

# Student to faculty satisfaction at a midwestern university in the United States



## **Karen Carey**

Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, USA  
careyka@nsuok.edu

## **Reneé L. Cambiano**

Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, USA  
cambiare@nsuok.edu

## **Jack B. De Vore**

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA  
jdevore@uark.edu

**Abstract:** *The purpose of the study was to compare campus satisfaction levels between students and faculty as measured by the Student Satisfaction Inventory<sup>8</sup> (SSI) and the Institutional Priorities Survey<sup>8</sup> (IPS). The student sample consisted of 692 (397 females and 295 males) from a Midwestern state university. The faculty sample consisted of 174 full-time professors and instructors (66 females, 100 males, and 8 did not indicate gender). The surveys were administered in fall 2000. The study examined three scales from the SSI and the IPS: (1) Concern for the Individual, (2) Responsiveness to Diverse Populations, and (3) Student Centeredness. Both student and faculty respondents rated all items on a 7-point Likert scale with respect to their expectation and satisfaction with student services. Findings indicated that significant differences existed between students and faculty in the area of Concern for the Individual and Responsiveness to Diverse Populations. There was a significant difference between Caucasians and all other ethnicities in the category of Responsiveness to Diverse Populations. In a comparison of national norms, the data indicated that the students at the Midwestern state university were significantly more satisfied in all three areas.*

**Keywords:** *student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, diversity*

Since 1980, the traditional single, white, full-time college student has evolved into a multi-cultural, older, part-time student. Universities need to know who their students are exclusively and what they expect from their institution. In 1900, fewer than 2% of Americans of traditional college age attended college. Today more than 50% attend, with over 3,500 colleges serving more than 14 million students. Four-year universities are admitting growing numbers of increasingly diverse students and adult students are enrolling in record-breaking numbers. By the end of the 1990s, over one-third of college students were over the age of 25 (Gardner & Jewler, 1998). The new millennium has forced change in many institutions, and higher education is no exception. The newly incoming students indicate they prefer a different type of relationship with their college. Contemporary discussions of higher education frequently overlook student satisfaction. Satisfaction covers the issues of students' perceptions and

experiences during the college years. According to Astin (1993), given the amount of time and energy invested in attending college, students' perceptions and experiences should be given substantial weight. According to Tinto's theory of student departure, college students enter with initial dispositions and intentions about personal goals. The university cannot be held accountable for this predisposed personality trait of the student. These commitments are modified and reformulated through extended encounters within the campus environment. Satisfying and rewarding encounters lead to greater integration and directly affect retention rates on college campuses (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

It cannot be determined that satisfaction is directly related to the student's decision to remain in or leave college, but the strength of these associations suggest that to reduce the institution's dropout rate, institutions should focus more attention on student satisfaction. Retention is a primary concern of campuses across America. Originally, satisfaction theories focused on preventing student dissatisfaction and attrition by explaining the relationship between students and the campus environment. The ecological theory of student satisfaction put emphasis on the fact that the campus environment influenced students' assimilation and adaptation to the campus culture. Student discontent with campus life led to satisfaction models that individualized assessment to determine the fit of the student to the environment (Schmidt & Sedlacek, 1972).

In 1975, Nafziger, Holland, and Gottfredson stated that student-college congruency was a predictor of student satisfaction. These researchers noted the interaction between individual students and the environment led to identify specific factors that tied in to student satisfaction. They examined student and college characteristics that were conducive to student satisfaction. The reported results indicated that certain college characteristics, such as faculty style of instruction, provided congruency between a student's personality and institutional environment. Further research led Morstain (1977) to propose the person-environment congruence model. Students reported high levels of satisfaction if their personalities were congruent with environment. Once again, faculty teaching styles congruency produced more satisfied students. Faculty input and involvement can directly affect the campus atmosphere. Faculty satisfaction spills over to student satisfaction. Research has shown, a positive association between academic achievement and hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class (among other variables), and between retention (ultimately, degree completion) and a student-oriented faculty (Astin, 1993). Despite the wide variation in the cultures of our nation's academic institutions, the value of human connection remains important. The need to measure and compare the satisfaction level of both students and faculty is apparent and is a legitimate topic of study.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were addressed in the study:

1. In comparison of faculty and student responses, what were their campus needs?
2. According to ethnicity, gender, and age, what were the differences in the satisfaction levels between students?
3. In comparison to the national norm, how does the Midwestern university compare?

