

# The Challenges and Rewards of Service: Job Satisfaction among Public Affairs Program Directors

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## ABSTRACT

Most public affairs programs have some form of director, but we do not know the full scope of the program director's role. This article thus asks, What tasks and duties does a program director perform? What aspects of the role are most satisfying to those performing it? What aspects of the role present challenges? Based on survey data, we conclude that female program directors are more likely to engage with advisory boards, while males are typically more satisfied in their role. Those currently in the position are less likely than former directors to work on financial aid. There also appear to be differences in how program size relates to the tasks and duties of the program director, to compensation, and to maintenance of a research agenda. Finally, we draw lessons for prospective program directors and for chairs and deans who have influence on how this role is structured.

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## KEYWORDS

MPA program directors, MPP program directors, PhD program directors, academic work, university employees, public administration and public policy employees, job satisfaction

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Academic programs do not run themselves, and the position of academic program director is ubiquitous across universities in the United States. Yet there is no standard description for the role, though one description from Australia says that such directors are “those with responsibility for delivery and quality of a course [program]” (Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2014, p. 102). Most degree programs in public affairs have some form of director and, according to the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (Eagan et al., 2014), 15% of faculty are in an administrative role other than dean, chair, or president across all academic fields. Nevertheless, we do not know, with any systematic clarity, what program directors do,

what unique challenges they face, and what they put into the role or get out of it. Knowledge of these factors is important for recruiting appropriate faculty into the position and structuring the role to make it desirable. Given the growing pressure for “professional management practices and quality leadership in universities” (Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2014, p. 102), understanding these factors takes on a special urgency.

We do have some anecdotal information about directing graduate programs in public affairs. Program directors often talk informally among themselves. Additionally, the past few annual conferences of the Network of Schools of Public

Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) have included panels about directing programs, and in 2015 NASPAA offered a half-day workshop for program directors. We know from these gatherings that program directors often navigate between and among faculty, students, staff, chairs, and deans and that to varying degrees they are involved in curricula, student life, and relationships with internal and external stakeholders. But beyond this, we know little. Indeed, we undertake this research in part because there is no standard description of the program director role. We thus seek to identify what program directors do and thereby propose a basic description of the role. We also seek to identify sources of satisfaction and specific challenges associated with the position.

The consensus during conference discussions was that directors are critical to program success and that a better grasp of directors' roles would help deans and other university administrators recruit appropriate faculty into these positions and enable them to work with directors more effectively. As Morris and Laipple (2015) state in their examination of academic administrators, "Poorly prepared leaders may at best slow the progress of their organization and at worst adversely affect productivity and morale" (p. 243). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) conclude that investigating faculty job satisfaction has important implications for university management, which should aim to "align incentives and job requirements to promote performance" (p. 179).

Some challenges faced by program directors may differ according to program characteristic. For example, benefits and challenges may vary by size of program. At some small programs, one person called on to serve as program director represents a substantial proportion of faculty and likely will have unique stresses and rewards. At the other end of the spectrum, directors of large programs, especially at research universities, must maintain their research agenda and may have different obstacles and incentives.

One challenge that all program directors have in common is that they are usually unprepared

for leadership and administrative roles. A PhD is a research degree, and though some doctoral programs provide teaching (or teaching assistant) opportunities, the focus of graduate-school training is on research skills. Faculty who take on administrative positions typically have no formal management training (Morris & Laipple, 2015).

Several other factors contribute to the importance of examining administrative and leadership demands on faculty members. First, faculty are aging, leading to a period of substantial turnover. About one in four (25%) faculty members nationwide are 64 or older (Eagan et al., 2014) and their retirements will lead to a new wave of hiring. Second, almost one in three (31%) faculty spend at least 4 hours per week on administrative tasks above and beyond committee functions, leaving less time for research and teaching (Eagan et al., 2014). This leads to a third factor: faculty positions are increasingly stressful. Hagedorn (2000) finds that "college professors typically work in environments that are high-pressured, multifaceted, and without clear boundaries. Stress abounds" (p. 6). Stress and satisfaction levels are of specific concern because they are related to a faculty member's intention to leave his or her job. Fully one third (35%) of faculty across disciplines report that they have considered leaving academia in the previous 2 years (Eagan et al., 2014).

