Introduction

Higher education in the United States has long been a shifting and evolving enterprise, with changes coming quickly in some areas (i.e. the proliferation of online degree programs and for-profit institutions) and slowly in other aspects, such as vaunted rituals of commencement and tenure of professors. One of the movements that has seemed to move at a snails pace is that of fair and equitable compensation for all faculty members, regardless of gender, tenure, or rank. The New York Times (2013, April 8) reported that 76% of American college faculty are adjunct professors – an all-time high. Unlike tenured faculty, whose annual salaries can top $160,000, adjunct professors make an average of $2,700 per course and receive no health care or other benefits (Lewin, “Gap Widens for Faculty at Colleges”).

Kezar (2012) traces the recent drastic faculty workforce shift from primarily full-time tenured faculty to non-tenure track faculty and part-time appointments. As this change in the employment landscape is taking place, several problems have emerged: the faculty system has become caste-based with great disparities in job security and pay, short-term solutions are often pursued for long-term problems, and educational quality has become an issue as non-tenure track faculty are relegated in terms of policies and compensation (Kezar, 2012, p. xi).

Although there are more issues at stake than pay, the income that faculty members receive from their institutions is one glaring indicator in which gender, rank, and other variables are shown to influence a significant discrepancy in compensation. This research study will focus on faculty members’ institutional income at four-year non-doctorial universities to examine how much it varies with regard to gender, rank, and scholarly output (in terms of publications in refereed journals and conference presentations).

First, a brief literature review will illustrate the income imbalance among faculty and integrate equity theory (Adams, 1965; Walster & Bershcheid, 1978) as a framework to inform a discussion of statistical analyses from a large faculty survey. Based on the statistical analyses, I will advance discussion and implications of the data with regard to equity theory and call for more quantitative and qualitative inquiry to investigate the extent to which people are (and aren’t) given equitable income for the outputs they produce as faculty. Last, limitations of the study and policy implications will be discussed.

Faculty Income and Equity Theory

The literature surrounding faculty compensation reveals that female faculty members tend to have lower salaries and are less likely to be tenured (or full professors) than
How far from income equity are faculty in four-year, non-doctoral universities?

Brandon Hensley

Many have argued that the corporatization of higher education in recent decades has increased income inequity. Cosco and Longmate (2012) lament “the disparity of rights and entitlements between the tenured and untenured. . . on the one hand, and the majority (the adjunct class) on the other, to say nothing of grossly unfair pay structures” (p. 72). Not only are income disparities evident along the lines of gender and minority status, but also in the growing trend of hiring adjunct instructors for annuity contracted, non-tenure track appointments that offer significantly less in compensation, benefits, and job security.

Although equity can be measured along many variables other than payment, the focus of this study will be on total income from the institution and the extent to which it seems to be equitable and based on scholarly “merit” (publication in academic journals and conference presentations) and other variables. Closely bound to faculty status, salaries reflect many aspects of faculty achievement; however, female and minority faculty tend to make lower salaries than their male and white female colleagues (Kezar, 2012; Lin et al., 2009; Neltjes et al., 2000).

Equity theory, the framework that informs the current study, was advanced by Adams (1965) and later extended by Walster and Bershcheid (1978). Considered a social justice theory, equity theory attempts to explain organizational satisfaction in terms of perceived fair/unfair distributions of resources, proposing that individuals’ self-perceptions of being under-rewarded or over-rewarded lead to experiences of distress, and this dissonance often involves perceptions of being under-rewarded or over-rewarded.

The overarching focus of equity theory is payment, whereas a wage or salary, so income from the institution becomes a central concern when examining equitable compensation in higher education. As in other service industries, in any faculty position, one wants to feel that their contributions and work performance are being rewarded in fair returns (the “equity norm” principle). Walsner and Bershcheid (1976) posit if an employee feels underpaid, s/he will likely report feeling hostile towards the organization and perhaps colleagues, possibly impacting performance in the work setting and interpersonal relations with others.

Research Method

The current study examines income discrepancies and equity theory further, using the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF04). Specifically, the aim is to examine the compensation of faculty at all levels of status at four-year non-doctoral universities (X38q). After narrowing the larger sample to exclude respondents from other Carnegie classifications, descriptive, associa- tional, and inferential statistics were employed to explore relationships between total income from the university and other variables. Specifically, linear regressions were conducted to examine the factors that predict income from the institution (X03Q66), introduced as a dependent variable.

The independent variables selected include full-time/part- time (q3ad), tenure status (q12), rank (q1bad), career articles in refereed journals (q2aa), career conference presentations (q84q52), and sex (q71aad). The variables of career conference presentations and articles published in refereed journals were selected to represent scholastic output of respondents in accordance with literature indicating the emphasis placed on publishing research reports (Green, 1999; Skolnik, 2000). Sex was selected because, as is evident in the literature, women are paid less even when producing scholarship at the same rate as their male colleagues (Park, 1996).

Demographics, ANOVA and regression statistics illuminate the sample in the NSOPF04 from the Carnegie classification of four-year non-doctoral institutions. It should be noted that some of the variables were recoded for the purposes of the data analysis, and one case was removed from the data subsample, as the income reported was a likely typographical error.

Results

Table 1 demonstrates that 43% of the respondents are female, the mean total income from institution is around $40,000 dollars (with a wide discrepancy between the range); 58% of respondents reported as full-time; 30% reported as holding tenure at their institutions; and rank, career, published articles, and career total presentations are also reported. Notable in this table, among other things, is the large standard deviation in terms of total income from the institution as well as rank. Career articles and presentations ranged from 0-200 and 0-900, respectively, so the standard deviation scores for those variables were to be expected.

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However, the empirical evidence depicted in the descriptive statistics suggests significant disparities in total income from the institution, which can be further explained through linear regression analysis examining the factors that predict income from the institution. Table 2 displays the results of the regression analysis. According to the model summary, R²=0.750 and adjusted R²=0.562, indicating a robust correlation and explanatory power of the variance in total income from the institution.

As Table 2 indicates, all of the independent variables are significant at the p<.001 level, with full-time/part-time status, career articles, and rank having the strongest influence on total income from an institution according to the Beta scores. To test for significance of regression differences and relationships between normal distribution and the results found from the NSOPF04 data, a two-way ANOVA was also conducted, displayed in Table 3, and according to the ANOVA output, the regression differ- ences are significant at the p<.001 level, and the F value large enough to support the tentative argument that facul- ty status, career output and gender do have an effect on total income from an institution. Although the ANOVA does not indicate what the relationship is, it does indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study align with the reports of other scholars who study, among other things, the glaring in- come gap in the American professoriate (if lecturers and scholars who study, among other things, the glaring income gap in the American professoriate (if lecturers and scholars...
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Table 3

<table>
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</table>

Notes: (a) Dependent Variable: Total income from the institution
(b) Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Career total presentations, exhibitions, or performances, recoded dummy variable full/part-time, Career articles, refereed journals, recoded dummy variable tenure status, reverse recoded variable rank

References


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