Amenities Provided as Predictors of Job Satisfaction Among Entry-Level, Live-on/Live-in Residence Life Professionals

by

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Introduction

Living on college campuses as a residence life professional staff member is a very common “rite of passage” for many student affairs professionals (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Frederickson (1993) explained that residence life has become the primary unit that provides assistance to new professionals in gaining student affairs experiences. Richmond and Benton (1988) found that graduate students and new professionals were predominantly employed in entry-level residence life positions, such as resident directors. Komives (1998) clarified that a live-on/live-in (LO/LI) professional is typically a post-graduate professional who resides in campus owned or operated housing, and who works for housing and/or residence life (HRL).

Researchers have observed that even though many new professionals begin their careers in residence life, they are initially hesitant in accepting these positions due to the effects the job can have on their quality of life (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Bender, 1980; Lagagna, 2007). Quality of life, according to Boehman (2007), includes job amenities such as domestic partner benefits and salary. Furthermore, new professionals are often hesitant in assuming the responsibilities associated with the demanding work required of LO/LI professionals (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Additionally, as a LO/LI professional, it is often difficult to leave work at work, because one lives at the place of their employment (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Because of the high number of new professionals holding LO/LI residence life positions, and the perceived high demands of the job and low quality of life, it is critical that job satisfaction of these professionals be examined.

Statement of the Problem

Student affairs professionals, including LO/LI professionals, impact student retention and success. Astin (1999) explained that student persistence could be dependent upon professionals in student affairs. Furthermore, Arboleda, Shelley, Wang, and Whalen (2003) found that student
involvement and satisfaction had a direct correlation to relationships with student affairs professionals. Braxton (2000), in examining the reason for high attrition rates among students who were involved during their college years, determined that student affairs professionals and paraprofessionals had a significant impact on student success. Therefore, LO/LI professionals have an impact on student success in college, so it is important to ensure they are satisfied with their jobs so they can continue to help their students.

Although a plethora of information on entry- and mid-level professionals’ job satisfaction exists, there is a paucity of research in the area of LO/LI residence life professionals (Komives, 1998). Specifically, very little research exists in the area of amenities or benefits provided to LO/LI professionals. Jennings (2005) studied job satisfaction and attrition among hall directors. Although hall directors commonly hold LO/LI positions and Jennings’ results can be utilized for comparison purposes, the research was focused solely on professionals with that job title. Potentially excluded were other residence life professionals with LO/LI positions who have different job titles.

A wealth of research has been conducted in coordination with the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I). Much of this research has been concentrated on recruitment and retention of housing and residence life (HRL) professionals, and some has focused on entry-level professionals. While St. Onge, Ellett, Nestor, and Scheuermann (2008) examined factors related to the recruitment and retention of entry-level professionals, they studied perceptions of chief housing officers, the highest level professionals in an HRL office. Furthermore, Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel (2008) conducted a Delphi inquiry in determining the best practices related to the recruitment and retention of LO/LI staff. However,
Belch et al.’s (2008) study was not limited to interviewing new professionals. Rather, they surveyed professionals in a variety of positions within departments of HRL.

In only three of the existing studies examining entry-level HRL professionals with potential LO/LI responsibilities were subjects queried regarding their perceptions of their jobs. In one study, Christopher (2008) investigated Resident Directors (RD), and determined aspects of the RD job that led to job burnout and a lack of workload satisfaction. Ellett and Robinette (2008) studied the impact of supervision and mentorship among new professionals in HRL. In a third study, Ellett and Stipeck (2010) determined factors that led to burnout and attrition of new professionals in HRL. In summary, numerous studies have been conducted on the recruitment and retention of new professionals in HRL. However, none of them have been focused solely on entry-level LO/LI HRL professionals. Furthermore, they have not been directed to the amenities provided in these positions, or the impact of these amenities on job satisfaction.

