

Teaching, research, and service as drivers of academic career success

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Abstract

Purpose – In response to current initiatives that seek to rebalance the facets of academic jobs, this paper aims to examine the impact of teaching, research and service on objective (e.g. salary) and subjective (i.e. satisfaction) indicators of career success.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors collected data from 182 tenure-track management faculty from public universities in the USA. The selection of participants followed a stratified sample from two traditional segments in higher education, research-intensive and teaching-research balanced institutions. Hierarchical regression analysis was used for testing the study hypotheses.

Findings – Results reveal that research achievements is the only job facet that accounts for objective and subjective indicators of career success across institutions. Outcomes suggest the impact of the initiatives put in place to elevate the role of teaching and service in the life of academics are falling short.

Originality/value – The study provides evidence about the need to adjust policy that seeks to rebalance academic jobs.

Keywords Service, Teaching, Research, Academic career success

Paper type Research paper

Teaching, research and service is the triad most commonly used to describe the content of academic jobs (Balkin & Mello, 2012; Sandhu, Perera, & Sardeshmukh, 2019). During job interviews and ensuing orientations, professional success is often depicted as striking some form of balance among all three aspects of the job (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000). And while mission statements across institutions might weigh teaching, research, and service differently, faculty are still expected to deliver exceptional instruction, engage in professional service and maintain an unwavering commitment to scholarly work (Kovoor-Misra, 2012).

Attempting some form of balance among the distinct aspects of faculty's jobs clashes with a long-lasting culture that over glorifies research and points to faculty with notable research productivity as figures for emulation (Beigi, Shirmohannadi, & Arthur, 2018; Chapman, 2012). Research productivity is often viewed as the exclusive currency of academic success in an industry that can look with indifference at faculty who place commensurate value on the distinct aspects of their job (Paulsen & Feldman, 2006). As Harley (2019) laments, core tasks in higher education (e.g. instruction) conflict with current



views of academic careers and are, consequently, marginalized when considering the meaning of professional success.

Over the years, numerous initiatives have attempted to counter the disproportionate attention that research has gained and, thereby, restore some form of balance between the distinct aspects of the job. For example, [Chalmers \(2011\)](#) reports that universities have progressively:

- revised the language and criteria for tenure and promotion to broaden the recognition of teaching;
- implemented awards that elevate the visibility of outstanding instructors; or
- established centers for teaching excellence, even in institutions with an espoused research emphasis.

Initiatives to recognize the importance of professional services are also gaining traction. [Thomas and Ambrosini \(2021\)](#) recently reviewed some of the alternatives business schools are adopting to expand the contributions to local stakeholders. By following a public-value model, the authors detail collaborative processes (e.g. service learning) that have successfully strengthened the engagement of faculty with the community. Furthermore, new accreditation standards for Business Schools (e.g. AACSB) have made societal impact an imperative, one that encourages schools to heighten the role of various forms of community service (e.g. collaborating with local media) in performance evaluations.

As the number of initiatives to restore the balance in academic jobs intensifies, the time is ripe to evaluate how such efforts have altered careers in academe. We ask, to what extent the professional success of faculty is driven by a more pluralistic – less research centric – academic effort. Do all three areas of academic jobs account for metrics that signal career accomplishments? To address this question, we rely on career success as criterion, a construct with a dimensionality (objective and subjective career success) that permits us to examine first, how higher education, business schools in our case, uses extrinsic rewards (e.g. salary) to validate faculty’s dedication to teaching, research, and service. On the flip side, subjective perceptions of career success permit us to observe how the distinct aspect of academic jobs impact the intrinsic gratification faculty experience in their careers.

To avoid a skewed view of academe, our study spans to business faculty from a wide array of institutions (i.e. research intensive and teaching-research balanced). It is plausible to assume that the so-called research-centric culture is an accurate, yet exclusive, representation of institutions that place research at the core of their mission (i.e. research-intensive institutions). Because studies have prioritized this type of institution ([Bedeian, Cavazos, Hunt, & Jauch, 2010](#); [Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992](#); [Seibert, Kacmar, Kraimer, Downes, & Noble, 2017](#)), we might have wrongly assumed that such a culture is true for the entire spectrum of business schools. Noticeably, research-intensive schools are a minority in the USA (7 percent; [Carnegie classification of higher education, 2015](#)). It seems imperative to explore the career of academics who operate in a vast proportion of institutions that have been broadly overlooked in research, teaching-research balanced ones. For the purposes of this study, we concentrate on management faculty as notable differences in metrics used to observe objective career success (e.g. salary) vary substantially across business disciplines (e.g. accounting, economics; see [AACSB, 2021](#)) and can thus mislead the interpretation of results.

In summary, this study examines how faculty performance across all three areas of academic jobs, teaching, research and service, impacts metrics of career achievement.