It therefore seems critical that we examine what tasks and duties are included in administrative and leadership roles as well as the reported sources of satisfaction and challenges. No studies to date focus on job satisfaction among public affairs program directors in the United States. We seek to fill that gap with three research questions:

1. What tasks and duties are included in the program director role?
2. What aspects of the role are most satisfying to those performing it?
3. What aspects of the role present challenges to those performing it?

### JOB SATISFACTION OF ACADEMIC FACULTY

Despite decades of research, no single, clear model of job satisfaction has emerged. Starting with work of Frederick Herzberg in the late 1950s, scholars have explored general concepts related to worker satisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Herzberg introduced the two-factor theory of job satisfaction, arguing that intrinsic factors (such as how rewarding the work is) affect satisfaction, while extrinsic factors (such as salary) affect dissatisfaction. However, there has been considerable debate about this two-factor theory because of the narrow sample on which it was based (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Looking at Herzberg's theory in the context of academic administrative roles, Basak (2014) found that among academics, most factors affect both satisfaction and dissatisfaction similarly.

Because there is no standard theory or measure of job satisfaction, and since we wanted to focus specifically on job satisfaction among public affairs program directors, we discuss the limited but more focused explorations of job satisfaction in academic settings. According to the 2013–2014 survey of 16,112 undergraduate teaching faculty (Eagan et al., 2014), most (74%) are satisfied with their job overall, but they also report substantial levels of stress caused by self-imposed high expectations (85%), teaching load (63%), and lack of personal time (74%).

Basak and Govender (2015) recently developed a theoretical framework of factors affecting university academics' job satisfaction based on a systematic review of 59 published and unpublished studies that met specified standards for validity and trustworthiness. Factors identified in that literature include salary and compensation, working conditions, promotional opportunities, the work itself, an individual's characteristics, administration and management, supervision, and facilities.<sup>1</sup> However, this framework is not specifically related to satisfaction among program directors. Further, the authors used no primary data, and most of the empirical studies they rely on predate 2010.

Al-Rubaish, Rahim, Abumadini, & Wosornu (2011) developed and validated an academic job satisfaction questionnaire in Saudi Arabia. Based on a review of 20 job-satisfaction measures, they included 46 items relevant to the academic setting. They sampled 248 faculty across several disciplines and identified 8 factors that explain 60% of the variance in job satisfaction. These factors are consistent with those identified by Basak and Govender (2015), with the addition of policies and facilities, interpersonal relationships, commitment, and workload (including job stress). The items used by Al-Rubaish et al. (2011) and Basak and Govender (2015) gave us a sense of the range of factors that affect faculty satisfaction. Because these studies do not focus on the specific impact of leadership and administrative roles and functions, we adapted them.

Very little empirical research has been conducted on satisfaction in academic settings in the United States. Hagedorn (2000) conceptualized a general model of job satisfaction to include triggers (such as significant life events) and mediators (including demographics and environmental conditions such as collegial relationships). She focused on how motivators of satisfaction vary across faculty career stage. Using a large sample of 25,780 faculty, Hagedorn explained 49% of the variance in job satisfaction. However, it is important to note that her data are from 1993. While 33 studies have cited Hagedorn's work in the last 5 years, most have applied the model to specific disciplinary settings (e.g., nursing and engineering) or in other countries (e.g., Germany and Portugal), and none address the impact of leadership and administrative roles on faculty satisfaction. Clearly, there is need for current research on this topic.