Beyond reports supported by ACUHO-I, only one refereed study was found in which the recruitment and hiring of LO/LI professionals was investigated (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Although the ACUHO-I sponsored studies and the work of Belch and Mueller (2003) and Jennings (2005) offer insight in several areas pertaining to new professionals in HRL, no studies exist which have specifically targeted the broad population of LO/LI professionals, and the impact that amenities have on their job satisfaction. Furlone (2008) and The Talking Stick Writers Community (2008) discussed ways to increase job satisfaction and decrease attrition of LO/LI professionals. These studies however, were not empirically based. Because of the dearth of research on this very important population, this study will be conducted in an effort to bridge the gap between the research and outline specific amenities provided to entry-level LO/LI residence life professionals that lead to job satisfaction.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine amenities that lead to job satisfaction among new professionals who hold LO/LI positions in residence life. This study will analyze amenities provided to this population, and the extent to which they impact job satisfaction. The amenities found to determine job satisfaction will be compared and analyzed in conjunction with (a) personal demographic information such as gender, years of experience, salary, and job title, and (b) institutional demographical information such as institutional size and location. This study will contribute to the field of student affairs, specifically residence life, in four major areas. First, it will help current employers and supervisors of LO/LI professionals understand the amenities that lead to job satisfaction. Second, this research will provide knowledge in areas and methods to increase job satisfaction. This may help decrease turnover and attrition of new residence life professionals. Third, the findings of this study will enlighten graduate students and new professionals in their job searches as to the likelihood that they will be satisfied with a LO/LI position. Such information could impact entry-level professionals’ decisions to pursue specific positions. Finally, this study will provide quantitative research that can be utilized by each of the above stated groups in career decision-making, evaluation of self and their job, hiring decisions, and through examining current practices.

Research Questions

The research questions below highlight the direction of this study.

1. To what extent is job satisfaction, as measured by the Job Diagnostic Survey related to personal demographics of entry-level live-on/live-in housing and residence life (LO/LI HRL) professionals?
2. To what extent is job satisfaction, as measured by the Job Diagnostic Survey related to institutional demographics of entry-level live-on/live-in housing and residence life (LO/LI HRL) professionals?

3. To what extent are the amenities provided to live-on/live-in housing and residence life (LO/LI HRL) professionals associated with job satisfaction?

**Methodology**

**Instrumentation**

In the proposed study, the personal and institutional demographics of LO/LI entry-level professionals will be explored as they relate to job satisfaction as measured by the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS). The JDS was created in 1974 and is able to produce the results of overall job satisfaction in addition to satisfaction regarding specific characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Amenities provided to LO/LI professionals will also be examined to determine the impact they have on job satisfaction, which will be determined using the JDS and a researcher-designed instrument.

In addition to the JDS, the researcher created a measure specifically for this study. The survey created for this study consists of aspects of LO/LI professional jobs and responsibilities, in addition to amenities received by these professionals. Overall, the Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals will determine what particular aspects of LO/LI positions are predictors of job satisfaction among LO/LI professionals. The review of literature was instrumental in the development of the questions for this survey. Specifically, the work of Belch and Kimble, 2006; Belch and Mueller, 2003; Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel, 2009; Herdlein, 2004; Horowitz, 2008; and St. Onge, Ellet, and Nestor, 2008 contributed to the questions included in the survey.
Additionally, five housing and residence life experts were asked for feedback on the measure. Four of the five agreed to assist. Another recommended professional who was employed in institutional research in higher education served as the fifth reviewer. Reviewers were asked to consider content of questions, survey structure, and variables that were either missing or should be excluded. The five experts returned the surveys with their comments to the researcher. The feedback received was incorporated into the final version of the Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals.

Due to the largely nominal-scaled questions on the survey, it is not possible or necessary to compute a Chronbach’s alpha. After successful defense of the dissertation proposal, the Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals was administered to a convenience sample of five LO/LI professionals throughout the United States. Participants were provided with a word document electronic version of the survey and asked to take notes and provide feedback regarding survey design, wording of questions, and formatting upon completion of the survey. Participants were also asked to time themselves and provide that information to the researcher along with all feedback.