Scrutinizing these effect sizes is a sine-qua-noncondition to understand the efficacy of the efforts used in rebalancing academic jobs. Results can also inform where policy adjustments in higher education are still needed. To that end, we first review the definition of career success. We then theorize and offer hypotheses that detail how teaching, research and service can drive career success criteria. The discussion section reviews our findings and elaborates on their practical implications for faculty careers and for policy making in higher education.

Career success

Career success captures outputs from accumulated work experiences (Beigi et al., 2018). The specialized literature emphasizes two types of outputs, objective and subjective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Objective career success reflects the organization's reward systems where salary has been the most traditional representation of success. Vertical promotions can similarly signal career achievements and, as such, rank (position) is also deemed an indicator of objective career success (Bedeian et al., 2010). However, contemporary career frameworks (Boundaryless career theory, Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) raise questions on the explicit association between hierarchically top positions and success. Horizontal career movements (between-industry mobility) can add significant value to careers, thus limiting considerations to rank of position as a proxy for objective career success. Here, we emphasize salary as the exclusive indicator of objective career success.

Subjective career success refers to personal evaluations of career outcomes. It captures how employees feel about their professional life based on the extent to which their career circumstances (e.g. progress) fulfill idiosyncratic aspirations. Because individuals observe different facets of their career (e.g. income, family-work balance), the multidimensional nature of subjective career success is broadly accepted (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). However, following models of job satisfaction, studies note that a single broad dimension can meaningfully capture the first-order facets that underlie subjective career success (Gaile, Baumann-Vitolina, Kivipold, & Stibe, 2022). In this study, we emphasize the broad dimension of career satisfaction as indicator of the construct.

Combining subjective and objective indicators of career success as criteria for this study is an imperative for several reasons. First, academics can vary in the criterion they consider when asked about professional achievements. This ambivalent view of success is even more evident in early stages of career life when academics struggle in establishing daily priorities (e.g. publishing versus servicing the community; Sutherland, 2017). Second, many of the tasks that academics perform (e.g. service to professional organizations) can only be perceived by observing the intrinsic gratification these actions convey. Indeed, academics can define career success in terms of the impact their efforts achieve on others (e.g. student success), rather than on themselves (e.g. salary). Finally, meta-analytic evidence shows the correlation between subjective and objective career success is moderate (i.e. 0.30; see Ng et al., 2005). The combination of both indicators provides a superior understanding of the definition of success and of how focal antecedents drive career outcomes.

Teaching, research and service as antecedents of career success

Human capital theory (HCT, Schultz, 1961) provides an avenue to define proficiency in teaching, research and service as drivers of career success. Under HCT, employees supply competencies (e.g. knowledge) that support the competitiveness of organizations making of such competencies a form of capital susceptible of deliberate investment. Academe illustrates this idea. In an industry where products (e.g. MBA) tend to commoditize, faculty

with unique competencies (e.g. research outcomes) can offer avenues for differentiation. Because the perception of a quality education can be partially attributable to the reputation of people (Bedeian et al., 2010), institutions of higher education invest in attracting and nurturing the career of individuals that bolster the image of institutions. Admittedly, distinct forms of personal capital (e.g. social networks) can similarly impact outcomes (e.g. salary, favorable labor conditions) conventional used as proxies for career success (Marginson, 2019), but HCT provides appropriate grounds to explain career success based on competencies associated with academic jobs, teaching, research and service.

Two conditions increase the value of human capital for organizations and individuals, distinctiveness and transferability. Distinctiveness refers to the uniqueness of a competency, the extent to which a competency is scarce and, consequently, desirable in the labor market (Angervall & Gustafsson, 2014). Arguably, an individual with distinctive competencies can not only expect premium rewards for his/her capabilities (i.e. salary), but possessing unique competencies can also elevate the individuals' sense of pride of career achievements (i.e. subjective career success). Transferability refers to the applicability of a focal competency across organizations, the extent to which a competency is portable. Transferability increases the value of human capital both by facilitating its transaction in labor markets and by augmenting a sense of job autonomy in individuals. Knowledge that is rather organization-specific adds marginal value for individuals who aspire for itinerant careers.

It is our position that while research and teaching meet the distinctiveness and transferrable conditions that make human capital a driver of career success, service falls short in each of these categories. Research and teaching are traditional areas of specialization. Scholars can advance unique lines of investigation and/or achieve a topic-specific teaching expertise that separates them from others. Research and teaching capabilities also transfer across institutions where faculty can follow similar lines of investigation and/or teach in similar areas of expertise. These conditions are not necessarily true for service. A substantial part of service can be seen as a commodity immersed in the ordinary tasks of monotonous committees. Service work can also be idiosyncratic to the routines of a focal employer, thus limiting the value of such competency in labor markets (transferability). We are not negating that service can be personally rewarding and thus, impact subjective career success. But we anticipate limitations with respect to the relationship of service with objective career success. Labor markets in academe primarily observe the research and teaching accomplishments of job applicants, rather undervaluing long histories of service accomplishments (Nath, 2013). Accordingly, we predict:

- H1.* Human capital in the form of research accomplishments is positively related to objective and subjective career success.
- H2.* Human capital in the form of teaching accomplishments is positively related to objective and subjective career success.
- H3.* Human capital in the form of service accomplishments is positively related to subjective career success but not so to objective career success.

