

FACTORS INFLUENCING AN EXTENSION AGENT'S CHOICE OF PURSUING EITHER THE FACULTY OR THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL CAREER TRACK

Rosemary R. Gliem, Director, Data Center

The Ohio State University

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive-correlational study was to describe Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) agents who are more likely to choose the faculty or Administrative and Professional (A & P) career track. The population for this census study was all OSUE agents hired on or after January 1, 1994 through October 31, 1997. Focus group interviews were conducted in three of the five Extension districts before the quantitative instrument was developed. Using a five point Likert-type scale, the instrument measured the agents' attitudes toward the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching along with the issue of balancing work and family. The instrument also measured agents' attitudes towards the differences in research criteria and salaries between the faculty and A & P career tracks. In general, agents were more likely to choose the A & P track, but younger, male agents were more likely to choose the faculty track. Stepwise discriminant analysis identified the following variables as the best discriminators between the two groups: mean score on the scholarship of application scale, the influence of the differences in salaries, and the agent's age. The discriminant function explained 25% of the variance and correctly classified 72% of the cases.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The effectiveness of Extension has always depended on its human resources base (Chesney, 1992). Therefore, any changes in Extension's personnel base may affect the organization. During the 1980s, the number of faculty agents in Ohio State University (OSU) Extension was dramatically reduced mainly because faculty agents were offered the option of early retirement (Little, 1993). In order to fill the vacant county agents' positions OSU Extension hired mostly associate agents who had a non-faculty appointment which mainly meant that associate agents did not have the option to secure tenure. While faculty agents had opportunities for promotion to the next level, the associate agents did not have any career ladder to pursue. Little (1993) found that associate agents were frustrated with the lack of opportunity for promotion. Barrett (1994) concluded that faculty agents and associate agents wanted to equalize their benefits and vacation time. In response to these research findings and communication with agents on January 1, 1994,

OSU Extension implemented the two track system which allowed agents to choose a career track - faculty or administrative and professional (A & P). The two track system provided A & P agents (formerly associate agents) opportunities for promotion by incorporating a career ladder and professional growth. The two track system also provided evaluation criteria for both faculty and A & P agents based upon their research, teaching, and service activities. Ultimately, the two track system was developed as an incentive for all Extension agents to grow professionally regardless of which career track was chosen. Currently, the 55 Extension services affiliated with land grant universities classify their county agents as either faculty or non-faculty so the two track system is a unique feature of OSU Extension.

According to Sommers (1995), workforce demographics will change due to the increase of workers in the 25 - 34 year range along with the increasing number of women in the workforce. Competition from the private sector for competent workers is a concern for Extension. Chesney

(1992) noted that Extension must offer incentives, educational opportunities, and career ladders to attract competent personnel. The critical factors for productivity in Extension are attitudes, relationships and job enrichment (Chesney, 1992).

Findlestein and LaCelle-Peterson (1992) defined junior faculty which new faculty is a subgroup similarly to Extension agents who have chosen the faculty track. Extension agents who have chosen the A & P track are similar to what the authors defined as non-tenure track faculty. The one major difference between junior faculty and non-tenure track faculty was the disproportionate number of women in the non-tenure track. Tenure track faculty were found to rely on the intrinsic aspects of their work such as, autonomy and professional growth to derive job satisfaction (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992). Tenure track faculty placed a high value on recognition of teaching and scholarship by administrators (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992).

For non-tenure track faculty a main problem area was inadequate feedback and recognition from the university (Sorcinelli, 1992). Specifically, non-tenure track faculty identified unclear criteria for evaluating teaching, research, and service along with the lack of recognition by the university. Also, non-tenure track faculty indicated that a greater amount of their work lives interfered with their personal lives than tenure track faculty.

Besides personal differences between tenure track faculty and non-tenure track faculty, the faculty track in the two track system places a greater emphasis on research in the evaluation criteria and offers an agent a larger salary base than the A & P track. How influential is the differences in research criteria and salary between the faculty track and the A & P track in determining which track an agent chooses?