Following the first pilot study, the JDS and the Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals were combined and administered via the secure web server to a convenience sample of five LO/LI professionals (different from those in the initial pilot). These participants were asked to concentrate on completing the survey and asked to note any technical or formatting issues and provide that to the researcher. Following completion, the researcher noted all feedback, worked to incorporate said feedback, and submitted the study for approval by the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board.
The Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals assesses several aspects of LO/LI positions, including amenities provided for LO/LI professionals. Additionally, the survey will inquire as to participants’ personal and institutional demographics. Job responsibilities of participants will be assessed along with participants’ preferences regarding institutional demographics. Finally, this study enables research on the difference in job satisfaction and amenities for live-on versus live-in professionals. For the purposes of this study, the first page of the survey lists distinct definitions for each of these positions. They are as follows:

**Live-on position/professional:** you reside on campus, but not within a building which houses residents.

**Live-in position/professional:** you reside in a residence hall or complex which houses residents, typically building for which you are responsible.

**Population**

The population for the proposed study consists of all members of ACUHO-I. The target sample is all entry-level LO/LI HRL professionals who are members of ACUHO-I. Since it is not possible to email members based on job responsibilities or characteristics, all members will receive an email that requests participation of LO/LI professionals.

**Data Collection**

All members of ACUHO-I will be sent an initial request via email, which will include the invitation of the intended population to participate in the survey, the benefits of the results, and instructions for survey completion. Nine days following the initial request, a follow-up email will be sent to ACUHO-I members reminding them of the opportunity to participate in the study. A final email will be sent to members three days prior to the close of the survey. The survey will be open for a total of 21 days.
The combined JDS and Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals will be hosted on a secure private web server, which ensures compatibility with other computers. Additionally, the private server cultivates greater security. Once participants arrive at the survey website, they will be greeted and given a brief synopsis of the survey. Also included on the first page will be notification of consent to participate in the study. The estimated maximum time to complete the survey is 30 minutes. Upon completion, the final screen of the survey will once again thank respondents for their participation and list contact information for the researcher.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics will be used in the analysis of personal and institutional demographics and amenities data. Hierarchical linear regressions are used to determine the relationship between job satisfaction (dependent variable) and personal demographics, institutional demographics (including distinction between live-on and live-in), and amenities provided (independent variables).

Hierarchical linear regressions are used to determine the relationship between job satisfaction (dependent variable) and personal demographics, institutional demographics, and amenities provided (independent variables). Hierarchical regression is the practice of building a successively more complex linear regression model in which additional predictors (independent variables) are added to the model either individually or in groups (Lomax, 2007). When conducting hierarchical linear regressions, predictors (or a block of predictors) are entered one at a time in an effort to determine how each contributes to the variance. Once a predictor is incorporated into the regression, the researcher can then control for that predictor when testing for the efficacy of the next predictor.
Two hierarchical linear regressions will be run for each research question resulting in a total of six hierarchical linear regressions. The first regression for each research question will utilize the motivating potential score (MPS) of a job, as determined by the core job characteristics in the JDS. The MPS will represent job satisfaction and serve as the dependent variable. The independent variables associated with the three research questions will be measured using the Survey of Live-on and Live-in Professionals as follows: Research Question 1, personal demographics; Research Question 2, institutional demographics; and Research Question 3, amenities.

The second hierarchical linear regression for each of the three research questions will encompass personal and work outcomes serving as the dependent variable. The personal and work outcomes will be scored according to the JDS scoring key. After each outcome score is calculated, the scores will be averaged to determine an overall score for personal and work outcomes. The outcomes are the results of the core job characteristics and critical psychological states, with growth needs strength serving as a modifier. Although this calculation has not been utilized before, it is believed that the averaged personal and work outcomes will serve as an accurate measure of job satisfaction. The personal and work outcomes include internal work motivation, general satisfaction, and specific satisfactions. Specific satisfactions include job security, pay and other compensation, peers and coworkers, supervision, and growth satisfaction.

**International Consideration**

The original intention of this study was to be done on a national level, in an effort to limit the population due to the researchers limited time to complete this dissertation research. However, if requested by ACUHO-I, the survey can be modified to be conducted on an international scale.
References


Ellett, T. & Stipeck, C. (2010, June) *Understanding burnout levels and factors that contribute to attrition of entry-level professionals in housing and residence life*. Presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of College and University Housing Officers-International, Austin, TX.