Within the limited research about job satisfaction among faculty in the United States, an even smaller share addresses academic program directors. While some of the general research on faculty job satisfaction includes academic service, directing and leading programs are typically not included as service (see, e.g., Houston, Meyer, Paewai, 2006). Rather, much

of the limited literature on job satisfaction in academic administration focuses on nonacademic positions (e.g., Smerek & Peterson, 2007) or higher-level administrators. Morris and Laipple (2015) looked at job satisfaction among academic administrators, but only 92 of their sample of 1,515 respondents were in fact program directors. The rest were deans, vice presidents, and other senior administrators. Morris and Laipple noted that even at these levels “few academic administrators have had any leadership training prior to beginning their post” (p. 241).

A search for literature related specifically to academic program directors in the United States identified a few studies in a range of disciplines, particularly programs with clinical components, such as medical residency programs (Beasley, Kern, Howard, & Kolodner, 1999; Hinchey, McDonald, & Beasley, 2009), psychiatry residency programs (Arbuckle et al., 2012), and associate nursing degree programs (Mintz-Binder, 2014). Common themes for program directors across these studies included the importance of workload issues and social supports. In addition, because of the clinical nature of these programs, these studies addressed attention to patient care.

One relevant study examined job performance and role attractiveness among academic directors across disciplines (Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2014). However, it was conducted in Australia, which has a unique academic reward system, and therefore its applicability to public affairs programs in the United States is somewhat tenuous. The study collected data using a 360-degree feedback survey from 101 academic directors who were participating in a leadership development program. While the study did not focus specifically on job satisfaction, some of its findings have bearing on the current study. Workload had the most significant impact on directors’ performance. Factors identified as significant in making directors’ positions more attractive included credibility of the role, workload points (credit for the administrative role), research time, administrative and

professional support, role clarity, recognition, and resources. The authors note that “this points to the need for good job design and analysis, and having policies in place which demonstrate that the role is valued and one that will support movements toward promotion” (p. 110).

### **Gender, Discipline, and Satisfaction**

Gender is the most widely studied demographic characteristic related to faculty job satisfaction (Hagedorn, 2000, p. 8), yet the evidence remains mixed with respect to gender’s specific interactions with job satisfaction. Seifert and Umbach (2008) studied the effects of faculty demographic characteristics and disciplinary context on dimensions of job satisfaction, concluding, “The weight of the evidence suggests that women faculty and faculty of color are less satisfied with their jobs than their male and White colleagues” (pp. 357–358). A more recent study by Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found that, in STEM fields, men and tenured faculty tend to be more satisfied but that “demographic variables alone are weak predictors of job satisfaction” (p. 173).

Sabharwal and Corley (2009) studied faculty job satisfaction across both gender and discipline. When they controlled for other variables, there was no difference in satisfaction based on gender and only weak differences in satisfaction by discipline. The most relevant finding for our study is their support for examining a range of measures of satisfaction rather than a global measure, finding that “using a measure of overall job satisfaction to implement policies for change might be misleading” (p. 554).

While some of the concepts and measures from the literature reviewed here are relevant to our study, none directly address the question of the impact that taking on a leadership and administrative role, in addition to normal faculty duties of teaching and research (and possibly other university and professional service), has on that job satisfaction. Our study thus focuses on the job satisfaction of faculty exclusively in their role as public affairs program directors.

## INSTRUMENT AND METHODS

Our survey sample consists of current and former directors of Master of Public Administration (MPA), Master of Public Policy (MPP), and PhD programs. We circulated the call for participation widely and multiple times using Twitter (via the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration at George Washington University, Association for Public Policy and Management, American Society for Public Administration, and NASPAA). Some followers of those organizations retweeted. The call also appeared in *JPAE* and in the NASPAA program directors' newsletter. Program director colleagues pretested the survey. After making changes based on the pretest, we distributed the survey using Survey Monkey during the summer of 2016. We received 126 responses.

As Table 1 shows, 83% of respondents were current directors and 18% were former directors. Males and females were nearly equally represented; 48% were female and 52% were male. Not surprisingly, program directors tend to be tenured faculty (associate and full professors), and a small minority are assistant or untenured faculty. Four out of 10 (43%) iden-

tified themselves as full professor, 43% as associate professor, and 4% as assistant professor. Ten percent (10%) were non-tenure track or nonfaculty, which we refer to as professional program directors.