## **Definition of Terms**

*IPS*: Noel-Levitz Institutional Priorities Survey8 4-Year College and University Version, a valid and reliable instrument that measures satisfaction outcomes of faculty instructing in a full-time capacity at a four-year higher education institution.

*Performance Gap Score:* The difference between the level of importance and the level of agreement which results in assignment of a score; negative gap score implies satisfied, and positive gap score implies not satisfied.

*Retention:* The process of students completing, continuing, or resuming studies at the higher education institution of first matriculation.

*Satisfaction:* Measures that include the student's level of satisfaction with the total undergraduate experience, as well as with specific aspects of that experience, such as the quality of instruction, contacts with faculty and fellow students, curriculum, college administration, and facilities (Astin, 1993).

*SSI:* Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey<sup>8</sup> 4-Year College and University Version, a valid and reliable instrument that measures satisfaction outcomes of students participating in a full-time capacity at a four-year higher education institution.

## **Methodology**

### ***Target Population***

Data were gathered at a Midwestern state university in the United States. The participants of the study were chosen from the students on the university campus, enrolled in courses during the Fall 2000 semester. The courses were randomly selected from all courses offered that semester. The survey was administered during class time to all students willing to participate. The student sample was categorized into three groups: (a) ethnicity (Caucasian, American Indian, and other), (b) gender (male and female), and (c) age (ages under 24, and over 25).

### ***Instrumentation***

The Student Satisfaction Survey<sup>8</sup> (SSI) was selected as the instrument for the study (Juillerat 1995) to provide a measure of student satisfaction as a reflection of current consumer trends in higher education. The Institutional Priorities Survey<sup>8</sup> (IPS) was created in 1997 by Noel-Levitz as a parallel instrument to the Student Satisfaction Inventory<sup>8</sup>. These two instruments were selected for use in the study because they were designed to compliment each other. The items on the IPS have been modified from the original items on the SSI to be appropriate for completion by faculty, staff, administrators, and Boards of Trustees on campuses. The IPS and the SSI consist of twelve scales that measure satisfaction in higher education. For purposes of this study, three scales (*Responsiveness to Diverse Population, Concern for the Individual, and Student Centeredness*) from both instruments were selected to identify student and faculty satisfaction. These three scales were specifically chosen to address issues of ethnicity, gender, and age.

Internal consistency was measured on the SSI utilizing Cronbach's alpha on both importance and satisfaction scores by Juillerat (1995). The coefficient alpha estimates were .97 and .98 for overall importance and satisfaction scores, respectively. Based upon these results, Juillerat concluded that the SSI was a very reliable instrument. Cronbach's coefficient alpha, which measures internal consistency, for the IPS was .97 for the importance scores and .94 for the satisfaction scores. The three-week test-retest reliability estimate of mean importance and satisfaction scores is .74 and .80, respectively. The validity of the IPS was .69 for importance scores and .60 for satisfaction scores, and the individual scale correlations between the interview responses and the survey responses ranged from .93 to .49 for the importance scales and from .86 to .44 for the satisfaction scales. Ten of the 11 scale correlations were significant at the .05 level, thus indicating that the instrument adequately reflects the construct it was designed to measure (Bryant, 2001).