Boyer (1990) alerted higher education to reconsider what it means to be a scholar in today's

world. Boyer concluded that universities had an obligation to broaden the scope to include not only research (basic), but the following interactive dimensions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. Rice (1996) concluded that the new American scholar will be more responsive to issues beyond higher education, (i.e., community, nation, and world), and will experience a greater connection between a faculty's personal and professional lives. Schon (1995) argued that most research universities subscribe to a too narrow definition of what counts as scholarship. Locke (1995) noted that scholarship should evolve across the career stages of a faculty member and should include not only individual accomplishments but collective, departmental efforts. Miller and Sandmann (1998) suggested for the discipline of agricultural education the definition of scholarship could be expanded to include the following categories: outreach research (publication, awards, applied research), outreach teaching (observation reports, enrollment demands, new course development), and outreach service functions (impacts on research and teaching, impact on public policy, evaluation of service).

What factors influenced an agent's decision to choose the faculty or the A & P track? How does the choice of career track relate to an agent's attitude toward the academy? The two track system broadened the definition of research to include such activities as presentations at national, regional, and district meetings.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to collect data on OSU Extension agents who had the option under the new policy of choosing either the faculty or the A & P career track in OSU Extension. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe agents in terms of their demographic characteristics.

2. Identify the factors that best discriminate between agents who chose the faculty track and agents who chose the A & P track.

Methods and Procedures

The population for this descriptive-correlational study was all OSU Extension agents hired on or after January 1, 1994 through October 31, 1997. Ninety-one agents were identified and surveyed for this study.

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies - a concept referred to by Patton (1987) as triangulation. Triangulation, especially in exploratory research, may help explain rival factors. Focus group interviews were conducted in three of the five Extension districts based upon the number of faculty and A & P agents in each district. Focus group interviews were conducted in the following districts: the district that had the most faculty agents, the district that had the most A & P agents, and the district that had the closest to a 50/50 split between both groups. The purpose of the focus group interviews was twofold: to collect information for the development of the mail questionnaire and to allow the researcher to get a better understanding of the issues surrounding the two track system. The focus group participants were stratified based upon their year of hire (1994, 1995, 1996) and were randomly chosen for participation in the focus group interviews.

The questionnaire was developed based upon the results of the focus group interviews and a review of the related literature. The questionnaire consisted of the following three parts: (a) 28 Likert-type statements which measured attitudes toward the academy (scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching) and five Likert-type statements measured attitudes toward balancing work and family; (b) two statements which

measured how influential the differences in salary and research criteria were towards an agent's decision to choose either the faculty or the A & P track; and (c) demographic information. The scholarship of discovery in the questionnaire was defined as advancing knowledge in the field and included items such as, "Extension agents would conduct more research if they could work in teams with other agents." The scholarship of integration in the questionnaire was defined as making connections across Extension program areas, academic disciplines, agencies, organizations, and included items such as, "making connections with academic disciplines is very important." The scholarship of application was defined as using existing knowledge to solve problems in the community or a client's individual problem and included items such as, "successfully applying knowledge to problems will be a critical function for Extension's future." The scholarship of teaching was defined as nonformal teaching with groups of adults or youth and included items such as, "the evaluation of teaching should include peer evaluations." The questionnaire was submitted to a panel of experts which consisted of five agricultural education faculty, two Extension administrators, one district director, and two former county agents who were graduate students at the time. The questionnaire was field tested with 12 OSU Extension agents hired in 1993. The following Cronbach's alphas were achieved on the subscales: the scholarship of discovery .61, the scholarship of integration .65, the scholarship of application .82, the scholarship of teaching .67, and balancing work and family .64. According to Nunnally (1967), these coefficients fall within the acceptable range for exploratory research. A test-retest reliability coefficient (percentage of agreement) was calculated for the following subscales: scholarship of discovery .70, scholarship of integration .79, scholarship of application .78, scholarship of teaching .86, and balancing work and family, .73.

Respondents were asked to rate individual statements using a Likert-type scale where 1 =

strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The five subscales were each summated and used as independent variables with the agent's choice of faculty or A & P track as the dependent variable. The two questions on salary and research criteria differences were dummy-coded and used as independent variables in the analysis.

Salant and Dillman's (1994) method of survey research was used in this study. A total of 87 usable questionnaires were returned out of a possible 91 which was a 96% response rate.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 8.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. The point biserial correlation and the phi coefficient were used to determine the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Stepwise discriminant analysis was used to determine the best discriminators of the dependent variable. The standardized discriminant function coefficients were used to determine which variables contributed the most to the discriminant function. The pooled within group matrices were used to determine the relationships among the independent variables. Davis (1971) conventions were used to describe the correlational relationships. The qualitative data were analyzed using the cut-and-fold method outlined in Bogdan and Biklin (1992). The alpha level was set at .05 a priori.

