



# Academic nursing administrators' workplace satisfaction and intent to stay

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** In nursing education, the academic administrator is critical given the multitude of challenges associated with program delivery (e.g., shortages of faculty, strict and changing regulations for program accreditation, and the sheer demand for more nurses). Unfortunately, with the focus on recruiting and retaining new novice faculty to teach students, academic nursing administrators have been overlooked in recent studies.

**Purpose:** As such, this study aims to explore the workplace satisfaction and intent to stay of academic nursing administrators by considering their relation to a variety of demographic and work related variables.

**Methods:** A secondary data source was used from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with post hoc Fisher's Least Significant Difference tests and t-tests were used in the analysis.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** Results indicate that several modifiable work factors positively relate to both job satisfaction and intent to stay.

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An academic administrator position is one of the most important in higher education, given that academic administrators are responsible for the vast majority of all academic decisions that are made in higher education (Czech & Forward, 2010). Yet, despite the importance of the work of this position, academic administrators typically receive little training or mentoring (Glasgow, Weinstock, Lachman, Suplee, & Dreher, 2009). Training and mentorship is important because the required skill set is significantly different from those of traditional nursing faculty (Adams, 2007; Glasgow et al., 2009). At the same time, academic

administrators are typically placed in highly stressful situations that are driven by budget cuts, greater accountability, and calls for more efficiency (Majeski, 2005).

In nursing education, the academic administrator is even more critical, as issues facing program delivery are confounded by shortages of nursing faculty, strict and changing regulations for program accreditation, and the sheer demand for more nurses (Mintz-Binder, 2014). Moreover, academic nursing administrator vacancies are on the rise, and this trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future (Adams, 2007;

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Glasgow et al., 2009). On average, academic administrator positions remain unfilled for 2 to 5 months, with interim academic administrators filling the void for extended periods of time (Mintz-Binder & Fitzpatrick, 2009). For example, in the *Special Survey on Faculty Vacancies for Academic Positions 2015-2016* (Li, Stauffer, & Fang, 2016) supported by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 1,328 full-time vacancies were identified in 741 reporting programs. Of these full-time vacancies, 12% of the positions had 50% or more work effort devoted to administrative responsibilities, demonstrating the small number of academic nursing administrators' positions compared with full-time faculty.

A large portion of one's life takes place at work. Satisfaction with work can impact all aspects of life. The job can determine economic stability and quality of life for the employed and their families. If dissatisfied with work, the results can impact personal growth and self-fulfillment, leading to frustration. This dissatisfaction can resonate to colleagues at work and impact the organizational culture. If dissatisfaction continues, the end result can be leaving the position. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to explore workplace satisfaction and intent to stay of academic nursing administrators. To this end, we sought to address five research questions: (a) Are there differences in demographic factors (gender, race, age) with academic nursing administrators' job satisfaction or intent to stay? (b) Are there differences in tenure status with academic nursing administrators' job satisfaction or intent to stay? (c) Are there differences in academic ranks for academic nursing administrators' job satisfaction or intent to stay? (d) Are there differences in institutional type for nursing administrators' job satisfaction or intent to stay? and (e) Is there a significant relationship between academic nursing administrators' job satisfaction and intent to stay with personal and family policies, collaboration, tenure clarity, institutional leadership, shared governance, career development, and department engagement?

## Relevant Literature

Job satisfaction has been a topic of considerable investigation in higher education administration outside of nursing education. Recent work by Morris and Laipple (2015) sampled 1,515 university administrators from across the United States. The survey revealed that most administrators had become less interested and less enthusiastic about their role compared with their beginning appointment. In addition, approximately half of participants reported that their job responsibilities regularly interfered with personal well-being and quality of life. Twenty percent of participants reported feeling good about their job every day indicating that 80% of administrators expressed less than desirable feelings about the job. These

findings may impact academic nursing administrators as well.

With the focus on recruiting and retaining new novice faculty to teach students, academic nursing administrators have been largely overlooked in recent studies. This trend was recognized by Lamborn (1991) and continues to this day. More explicitly, in the literature reviewed, few studies with samples of academic nursing administrators considered either job satisfaction or intent to stay. Of the few that did consider job satisfaction or intent to stay, the majority focused on individual characteristics, skill sets, mentorship in the role, job characteristics (e.g., autonomy and reward), and role responsibilities as related to job satisfaction and intent to stay (Baker, 2010; Carpenter, 1989; Christensen, 2004; George, 1981; Lamborn, 1991; Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012; Ryan & Irvine, 1996).

The classic work by George (1981), surveyed 127 associate and assistant deans of nursing, revealed that 79% would not commit to continue in the academic leadership roles—pointing to stress, heavy work load, and role conflict as reasons for not pursuing or leaving these positions. Those surveyed recommended improving lines of authority and decision-making as strategies for organizational change to retain academic nursing administrators. The author concluded that doctoral preparation in academic administration emphasizing effective leadership in education demands a specialized knowledge and skill set for success. However, the trend to forego a deanship as a career goal by these middle managers seemed paradoxical.

Lamborn (1991) surveyed 335 deans from National League for Nursing accredited institutions offering a bachelor's degree in nursing. Most deans in this study reported being satisfied with their jobs ( $r = .56, p \leq .001$ ), and the authors concluded that deans who were satisfied with their jobs were highly motivated and the relationship between job satisfaction and motivation were interdependent. In addition, the study found that only half of the deans sampled received any formal preparation for the administrative role. Recommendations included support from institutions for higher education for formal classroom education and mentorship as strategies for retention.

In the work most closely related to the present study, Mintz-Binder (2014) surveyed 242 academic nursing administrators in associate degree granting institutions from across the United States. The descriptive analysis showed 68% of respondents reported accepting their administrative roles for <5 years. Of that 68%, 16% reported <1 year in their administrative role. These figures demonstrate the high turnover rate in administrative roles in the previous 5 years for associate degree programs nationwide. In addition, 83% of respondents reported age within the 51 to 70 range, suggesting that a number of academic nursing administrators will retire within the decade. Results indicated that multiple factors related to job satisfaction, including a lack of supportive

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