Most (71%) respondents were MPA directors, 10% were MPP directors, and 5% were PhD directors. In addition, 7% were directors of other related programs, such as Master of International Development and Master of Public Policy and Administration. Similarly, 7% of program directors managed multiple programs. In all, our study included 136 programs: 73% MPA, 10% MPP, and 10% PhD, in addition to 7% being other related programs (see Table 2). The 136 programs included 122 master's programs and 14 doctoral programs. To estimate a response rate, we looked only at current directors, in order to not double-count programs. There were 77 current MPA directors and 9 current MPP directors; thus, 86 respondents direct master's programs. Given that NASPAA (2016) reports 196 master's programs, our response rate for master's program directors is 44%.

**TABLE 1.**  
Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Percentage
Current director	83%
Former director	18%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	48%
Male	52%
<b>Rank</b>	
Professor	43%
Associate professor	43%
Assistant professor	4%
Professional directors: non-tenure track, nonfaculty, such as "clinical" or "distinguished" professors	10%

Note. *N*=126.

**TABLE 2.**  
Characteristics of Programs

Program type	Percentage
MPA	73%
MPP	10%
Doctoral	10%
Other	7%
Program size	Percentage
Small	39%
Medium	46%
Large	15%

*Note.* N=136.

The tenure of program director respondents varies widely, from 1 month to 54 years, with a mean of 6 years. Three respondents reported having completed one or more previous terms as well. We specifically examined professional program directors, those without regular faculty positions, to determine whether they are different enough to warrant exclusion from our analysis. In terms of this variable, they are like other program directors, having an average tenure of 5.8 years. Because of their fewer number of years in the position, their range of years in this position is significantly narrower at 2–12 years. However, since the stresses experienced by nonfaculty directors, especially regarding research productivity, are likely to be different, we excluded these professional directors from the parts of our analysis that focus on job satisfaction and challenges.

Table 2 also provides the distribution of self-reported program size. Most directors report their programs as either small or midsized. In the analysis that follows, we examine whether perceived size relates to levels of satisfaction or challenges faced by directors.

To develop the survey instrument, we drew primarily from Al-Rubaish et al. (2011), Basak and Govender (2015), Sabharwal and Corley (2009), and Russell (2010). We found that their approaches contained some job satisfaction

items in common, including salary and compensation, promotion opportunities, relationship with supervisors, facilities and resources (including staff and funding), workload, and relationships at work. When adopting items common to previous studies, we collapsed elements from several studies in order to keep our survey manageable in length. For example, Al-Rubaish et al. (2011) included four items related to salary, while we had one general measure of satisfaction and added one related nonsalary remuneration. Similarly, we collapsed five items about relationships with one's supervisor into a single item. Other items we included were based on issues described above, including those identified in faculty conference discussions. We asked questions designed to help us understand the characteristics of program directors and their programs. We included questions that examined the composition of their roles—that is, what program directors do and how they are compensated. We asked questions related to job satisfaction (see Table 5 for specific wording) and concluded by asking an open-ended question about other important sources of satisfaction and challenges.

There are of course several limitations to this study. First, while we promoted our survey across as wide an array of venues as possible, and in sources targeted to program directors, we obviously cannot be certain that we reached every former program director. Second, one respondent noted that questions did not provide a “not applicable” option. Given that 111 (of 126) respondents answered the particular question that triggered this concern, however, we infer that respondents in general found the question sufficiently direct to provide an answer. Respondents for whom an item was not applicable simply did not answer the question. Third, a large majority (71%) were directors of MPA programs, so our findings are not necessarily representative of those from MPP or PhD programs. In addition, respondents were overwhelmingly associate or full professors (86%); only 4% were assistant professors. Given the small portion of assistant professors, we dropped them from much of the following analysis because comparisons using them were not meaningful.