Results

Table 1 reports the demographic characteristics of the Extension agents. Of the 87 agents 52% were male and 48% were female. There were more males in the faculty track, 69%, than females, 31%. The A & P track was mostly female, 57%, with males comprising 43%. The average age of all agents was 34 years old (range from 23 to 61 years of age) with faculty agents

being on average 32 years old and A & P agents being 36 years old. The racial/ethnic composition of all agents was 94% White, 5% Black/African-American, and 1% Asian.

For the total number of agents most had the title of Extension Agent II, 49%. The next most frequent title was Extension Agent I (entry level), 40% followed by Extension Agent III, 7%, Assistant Professor 3%, and Extension Agent IV, 1%. For all agents the most frequent occurring program area an agent was employed in was 4-II/Youth Development, 39%, followed by Agriculture and Natural Resources, 28%, and a tie for third place between Community Development and Family and Consumer Sciences, 13% respectively. There were more 4-H/Youth Development agents in the A & P track than the faculty track.

For all agents 61% were married followed by single, never married, 25%, divorced, 10%, and married, but currently separated, 3%. For the highest level of education attained 56% of all agents had a master's degree followed by some graduate work, 33%, post master's degree work, 7%, doctorate, 2%, and a 4-year college degree, 1%.

For all agents 34% stated that the influence of the differences in salaries between the faculty and the A & P track were a little influential in their decision followed by 29% who indicated that it was somewhat influential, 21% indicated it was moderately influential, and 14% reported that it was very influential. For A & P agents 47% indicated it was a little influential followed by 33% who stated it was somewhat influential, 17% who stated it was moderately influential, and 2% who stated it was very influential. For faculty agents 38% reported that it was very influential followed by 28% who stated it was moderately influential, 21% who stated it was somewhat influential, and 10% who stated it was a little influential.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of OSU Extension Agents (n=87)

Characteristics	Faculty A & P				Total	
	n=29		n=58		n=87	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender						
Male	20	69	25	43	45	52
Female	9	31	33	57	42	48
Racial/Ethnic Background						
Asian	1	3	-	-	1	1
Black/African-American	-	-	4	7	4	5
White	28	97	54	93	82	94
Title						
Extension Agent I	12	41	22	38	34	40
Extension Agent II	13	45	30	52	43	49
Extension Agent III	1	3	5	9	6	7
Extension Agent IV	-	-	1	2	1	1
Assistant Professor	3	10	-	-	3	3
Appointment (≥ 50%)						
Ag. & Natural Resources	10	34	14	24	24	28
Community Development	5	17	6	10	11	13
Family & Consumer Sciences	3	10	8	14	11	13
4-H/Youth Development	10	34	24	41	34	39
Marital Status						
Married	18	62	35	60	53	61
Single, Never Married	9	31	13	22	22	25
Divorced	2	7	7	12	9	10
Married, but Currently Separated	-	-	3	5	3	3

(table continues)

Characteristics	Faculty A & P				Total	
	n=29		n=58		n=87	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Highest Level of Education						
4-Year College Degree	-	-	1	2	1	1
Some Graduate Work	11	38	18	31	29	33
Master's Degree	14	48	35	60	49	59
Post Master's Degree Work	2	7	4	7	6	7
Doctorate	2	7	-	-	2	2

For all agents 43% responded that the differences in research criteria between the two tracks was very influential in their decision followed by 30% who stated it was moderately influential, 15% stated it was somewhat influential, and 13% indicated it was a little influential. For A & P agents 47% indicated it was very influential followed by 34% who stated it was moderately influential, 12% who stated it was somewhat influential, and 7% indicated it was a little influential.

On the five summated scales faculty agents had slightly higher means than A & P agents except on the balancing work and family scale (Table 2). Since this was a census study, it was not appropriate to calculate any inferential measures on the means. The variables age, gender, title, and FCS appointment had a low association (Davis, 1971) with the dependent variable. The differences in salaries had a moderate association with the dependent variable while the differences in research criteria had a low association with the dependent variable. For the summated scales the scholarship of discovery, application, and teaching had a low association with the dependent variable. Summary data for the discriminant analysis are reported in Table 3. The variables age, gender, title, and FCS appointment had a low association (Davis, 1971)

