

A QUALITATIVE METHOD FOR ASSESSING FACULTY SATISFACTION

Susan Ambrose,*† Therese Huston,** and Marie Norman*

Universities attempt to hire the highest quality faculty they can, but they are not always successful at retaining them. Furthermore, some faculty members who do remain may not function as engaging colleagues who make others want to stay. This study investigates why some faculty members leave and why others stay by illuminating the complexities of individual experiences. Using semi-structured interviews rather than surveys, a matched cohort of 123 faculty members (half current and half former) from one institution was interviewed. Although some of their primary reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction (e.g., collegiality, mentoring) were predicted by general survey research, there were also unforeseeable issues that strongly influenced satisfaction and decisions to stay or leave, demonstrating the importance of institution-specific research. This paper provides a method for collecting institution-specific information as well as several arguments for conducting interviews instead of pre-defined surveys.

KEY WORDS: faculty retention; faculty satisfaction; qualitative research; collegiality; mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

Universities go to considerable effort and expense to hire new faculty, but how successful are they at retaining the faculty they hire? Are the faculty members they retain satisfied, and do they function as the kind of engaged colleagues who make others want to stay? Finally, how can colleges and universities most effectively confront the problem of faculty dissatisfaction and increase retention?

*Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

**Seattle University, Seattle, WA, USA.

†Address correspondence to: Susan Ambrose, Office of the Associate Provost for Education, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA. E-mail: sambrose@cmu.edu