### **Data Collection**

The data utilized for this study were collected during the Fall 2000 semester at a Midwestern state university. The SSI and a cover letter were distributed to the students in the randomly selected classes. An initial letter was drafted and sent to all full-time faculty via electronic mail by the Vice-President of Academic Affairs stating the importance and purpose of the IPS instrument. All IPS instruments were sent through campus mail to all full-time faculty. All returned surveys were collected for preparation of the data for statistical analyses. The surveys were sent to Noel-Levitz for tabulation of the instruments' responses. A hard copy of the report and raw data on computer disks were mailed from Noel-Levitz to the institution. Further analyses of the raw data for the purpose of descriptive statistics were completed for this study using SPSS 9.0 for Windows (SPSS, Inc., 1999) statistical software.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed to determine levels of satisfaction as well as the differences between scores for student and faculty respondents. The data were analyzed to determine if significant differences exist between student and faculty perceptions. Student responses were compared to the national norms. Three scales were chosen and subjected to statistical analyses. The scale *Responsiveness to Diverse Population* was designed to assess the extent to which the institution is sensitive to ethnic groups and diversity issues on campus. The scale *Concern for the Individual* was developed to assess the extent to which the university is caring and helpful. Concern shown towards students of all ages, including non-traditional age students, is addressed in this area. The scale *Student Centeredness* was designed to assess the extent to which the needs of the students are a priority including fairness associated with gender. Several independent sample *t*-tests, a one-sample *t*-test, and ANOVA. Standard deviations and sample sizes (*n*) were tabulated. Descriptive statistics were also utilized.

### **Results of the study**

The sample population consisted of 692 students, 397 female and 295 male. Ninety-two percent of the students surveyed were enrolled full-time and 8% were part-time students. Of those students surveyed, 24% were American Indian and 67% were Caucasian. The sample consisted of 117 non-traditional students (age 25 and older) and 574 traditional students (age 24 and under). The faculty sample consisted of 174 full-time professors and instructors, 100 male, 66 female and 8 preferred not to respond. Satisfaction scores were determined for the three selected scales using the Student Satisfaction Inventory8 (SSI) for students and the Institutional Priorities Survey8 (IPS) for faculty: *Concern for the Individual*, *Responsiveness to Diverse Population*, and *Student Centeredness* (Noel-Levitz, 1997).

#### **Student and faculty campus needs**

Students mean scores for campus satisfaction in the area of *Concern for the Individual* was 4.59 as opposed to the faculty mean score of 5.21. Students mean scores for campus satisfaction in the area of *Responsiveness to Diversity* was 4.32 as opposed to the faculty mean score of 5.12. Students mean scores for campus satisfaction in the area of *Student Centeredness* was 5.10 as opposed to the faculty mean score of 5.49. Student and faculty satisfaction scores in the area of *Concern for the Individual* indicated a standard deviation score of 1.13 and 1.30, respectively; meaning student scores were less spread out than faculty scores. The *t*-test ( $t=6.24$ ; .001) indicated a statistical significance difference between the faculty and students. A *t*-test ( $t=6.23$ ; .001) indicated a statistical significance difference in the area of *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations*. Students indicated that they were neutral in the area of satisfaction, while faculty indicated that students' were somewhat satisfied. A

mean score for faculty and students was 5.12 and 4.32. Standard deviation scores were 1.41 for faculty and 1.79 for students. The *t*-test ( $t=.56$ ; .57) indicated no statistical significance difference in the area of *Student Centeredness*. Student responses with a standard deviation score of 1.12 and faculty standard deviation scores were 1.15. Faculty and students believe that *Student Centeredness* is Important, but faculty members have a wider performance gap than do students.

### **Gender issues relating to satisfaction**

Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Concern for the Individual* was tested. Results of the *t*-test ( $t=.49$ ; .62) indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female responses. Campus satisfaction and *Responsiveness to Diversity* was tested. The standard deviation scores of 1.87 (female) and 1.68 (male) were compared and analyzed. the *t*-test ( $t=-.47$ ; .63) indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female responses. Campus satisfaction and *Student Centeredness* were tested for gender. The *t*-test ( $t=1.05$ ; .13) indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female responses.

