INTRODUCTION

At the central functioning of the academic department are the activities of faculty members. As these individuals teach, conduct research, and provide valuable service, their combined success ultimately defines the success or failure of an academic department (Guvendir, 2014). Through the work of academic faculty, students are inspired to learn, research advancements are made, service is provided to local communities and professional societies, and all of these activities are to some extent harnessed and directed by an administrator typically referred to as a ‘department chair.’ The department chair or head does not work alone, however, and is linked directly with those working as deans and central academic administrators, such as the provost, also called a vice president for academic affairs or chief academic officer. A key activity for these administrators is the coordination of their efforts to advance the work of faculty members.

Academic administrators at all levels have some impact on the performance of faculty members, yet each level of administration may interact differently with faculty. Literature has strongly supported the notion that department chairs, deans, and provosts can positively influence the performance and livelihood of faculty members. This study was designed to explore faculty satisfaction with each level of academic administration making use of the 2014 survey data collected by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We found that faculty members at research universities were more satisfied with leadership at the departmental than college or institutional levels. Furthermore, assistant professors were significantly more satisfied with academic leadership at all levels than both associate and full professors.
be creative and find self-motivation to be high performing (Kaufman, 2009).

Among the varied activities administrators can create to support faculty in their teaching and research roles are providing money to attend conferences and workshops on teaching strategies, resources to meet with grant funding agents, release time from teaching to write grants, and at some institutions, sabbatical leave programs to allow a dedicated time for research. Increasingly administrators are the individuals who stand between the work of faculty members, determine workload and effort, and ultimately, evaluate those efforts and reward them with increased pay, rank promotions, and recognition.

Faculty productivity is strongly correlated with workplace satisfaction and the culture created and maintained by academic administration, especially at the departmental level (Czech & Forward, 2010; Fitzmaurice, 2013; Monteiro et al., 2013). The result of greater workplace satisfaction can be documented in higher retention rates of faculty, higher levels of academic output, increased teaching effectiveness, the recruitment of better faculty and students, and to a greater extent, the progression of hires in academic careers (Birnbaum, 1989). Implementing directives is particularly difficult in a higher education setting when faculty experience significant amounts of freedom in completing their assigned academic tasks. In such settings, fostering positive and mutually respectful relationships between faculty and academic administration becomes essential.

METHODS

Sample

This study utilized survey data collected by The Coalition on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We selected the sample of 2,355 full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty members at research universities who participated in COACHE survey in 2014 (Benson, Mathews, & Trower, 2014). Faculty members who held an administrative appointment at the time of survey administration were not included in the final sample. The final sample was evenly divided by rank with 785 (33.3%) faculty members at the assistant, associate, and full professor levels, respectively. Of the total sample, 1,556 (66.1%) were tenured and 799 (33.9%) were not tenured but on the tenure-track. Majority of the participants were White (78.1%) and male (60.6%). The final sample included 1,502 (63.8%) faculty members from research universities with very high research activity, 733 (31.1%) from research universities with high research activity, and 120 (5.1%) from doctoral/ research universities.

Measures

The COACHE survey is designed to investigate faculty satisfaction with the nature of their work, institutional support, mentoring, institutional climate, and other conditions of their employment (COACHE, n.d.). The COACHE survey contains fifteen themes, one of which is institutional governance and leadership. Based on the purpose of this study, we included 12 institutional governance and Leadership questions from the COACHE data set that asked faculty to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of departmental, college, and institutional leadership using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied. Specifically, faculty members were asked to rate their satisfaction with pace of decision making, stated priorities, and communication of these priorities to faculty at all three levels. In addition to these questions, faculty were also asked to indicate whether they had been offered opportunities for faculty to have input into departmental policy decision and school/college priorities. Finally, at the departmental level, faculty also rated their department head’s or chair’s fairness in evaluating their work. Table 1 includes descriptive data on each of the variables used in the study for the total sample as well as by academic rank. Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software was used to analyze the data. First, we conducted factor analysis with Principle Component Analysis and varimax rotation to explore the underlying factor structure of 12 variables selected for this study. The factor analysis confirmed three-factor structure with a strong validity: Departmental leadership (Q185H, Q185L, Q185J, Q185K, and Q185L), College Leadership (Q185D, Q185E, Q185F, and Q185G), and Institutional Leadership (Q180L, Q180M, and Q180N). After the factors were confirmed, we conducted paired samples t tests to compare faculty satisfaction with leadership at the departmental, college, and institutional levels. Finally, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at the academic rank. Prior to ANOVA tests, we checked for violations of normality and homogeneity of variance. ANOVA tests are typically robust to these violations when sample sizes are equal as was the case in this study (Field, 2013). Examination of skewness and kurtosis values did not reveal violations of normality in the data. However, Levene’s test revealed that assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the satisfaction with departmental leadership factor; therefore, we used the Games-Howell post-hoc test to examine the group differences. Tukey’s post-hoc tests were used to examine the group differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at the college and institutional levels. To compensate for the effects of multiple testing and large sample size, alpha levels were set at p < 0.001.

RESULTS

Paired Samples t-Tests

Paired-samples t tests revealed that faculty were significantly more satisfied with departmental level (Mean = 3.57, SD = 1.18) than college level leadership (Mean = 3.12, SD = 1.10), r(2354) = -.17, p < .001, Cohen’s d = .39. Similarly, when compared to institutional level leadership, faculty’s satisfaction with leadership at the departmental level was not significantly different from their perceptions of institutional level leadership. Similar results emerged when we conducted exchange has been noted to offer opportunities for faculty to have input into departmental policy decisions and school/college priorities. Finally, at the departmental level, faculty also rated their department head’s or chair’s fairness in evaluating their work. Table 1 includes descriptive data on each of the variables used in the study for the total sample as well as by academic rank.