## DATA AND FINDINGS

### Program Director Role

Our first research question concerns the composition of the program director role: what program directors do and whether and how they are compensated. We asked respondents to identify whether they participate in school leadership, work with an advisory board, work on student recruitment, make financial-aid decisions, make admissions decisions, participate with career services, and/or engage with alumni organizations.

Table 3 details the frequency distribution of the various activities in which program directors engage. Program directors are most likely to regularly participate in direct student-facing tasks, including making admissions decisions and working on student recruitment. The single most frequent activity of program directors is making admissions decisions: almost all program directors (90%) have this responsibility. Student recruitment is close behind: 85% reported this activity. The third most frequently reported responsibility (76%) is participating in school leadership (e.g., executive committees, curriculum committees). These three functions are conducted by a large proportion of directors across program sizes, without important differences in frequency. We do see meaningful

differences in working with advisory boards, working on financial aid, and working with career services and with alumni organizations. Our discussion of these findings focuses on the functions in which there is notable variation based on program size and/or faculty characteristics.

Only 60% of program directors report working regularly with advisory boards. Directors of midsized programs do this less often than those in either smaller or larger programs. Two thirds (65%) of directors of small programs, 53% of directors of midsized programs, and 63% of directors of large programs report working regularly with a board. This difference, however, disappears when combining those who work regularly and occasionally with advisory boards.

Six of 10 (61%) full professors compared to 54% of associate professors report working with an advisory board regularly. When adding in those who work with advisory boards only occasionally, the proportions increased substantially across ranks: 85% of full professors and 89% of associate professors. Interestingly, non-tenure track (professional) directors are even more likely to work with advisory boards than full or associate professors; 67% do so regularly and 92% regularly or occasionally.

**TABLE 3.**  
Program Director Survey

In your position as MPA, MPP, or other program director, do you:	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely or not at all
Make admissions decisions	90%	5%	5%
Work on student recruitment	85%	12%	3%
Participate in school leadership based on being a program director	76%	21%	3%
Work with an advisory board/steering committee	60%	29%	12%
Make financial aid recommendations or decisions	58%	16%	26%
Participate with career services/placement	45%	46%	9%
Engage with an alumni organization	39%	44%	17%

Note.  $N=113$ .

Differences in the likelihood of working with advisory boards also occur by gender. Almost two thirds (63%) of female respondents report regularly working with an advisory board, while 56% of males do so. Again, these shares grow substantially (but the pattern holds) when adding those who take on this task only occasionally: 92% of females and 85% of males report regularly or occasionally working with an advisory board.

While the likelihood of working on financial-aid decisions (58%) is generally lower than the previously discussed activities, this rate varies substantially by program size: directors of small programs are less likely to have this job than either medium or large programs. Over half (51%) of directors of small programs report working on financial aid regularly, while three of five (60%) directors of midsized programs and 69% of directors of large programs report that response. This pattern holds when we combine working on this activity either regularly or occasionally.

Differences in working on financial aid are even more substantial when comparing current and former directors. Over half (54%) of current program directors regularly work in financial aid, while over three quarters (77%) of former directors regularly do so. Again, this difference is maintained when adding those who work on financially aid only occasionally.

### Compensation

The most frequent compensation for being a program director is to receive at least one course release (86%) (see Table 4). Fully 70% of program directors receive a stipend or other financial remuneration. In fact, most (62%) of those who receive payment get it in addition to course release(s). Only 7% of program directors report getting neither type of compensation for taking on this responsibility.

The data regarding compensation related to program size are interesting. Small programs (74%) are more likely to offer a stipend or other financial remuneration; midsized programs are close behind (71%). Large programs are

**TABLE 4.**  
**Program Director Compensation**

Stipend or other remuneration	70%
Course release(s)	86%
Both	62%
Neither	7%

*Note.*  $N=126$ .

more likely to offer course release(s) (94%); with midsized programs are next (90%) and small programs trail (78%).