### **Age Issues relating to satisfaction**

Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Concern for the Individual* was tested for traditional and non-traditional students' (ages 25 and over and 24 and under). Statistical results indicated a mean score of 4.63 for traditional age students and a mean score of 4.47 for non-traditional students. Standard deviation scores were 1.13 and 1.10. The *t*-test ( $t=1.42$ ; .15) indicated that there was no significant difference between non-traditional and traditional students. Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Responsiveness to Diversity* was tested. The *t*-test ( $t=1.30$ ; .17) indicated that there was no significant difference between non-traditional and traditional students. Statistical results indicated a mean score of 4.38 for traditional age students and a mean score of 4.13 for non-traditional students. Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Student Centeredness* was tested. The mean scores were 5.13 for the traditional students and 5.01 for the non-traditional. The *t*-test ( $t=.92$ ; .35) indicated that there was no significant difference between non-traditional and traditional students.

### **Ethnicity issues relating to satisfaction**

Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Concern for the Individual* was tested for ethnicity. Statistical results indicated a mean score for American Indians was 4.59, Caucasian was 4.63 and Other was 4.42. Standard deviation scores were for American Indians was 1.08, Caucasian was 1.10 and Other (African American, Asian American, and international) was 1.39. An ANOVA ( $F=.97$ ; .37) indicated that there was no significant difference for ethnicity. Tukey HSD indicated that Caucasians were significantly different from the American Indians and the Other group. Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations* was tested. Statistical results indicated a mean score for American Indians was 4.47, Caucasian was 4.22 and Other was 4.79. Standard deviation scores were for American Indians was 1.63, Caucasian was 1.87 and Other was 1.55. An ANOVA ( $F=3.54$ ; .03) indicated that there was a significant difference. Campus satisfaction as it relates to *Student Centeredness* was tested for ethnicity. Statistical results indicated a mean score for American Indians was 5.21, Caucasian was 5.09 and Other was 4.90. Standard deviation scores were for American Indians was 1.04, Caucasian was 1.10 and Other was 1.26. An ANOVA ( $F=1.97$ ; .14) indicated that there was no significant difference for ethnicity.

### **Comparison to the national norms**

National norms and institutional satisfaction was compared as it relates to *Concern for the Individual*. The national norm of satisfaction was 4.73 and the institutional mean score was 4.92. The *t*-test ( $t=-4.48$ ; .001) indicated that there was a significant difference between the

national norms and the institutional satisfaction. National norms and institutional satisfaction was compared as it relates to *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations*. The national norm of satisfaction was 4.88 and the institutional mean score was 4.98. The *t*-test ( $t=-2.03$ ; .04) indicated that there was a significant difference between the national norms and the institutional satisfaction. National norms and institutional satisfaction was compared as it relates to *Student Centeredness*. The national norm of satisfaction was 4.88 and the institutional mean score was 5.14. The *t*-test ( $t=-6.24$ ; .001) indicated that there was a significant difference between the national norms and the institutional satisfaction.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicated that significant differences existed between students' satisfaction and faculty awareness of the students' satisfaction in the areas of *Concern for the Individual* and *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations*. Results of the research indicated that the faculty at this Midwestern state university is not significantly concerned with the students' satisfaction. In order for the research to be put to practical use, the faculty needs to be more aware of students' needs. This can be achieved by simply recognizing that students' are individuals and each brings to the campus their own set of needs. The faculty would be well advised to spend more time interacting with the students' on this campus. The faculty at this Midwestern state university needs to recognize that student needs are directly related to retention issues. Thus, satisfaction issues need to be addressed on this campus.

In comparing student satisfaction responses to how faculty believe students feel, a notable difference occurred. Student satisfaction levels in each of the three areas of campus satisfaction were significantly lower on the SSI than faculty satisfaction levels in each of the three areas of how faculty believe that students feel. This indicates that the faculty are completely satisfied with their role as educators and have not taken into account students' needs. The findings also indicated that there was a significant difference between Caucasians and all other ethnicities in the category of *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations*. The findings indicated that in a comparison to the national norms, the Caucasian students at the Midwestern state university were significantly more satisfied in the areas of *Concern for the Individual*, *Responsiveness to Diverse Populations* and *Student Centeredness* based upon on the Student Satisfaction Inventory8 (SSI) and the Institutional Priorities Survey8 (IPS).

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