This issue is by far my greatest complaint about the assistantship program.
9	Health Insurance

10	My experience has been wonderful and rewarding. I feel very lucky to have worked with my boss and the entire office staff. I feel a part of the team and that my work adds value to the University. I feel that GAs should have a greater stipend. I do not want to seem ungrateful - I am very happy to have my tuition covered by my position. However, the stipend barely covers my rent and without additional funding (a part time job) I would not be able to attend graduate school. Thus, I am going to school full time, working 20 hours a week for the University, and working between 15 and 20 hours a week elsewhere. I have no life, but I'm doing what I love so its ok. I think the stipend should be increased to \$1000. That would pay for rent, food, and transportation.
11	I am very glad to have had my GAship. The compensation was critical. I would not have come to Seton Hall without it. On the other hand, I felt that my supervisors were not interested in my full dedication to the position, because they were worried about losing control of the duties I thought I was charged with effecting. As a result, I felt less like a colleague, and more like a casual worker. When I'm asked what I liked and didn't like about my experience at Seton Hall, I always say that I've been very impressed with my fellow grad students, but really underwhelmed by an administration that doesn't seem to have much interested in being a first-rate institution. The administration appears myopic and parochial, from my perspective as a student, as a graduate assistant, and also as a former university administrator (previous to SHU). I believe that they put efficiency and scholarship second to other priorities.
12	The application process is untransparent, undemocratic, and badly set up. The process needs to be revamped entirely, from putting together a searchable database of openings, to a more efficient, and transparent method of applying and interviewing. As it stands now, the application process varies widely from department to department and is often at the whim of various administrators.
13	Many of us feel the university, other than the department we work for, does not care about the graduate assistants. Paperwork and files are constantly being lost. We are billed for classes when we are supposed to be covered under our assistantship. Some teaching assistants go 1-6 months without getting a paycheck. The university has already tried to take our assistantships away from us for the summers and our bosses had to fight for our jobs and our stipends. As a whole I am very dissatisfied with the way the rest of the university (outside of my department) treats the graduate assistants.
14	My role has been unique. I have been given literally unprecedented authority in my position. At 20 hours a week I am running the program with my director. I have had access to materials and information far beyond what was standard.
15	I don't have many complaints about my position as a GA even though there are some negatives my department takes care of me and makes sure I'm thanked for the extra efforts it requires. My complaint is the time frame a G.A. is expected to work. Many of our degrees require internships which, because of our working hours during the school year, can only be fulfilled during the summer. Because many internships have specific time frames from June through August our G.A. positions inhibit us from accepting these internships. I believe it would benefit most students for the G.A. position to run September to May therefore allowing them the time needed to fulfill their internship requirements and or get summer employment.
16	My job was great...I learned alot of new skills. I think the person who created this survey is a disgruntled worker, and wrote the questions in a weighed manner.
17	Grad assistants should be provided discount parking passes because they are required to be on campus just as employees and in some cases, issued laptops for their jobs.
18	We are grossly underpaid. Try living on what we earn. It is outrageous.
19	Generally, I feel that I am capable of doing more than I am allowed to do.
20	Keep me learning everyday
21	Please increase stipends!!
22	I would have to say that this survey was very interesting and cannot wait to hear about the results. It is sad that I could not truly agree with most of the positive statements, but I am sure that there will be others who have the same opinions as I do. I do not feel that I have grown professionally and would love to suggest some management/leadership changes in the office that I am currently working in.
23	My only complaint is that GA's were not taken into consideration when creating parking permits. It seems unfair that GA's have to pay for a full-commuter parking pass. We work during the day, making much less money than administrators and cannot purchase administrative passes. The "evening" pass used by most graduate students does not allow us to park during work hours. Then, our parking pass expires in early May, and our assistantship ends at the end of May. This leaves us to pay for weekly parking just to complete our commitment to the assistantship.
24	Orientation should occur b4 the beg of the semester, Selection of asst is a farce and the Grad asst ofc is useless
25	Overall, I would say it has been a good experience so far. The main problems for me were the lack of training in my position and the difference between my expectations of what I thought I would be doing and what I ended up doing.
26	Considering the amount of work we do as TA's, I do not believe we make enough money. This is surely a common complaint, but one with merit. However, I love my job and the people I work with, as well as the professors in my dept.
27	overworked and underpaid.....we turn out great students who go on to ivy league schools, while we have to scramble to get our own lives together with little or no help from the university
28	the pay is not fair
29	none
30	It has been an exceptionally positive experience for me.