Of potentially greater interest is difference in compensation by gender. Less than half (46%) of females receive a stipend, compared to 54% of males. While the reported likelihood of a reduced teaching load is close to equal, the difference is in the same direction as for stipends: 48% of females and 52% of males report receiving one or more course release(s). This gap can possibly be explained by differences in rank, since we find that males are more likely to be full professors (52% compared to 43% of females). However, it seems that while the amount of stipend might vary based on rank, simply receiving one should not.

### The Heart of the Matter: Job Satisfaction and Challenges among Program Directors

**Sources of Satisfaction.** Our second research question addresses satisfaction among program directors. Program directors rated how satisfied they were with 11 aspects of their position. We also gave them an opportunity to provide open-ended comments about additional challenges or sources of satisfaction of their role. Because we thought it likely that professional program directors, who were not regular faculty members, may have different pressures and experiences, we excluded them from the analysis related to sources of satisfaction and job challenges. We examined differences in terms of program size, gender, and rank, but the following discussion discusses details only where differences were notable.

As seen in Table 5, program directors are generally satisfied with most (6 of 11) aspects of their job. Over 70% of directors are satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied with having efficient support staff, having appropriate information needed to accomplish their work, the stipend and/or course release, trusting their school director/leadership, and their friendships and team spirit among colleagues.

The positive assessments of job characteristics do differ, again, based on program size and respondent's gender. Those in small programs more often report being extremely satisfied regarding their ability to pursue research (9%, compared to less than 2% for other-sized programs). Directors in medium or large programs are more likely to report being not satisfied with their research opportunities (38% for both, compared to 14% in small programs). We found the opposite pattern in terms of having sufficient and efficient support staff; directors in large programs are most satisfied

and those in medium and small programs more likely to report being not satisfied. Directors of larger programs also tend to be more satisfied with their stipend or course release. Interestingly, directors of large programs are at both ends of the spectrum as concerns sharing a sense of friendship with colleagues (56% extremely satisfied, a larger share than in other-sized programs; and 13% not satisfied with these friendships, also a larger share than in other-sized programs).

Gender differences are also meaningful. Male program directors are generally more satisfied. Specifically, 26% are extremely satisfied with the stipend or course release they receive (compared to 18% of females), and 44% are extremely satisfied with working in an environment that is sensitive to diversity (compared to 28% of females). In addition, 21% of males are either satisfied or extremely satisfied with having an administrative workload that allows them to perform at what they see as a high level (compared to 12% of females).

**TABLE 5.**  
Satisfaction with Aspects of Program Director Role

	Extremely or very satisfied	Satisfied	Only slightly or not satisfied
Have financial resources adequate to run the program	16%	34%	50%
Pursue your research agenda and/or academic promotion	17%	27%	57%
Have an administrative workload that allows me to perform my other activities at a high level	17%	29%	54%
Manage the workload without undue stress	18%	27%	55%
Have administrative support sufficient to do the work	32%	20%	48%
Have appropriate information to accomplish my work	39%	37%	24%
Receive a stipend, course release, or other remittance	47%	33%	20%
Work with efficient support staff within my unit	50%	23%	27%
Trust my school director/leadership	53%	20%	28%
Share sense of friendship and team spirit with colleagues	71%	15%	14%
Work in an environment that is sensitive to diversity	73%	19%	8%

Note.  $N=113$ .

**Challenges of Being Program Director.** Regarding our third research question, there are several important challenges. At least half of respondents reported being only slightly or not satisfied with the extent to which they are able to manage their workload without undue stress, pursue their research agenda and/or promotion, have financial resources adequate to run the program, and have administrative workload that allows completing other activities at a high level.

There were, however, differences in these responses based on program size. Fully 70% of directors of midsized programs report challenges with their ability to pursue their research agenda (only slightly or not satisfied), compared to 41% in small programs and 56% in large programs. While over 50% of those in small and midsized programs had low levels of satisfaction with financial resources available to their program, only 25% of those in large programs had this concern. The other notable difference is that those in small programs were less likely to report such challenges in their ability to manage the workload without undue stress (39%), compared to medium (69%) or large programs (50%).