with the dependent variable. The differences in salaries had a moderate association with the dependent variable while the differences in research criteria had a low association with the dependent variable. For the summated scales the scholarship of discovery, application, and teaching had a low association with the dependent variable. Summary data for the discriminant analysis are reported in Table 3. There was one discriminant function because there were two groups. The null hypothesis tested was that in the population there will be no difference between the group centroids on the discriminant scores. The level of significance associated with the chi-square was less than alpha (.05) so the null hypothesis was rejected. A Wilks' lambda of .75 indicates that 75% of the variance was unexplained. Structure coefficients (s) were considered if the absolute value was equal to or greater than .30 (Hair, et al., 1995). The standardized canonical discriminant coefficients (b) were interpreted using the general rule that the coefficients whose absolute value is not less than one half of the largest value are considered in the discriminant function (Hair, et al., 1995). The variables which contributed the most to the discriminant function were the scholarship of application ($b = -.62$), the influence of the differences in salary ($b = .59$), and the agent's age ($b = .51$). The same variables loaded high on the discriminant function when

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Point Biserial Correlations, and Phi Coefficients for the Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Faculty		A & P		r_{pb}	Phi
	<u>M</u>	SD	<u>M</u>	SD		
Demographic Variables						
Age	32	7.42	35.60	8.78	.20	
Gender ^a	.69	.47	.43	.50		.24
Racial/Ethnic Background ^b	.97	.19	.93	.26		.07
Title ^c	.90	.31	1.00	.00		.27
ANR Appointment ^d	.34	.48	.24	.43		.11
CD Appointment ^d	.17	.38	.14	.35		.05
FCS Appointment ^d	.10	.31	.26	.44		.18
4-H Appointment ^d	.34	.48	.41	.50		.07
Other Appointment ^d	.00	.19	.00	.18		.00
Marital Status ^e	.62	.49	.60	.49		.02
Highest Level of Education ^f	.62	.49	.67	.47		.05
Other Factors						
Salary Differences ^g	.11	.31	.47	.50		.36
Research Criteria ^h	.34	.48	.47	.50		.11
Attitudes Regarding the Academy						
Discovery	21.69	3.27	20.89	2.44	-.14	
Integration	31.41	3.61	30.88	3.57	-.07	
Application	35.10	3.46	33.10	2.97	-.29	
Teaching	23.72	2.49	22.05	3.43	-.24	
Issue						
Balancing Work and Family	14.45	3.63	14.55	2.80	.02	

^aMale = 1, Female = 0; ^bWhite = 1, Minority = 0; ^cA & P = 1, Faculty = 0; ^d≥ 50% = 1, <50% = 0;

^eMarried = 1, Unmarried = 0; ^f≥ Master's degree = 1, < Master's degree = 0; ^gLittle Influential = 1,

> Little = 0; ^hVery Influential = 1, < Very Influential = 0

Table 3. Summary Data for Discriminant Analysis

Variables	Discriminant Function 1		Centroids	
	Group <u>b</u>	<u>s</u> ^c		
The Scholarship of Application	-0.62	-0.64	Faculty	-0.816
Influence of Salary Differences	0.59	0.62	A&P	0.401
Age	0.51	0.45		
The Scholarship of Integration ^a		-0.22		
Race/Ethnic Background		-0.19		
ANR Appointment ^a		-0.12		
Marital Status ^a		-0.07		
The Scholarship of Teaching ^a		-0.07		
Title ^a		0.06		
Gender ^a		0.06		
Research Criteria ^a		-0.06		
Balancing Work and Family ^a		0.05		
Highest Level of Education ^a		0.04		
CD Appointment ^a		0.03		
FCS Appointment ^a		-0.01		
4-H Appointment ^a		-0.01		
The Scholarship of Discovery ^a		0		
Eigenvalue	<u>Rc</u> ^d		Wilks' Lambda	
0.33	0.5		0.75	

^aThese variables were not used in the discriminant analysis. ^bstandardized canonical discriminant function coefficients. ^cstructure coefficients. ^dcanonical correlation coefficient.

analyzed by their structure coefficients - the scholarship of application (s = -.64), the influence of the differences in salary (s = .62), and the agent's age (s = .45).

The discriminant function accounted for 25% (Rc = .50) of the variance which could be

explained by the two groups (Table 3). The proportion of variance unexplained was 75% (Wilks' lambda = .75). The eigenvalue of .33 (Table 3) indicates that the discriminant function can explain .33 times as much as is not being explained. The classification of cases (Table 4) reports that 72% of the cases were correctly

classified based upon its discriminant score.