Data Analysis
One-Way ANOVA Tests

Results from one-way ANOVAs indicated significant differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at all three levels by academic rank. More specifically, the Games-Howell and Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that assistant professors were significantly more satisfied with departmental, college, and institutional leadership. Academic department is the most important community for faculty members, and the role of the department chair is critical in shaping the identity of this community. In various contexts, the chair is not only the individual who hires the faculty member, but also the individual most responsible for faculty development, support, and creating a culture that ensures faculty success. In large institutions this departmental culture can supersede institutional cultures, expectations, and norms. Through strong leadership, department chairs can encourage productive behaviors and serve as a resource for faculty as they learn to identify the criteria necessary for success. Therefore, the findings that faculty members in general were satisfied with department chair’s decision making, fairness in evaluating their work, and efforts to engage them in the departmental policy decisions are positive and reassuring.

However, we also found that associate and full professors were less satisfied with academic leadership at all levels than assistant professors. As faculty members progress through the life cycle or seasons of their academic life (Knefelkamp, 1990), they seem to become more critical of the decisions made by their leaders as well as the opportunities awarded to them to provide input in setting these priorities. Faculty members who have successfully passed through the initial gateway of the academy and have been tenured and promoted, no longer have a singular goal of earning tenure. They have, in a sense, made it into the institution’s life and are now in a position to exert influence and dominance over different processes through involvement in campus life and activities. The rewards for these faculty members are less driven by the immediacy of tenure and promotion and are more strongly linked to individualistic behaviors. As faculty progress through their careers, they may develop higher and clearer expectations of their leaders, and if these expectations are not being met, dissatisfaction will arise.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Considering the critical role of the departmental context in the life of a faculty member, the findings from our study are encouraging. Faculty members in general were significantly more satisfied with departmental than college and institutional leadership. Academic department is the most important community for faculty members, and the role of the department chair is critical in shaping the identity of this community. In various contexts, the chair is not only the individual who hires the faculty member, but also the individual most responsible for faculty development, support, and creating a culture that ensures faculty success. In large institutions this departmental culture can supersede institutional cultures, expectations, and norms. Through strong leadership, department chairs can encourage productive behaviors and serve as a resource for faculty as they learn to identify the criteria necessary for success. Therefore, the findings that faculty members in general were satisfied with department chair’s decision making, fairness in evaluating their work, and efforts to engage them in the departmental policy decisions are positive and reassuring.

One-Way ANOVA Tests

Results from one-way ANOVAs indicated significant differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at all three levels by academic rank. More specifically, the Games-Howell and Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that assistant professors were significantly more satisfied with departmental, college, and institutional leadership. Academic department is the most important community for faculty members, and the role of the department chair is critical in shaping the identity of this community. In various contexts, the chair is not only the individual who hires the faculty member, but also the individual most responsible for faculty development, support, and creating a culture that ensures faculty success. In large institutions this departmental culture can supersede institutional cultures, expectations, and norms. Through strong leadership, department chairs can encourage productive behaviors and serve as a resource for faculty as they learn to identify the criteria necessary for success. Therefore, the findings that faculty members in general were satisfied with department chair’s decision making, fairness in evaluating their work, and efforts to engage them in the departmental policy decisions are positive and reassuring.

However, we also found that associate and full professors were less satisfied with academic leadership at all levels than assistant professors. As faculty members progress through the life cycle or seasons of their academic life (Knefelkamp, 1990), they seem to become more critical of the decision-making process and the priorities set by the leaders as well as the opportunities awarded to them to provide input in setting these priorities. Faculty members who have successfully passed through the initial gateway of the academy and have been tenured and promoted, no longer have a singular goal of earning tenure. They have, in a sense, made it into the institution’s life and are now in a position to exert influence and dominance over different processes through involvement in campus life and activities. The rewards for these faculty members are less driven by the immediacy of tenure and promotion and are more strongly linked to individualistic behaviors. As faculty progress through their careers, they may develop higher and clearer expectations of their leaders, and if these expectations are not being met, dissatisfaction will arise. Findings may also highlight the changing nature of the academic leadership, particularly at large, research-un-
mented institutions. In these environments, the dean for example plays more prominent roles in fund raising and external relations, including working with policy makers, legislators, and others who have influence on institutional resources, rather than in the internal functioning of the college. Faculty may not find high levels of satisfaction with their guidance, precisely because these administrators are not employed in such settings to provide it. The lack of satisfaction with the senior academic officer, however, is somewhat surprising as a growing number of institutions have invested in enhancing faculty quality through provost-level activities, such as teaching centers, faculty ombudsperson offices, more structured research support, etc.

Based on this study, we are not able to determine the reasons for dissatisfaction of associate and full professors with academic leadership; but the findings do speak to the difficulty in generalizing discussions and programs targeted at “the faculty” at large. Further research is needed to unwrap the causes of this dissatisfaction. Studies that explore how men and women or faculty of color respond to leadership differently would also be helpful in creating programs and processes that take into consideration the needs of different segments of the professoriate. This study represents a modest first-step in unpacking and understanding the differences in faculty perceptions of their academic leaders, but more in-depth examination of what drives faculty satisfaction or dissatisfaction with leadership priorities and decision-making at different institutional types is clearly warranted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND DISCLAIMER

The authors acknowledge that the reported results are based in whole on analyses of the COACHE Data Set. These data were collected as part of a multi-site survey administration and supported by funds from participating colleges and universities and made available to the authors by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education. This article has not been reviewed or endorsed by COACHE and does not necessarily represent the opinions of COACHE staff or members, who are not responsible for the contents.

REFERENCES