The job characteristics that present program directors with the lowest levels of satisfaction are their level of stress, ability to pursue their research, the financial resources of the program, and their ability to balance their workload. Notably, while respondents generally trusted their leaders, unfortunately more than one in four (28%) responded as less than satisfied in this area.

Looking at the challenges by rank reveals an understandable difference. Given associate professors' greater need to produce research and publications to achieve tenure and/or promotion, it is not surprising that they are more likely to report low levels of satisfaction concerning their ability to pursue their research agenda and/or promotion (32%), compared to tenured professors (22%).

While 32% of males report that they are not satisfied with being able to pursue their research

agenda, this is true for only 24% of females. At the same time, females are more likely to report not having adequate administrative support (25% not satisfied, compared to 19% of males).

### **Additional (Open-Ended) Concerns**

In an open-ended request for additional challenges and sources of satisfaction, respondents noted more of the former than the latter. As to challenges, respondents' answers struck several themes: resources (in particular, resources for marketing), lack of (or not enough) faculty participation, and perceived problems shaped by university decisions (such as trimesters rather than semesters). One challenge that came up several times relates to demands from NASPAA. Program directors report having difficulty with ongoing administrative work for NASPAA as well as the time involved in seeking or retaining accreditation and the vagueness of the standards.

Some directors also offered a few sources of satisfaction. Several noted faculty participation as a positive, with one person stating that "faculty are wonderful" and another referring specifically to excellent adjunct faculty. The most frequently mentioned rewarding part of the job was seeing students' successes. Five open-ended comments referred to this aspect of being a program director, including, for example, the comment that "helping students advance in their profession is very satisfying." Thus, there are both challenges and sources of satisfaction in the role of being a program director beyond those items that the literature suggests are significant determinants of faculty satisfaction generally.

### **CONCLUSION**

The data above allow us to better define the role of program director, which in turn helps us identify areas for future research. Clearly the position of program director is multifaceted. It appears to be predominantly student facing, specifically at the prematriculation stages of recruitment, during admissions decisions, and as concerns financial-aid awards. Though the role does include working with faculty and external stakeholders, it appears that these

activities receive much less emphasis. The role is usually compensated, with both stipend and course release(s). Intangible and intrinsic benefits include work friendships and a sense of team spirit with faculty, as well as working in a diverse environment. However, the role includes a stressful workload that often impinges on the program director's ability to maintain a research agenda.

The activities demanded of the program director do appear to vary by perceived program size: there are some distinct differences between responses of directors who said their programs were small, medium, or large. Program size is a differentiator in likelihood of working on financial aid, with advisory boards, and on career services. Differences also occur in receiving compensation for the job of program director and being able to work on research. Directors of small and large programs are more likely to report working with advisory boards, while those in large programs (versus small and medium) are more likely to work on financial aid and on career services. The latter finding is surprising, as one might think it more likely that large programs would have professional career services staff. In terms of compensation, small programs are more likely to offer financial compensation, while large programs are more likely to offer course release(s). This is consistent with the idea that program directors of large programs have a heavier research expectation, so course release(s) may matter more. Those in large programs are more likely to be satisfied with their compensation. Regarding working on research, those in small programs are most satisfied with their ability to pursue research. Directors of large programs are most satisfied with having sufficient and efficient support staff. Interestingly, directors of large programs are at both ends of the spectrum in terms of sharing a sense of friendship with colleagues.

Another unexpected finding is the existence of professional program directors. It would be valuable to track whether this is an increasing trend. Unfortunately, our sample size was not adequate to determine whether these profes-

sional program directors experience the same challenges as regular faculty. Future investigations could involve trying to understand what difference, if any, this makes in how programs are run and in attention paid to students.

