Exploring Differences in Research Administrators Perceived Marginality, Isolation, And Mattering in The College Setting: Considerations for University and Personal Job Characteristics

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Those who are a part of the field of research administration act as liaisons between universities and sponsors. Due to the increased need and expectation for faculty to produce research and secure external funding, research administration plays a critical role in higher education. Despite this, those who serve the university in this capacity are often overlooked and underappreciated in the research sphere. This may lead to research administrators’ perception that their work, or even themselves as a person, does not matter to the institutions. This descriptive study investigated research administrator’s perceptions of perceived mattering and factors that may influence the feelings of marginality and isolation within their workplaces. The survey instrument, Marginalization in Research Administration Survey, was electronically distributed to 7500 research administrators of the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA). The e-survey items were derived from the Physical Education Marginalization and Isolation Survey (PE-MAIS) (Gaudreault, Richards, & Woods, 2017) and the Perceived Mattering Questionnaire-Physical Education (PMQ-PE) (Richards, Gaudreault, & Woods, 2017), which are validated instruments used to capture practitioners’ perceptions of marginality and isolation (PE-MAIS) and perceived mattering (PMQ-PE). Survey items were modified for word choice to be specific to research administrators. The study revealed that salary range is a significant factor for research administrators perceived marginality, isolation, and mattering. Specifically, research administrators with the lowest salary reported higher levels of marginality and isolation than those with higher salaries. Mid-career research administrators seeing increases in salary and time on the job reported high levels of marginality and isolation, then it typically went down over time. Years in the profession showed differences among groups’ perceptions of perceived isolation depending on the organization type. Lastly, perceived mattering trended up through each salary stage. Understanding how salary is likely tied to prioritization and the roles research administrators assume based on their organization type helps to identify perceptions of mattering within the social context of the research administrator profession and provide necessary information to address marginality.