Table 4. Classification of Cases

Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Group	
		Faculty	A & P
Faculty	29	21	8
		72.4%	27.6%
A & P	58	16	42
		27.6%	72.4%
Percent of Cases Correctly Classified: 72%			

Conclusions

The typical faculty agent in this study was on average 32 years old, male, white Extension agent II, employed full-time as an 4-H/Youth Development agent, married, and had a master's degree. Faculty agents in general scored higher than A & P agents on the scholarship of application scale which was on one of the discriminating variables that corresponded with the faculty agent group. Since applying knowledge to real life problems is one of the main functions of an Extension agent, it is interesting to note that the scholarship of application variable was a discriminating variable for faculty agents and not A & P agents. One would assume this would not be the case considering the general job descriptions of both faculty and A & P agents. The typical A & P agent was on average 36 years old, female, Extension agent II, employed full-time as an 4-H/Youth Development agent, married, and had a master's degree. A & P agents were not as influenced by the differences in salary levels, a discriminating variable for A & P agents, between the two groups even though the faculty agents were at a higher base salary. If the purpose of starting faculty agents at a higher base salary was to motivate new agents to pursue the faculty track, the findings of this study indicate for those newly

hired A & P agents offering them more money will not be a motivating factor for them to pursue the faculty track. A & P agents were also older on average than faculty agents with age being a discriminating variable for A & P agents.

When entering OSU Extension, agents are more likely to choose the A & P track. If agents continue to choose the A & P track over the faculty track, administrators need to consider what effect, if any, this has on the organization. Long term implications to the organization of having more A & P agents than faculty agents need to be addressed.

Agents entering the organization who indicate a preference for the faculty track tend to be younger, male, more influenced by salary differences between the two tracks, and less likely to be in the 4-H/Youth Development or FCS program areas. If Extension administrators want to encourage agents to pursue the faculty track, these variables need to be further reviewed and supported by possibly offering some career development information and/or being aware of the agent's career aspirations.

Attitudes toward the academy and the issue of balancing work and family did not differ greatly for agents in the faculty or the A & P track. Since the groups did not differ attitudinally for all practical purposes, Extension administrators should not assume that agents choosing one track over the other have different levels of commitment to and motivation toward the organization (Cherniss, 1991; Granrose & Partwood, 1987). The two groups for all practical purposes did not differ on the variable which measured the influence of the differences in the research criteria between the two tracks. The main difference between the two tracks in terms of research criteria is that faculty agents are expected to publish articles in refereed journals while A & P agents are expected to produce nonrefereed publications such as, fact sheets and newsletters. One would assume that the differences in the

research criteria would have been a discriminating variable but very little differences existed between the two groups. This finding may indicate that A & P agents are willing to conduct the research necessary and disseminate the results in refereed journals which would add to knowledge base of the profession. However, agents in both tracks need to feel valued by the organization.

Recommendations

Further study is needed to determine whether there are differences in outcomes between faculty and A & P agents in terms of serving the needs of targeted clientele. Future studies could also focus upon the scholarship of application which was one of the discriminating variables in this study. It may be interesting to determine how faculty and A & P agents apply existing knowledge to real life problems and their rate of success. Determining if there are outcome differences between the two tracks may help OSU Extension administrators reevaluate the two track system in regards to how the system facilitates an agent's professional development and the goals of the organization.

Studies are needed to explore the differential career development needs of males and females in the four Extension program areas. OSU Extension needs to determine what motivates agents to choose either the faculty or the A & P track and thereby help each person achieve his or her career potential (Cherniss, 1991). Salary differences between the two tracks was not a discriminating variable for A & P agents - so, what motivates an A & P agent to choose the A & P track? OSU Extension should investigate this question since the majority of the newly hired agents are pursuing the A & P track. The findings of this study indicate that A & P agents are not opposed to writing articles for refereed publications so OSU Extension needs to pursue this finding and encourage A & P agents to publish their research which may lead some of the agents to consider pursuing the faculty track.

The literature suggests that differences exist between tenure and non-tenure track individuals such as, non-tenure track individuals have higher levels of stress and tenure track individuals were found to be more intrinsically motivated than non-tenure track individuals (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992; Sorcinelli, 1992). Eventhough no differences were found between agents who are more likely to choose the faculty track or the A & P track regarding their attitudes toward the academy and balancing work and family, further study is needed to identify other factors which may lead to a better understanding of the differences. The two track system was relatively new at the time of this research study so additional studies are needed to determine what trends and issues may influence an agent's choice of either track.

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