There was only one notable gender difference in administrative activities: females are more likely to engage with advisory boards. Further study could investigate why this is the case. Does gender make a difference because working with an advisory board is a requirement of the position? Or do females choose more frequently than males to work with advisory boards?

We are surprised to learn that current program directors are less likely than those no longer in these positions to work on financial aid. We wonder if this function might increasingly be being handled at some other university level.

There are also differences in terms of the extent to which characteristics of program directors affect reported areas of satisfaction and challenges. As has been reported in at least some of the research on academic job satisfaction generally, male program directors are typically more satisfied, especially with their remuneration, ability to manage the workload without undue stress, working in an environment that is sensitive to diversity, and having an administrative workload that allows performance of other activities at a high level. In-depth interviews might enable future researchers to understand why these differences exist.

Finally, we find that program directors report important challenges. Specifically, that approximately one in three are not satisfied with their ability to pursue their research agenda and/or promotion, do not have adequate financial resources to run their program, and lack the ability to manage their work without undue stress should be of concern to university administrators. Specific to public affairs programs, the workload associated with accreditation seems to add to this stress, and increasing demands for program marketing are an apparent pressure. Having good colleagues and supportive school

leadership, seeing student achievement, and receiving some sort of compensation appears to offset some of these concerns, but the number of areas that cause dissatisfaction and the general content of additional open-ended responses describe a work environment consistent with Hagedorn's (2000) observation that "stress abounds" (p. 6).

### **Lessons for Prospective Program Directors and Those with Influence over the Role**

Our data, combined with the literature, provide several possible recommendations for the program director role in public affairs programs. First, as few program directors are assistant professors, those at this rank who are asked (or feel pressured) to serve in the role pre-tenure can point to our study as evidence that doing so would be well outside the norm. These data are also reminders for chairs and deans to refrain from asking assistant professors to serve—and that assistant professors' serving as program directors may well warrant course release(s) above and beyond what tenured faculty receive for serving.

Second, prospective program directors must be attentive to the role's multifaceted nature. As was found in Australia and among senior academic administrators in the United States, our findings support that those with management skills are especially suitable for the position (Morris & Laipple, 2015; Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2014). As most academics do not have management training, deans and chairs might consider providing management training and mentoring for those considering the role and for those already in it. Further, as the role seems to emphasize duties involved in the pre-matriculation phase of student recruitment, working on admissions, and working on financial aid, a person with strong student-facing skills might be most suitable for the role. Alternatively, deans and chairs might structure the role to emphasize post- and nonmatriculation duties (working with an advisory board, alumni, career services, etc.) when a potential program director's skills lie in that area.

Third, knowing that a majority of program directors receive both a stipend and a course release, prospective program directors should now know that it is reasonable to advocate for both—our data show that this would be of particular importance for female program directors.

Fourth, sources of dissatisfaction in the role are stress and lacking the resources to run the program. In addition to providing adequate resources and administrative support (Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2014), senior administration should strive to enable directors to develop and maintain health and wellness behaviors (Morris & Laipple, 2015).

An important challenge is having enough time to maintain a research agenda. Chairs and deans might restructure the role and/or develop policies to provide more research time (Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2014). Alternatively, they might work with provosts to establish tenure and promotion criteria that recognize the role of director (Al-Rubaish et al., 2011).

Finally, given the array of lessons above, chairs and deans might consider changing the role from one filled by a faculty to member to one filled by an administrator. Long-term, professional program directors who have a clear understanding of the position, management training and/or experience, and a horizon more distant than that of a faculty administrator appointed for a term might address many of these issues (Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2014). However, more research is needed to better understand the effectiveness of professional directors and their impact on dimensions such as faculty collegiality and student relations.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of the role of program directors in public affairs programs. These positions have never been the focus of such attention. While our findings are consistent with those in other countries, in clinical fields, and among senior academic administrators, they also lead to specific recommendations that can help shape and improve public affairs program directors' roles in the future.

## NOTE

- 1 An “other” category included security, commitment, workload, organization vision, feedback, and work burden. These items did not inform our instrument.

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