We acknowledge that institutions of higher education can value teaching, research, and service differently. Research has been traditionally the divisional line that segments higher education into two broad categories: research-intensive and teaching-research balanced institutions (Carnegie classification, 2015). We expect this segmentation to impact career success by dictating what competencies must be prioritized, research accomplishments in research-intensive institutions and teaching accomplishments in teaching-research balanced

ones. Consequently, we will examine how the industry segment can moderate the relationships *H1*, *H2* and *H3* anticipate.

Methods

Sample

As part of a major project that explores the development of faculty careers under distinct career frameworks, we collected data from a total of 182 full time faculty from US public higher-ed institutions located all over the country, 99 work for research-intensive institutions and 83 for teaching-research balanced ones. We followed the 2015 Carnegie classification to determine the type of institution. In total, 69% of the sample is male. The average career tenure of the sample is 15.45 years (*S.D.* = 11.01) with 69.8% holding post-tenure positions. We did not invite faculty serving in administrative roles (e.g. department chair) as these positions hold distinct labor conditions (12-month contract) and expectations with respect to teaching, research and service.

Measures

Career success. We collected publicly available salary data for each of the participants on a nine-month contract basis. We normalized salaries according to the cost of living of the location of schools by following the guidelines of the 2020 Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis' regional-price-parity parameters (Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis, 2020).

Subjective career success. We resorted to five items of the Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley's (1990) career satisfaction scale. Based on a seven-point scale, the survey assesses participants' perceptions on career accomplishments. A sample item reads "I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals." Alpha reliability for our study = 0.84.

Research accomplishments. We created a scholarly performance index that transforms the list participants' publications into a single metric. Publications of each participant were first identified by collecting personal vitae. For accuracy, these publications were cross checked with publicly available databases (Web of Science, Google Scholar). Publications were then ranked using a point system that reflects the Australian Business Deans Council's (ABDC) journal rankings as follows: A* journal = 5; A journal = 4; B journal = 3; and C journal = 2. A value of one was assigned to peer-reviewed papers published in journals not listed in the ABDC rankings, book chapters, or books. The research-performance metric was computed by adding points across publications.

Teaching accomplishments. Using five percentile ranges (<20, 20–40, 41–60, 61–80, >80), we asked participants to identify the range where their student evaluations regularly fall implying that the higher the percentile, the better the teaching scores. Points were distributed according to the self-reported percentile (1 = <20, 2 = 20–40, 3 = 41–60, 4 = 61–80, 5 = > 80). To corroborate self-reported data, we contrasted it with publicly available information (ratemyprofessor.com). We acknowledge that information on the ratemyprofessor site can be similarly biased. Yet, a correlation of 0.43 between self-report teaching evaluations and information from the site suggests some congruency between sources and provides some validity to the self-report data on teaching evaluations.

Service accomplishments. We created two items for assessing the variable. The first item, accompanied with a seven-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), assessed the perceived relevance of the task (i.e. "College, university, and/or professional organization service has been a meaningful aspect during my entire career"). A second motivational-based item inquired about the time allocated to service ("On average, I spend ____ hour(s) weekly dealing with college, university and/or professional

organization service”). Response options, (a) <1, (b) 1–2, (c) 2–3, (d) >3, were coded one through four. We used the average of both items ($r = 0.53$) as index for service accomplishments.

Control variables. Because of an expected correlation between career length and research accomplishments, we controlled for career length (i.e. years after earning a PhD) We also controlled for gender.

Analysis and results

Table 1 shows correlations between the study variables for each of the two academic segments separately. Correlations from research-intensive institutions are shown above the diagonal whereas those under the diagonal correspond to teaching-research balanced institutions. Where appropriate, alpha reliabilities are shown in the diagonal. Table 2 shows results of the hierarchical regression analyses when subjective career success was used as dependent variable. Table 3 shows similar results when objective career success was entered as dependent variable. Of note, variables were centered for multicollinearity purposes (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

As Tables 2 and 3 indicate, research accomplishments account for subjective ($\beta = 0.165$; $p < 0.05$) and objective career success ($\beta = 0.241$; $p < 0.05$), thus providing support for the tenets of H1. Contrary to the predictions of H2 and H3, teaching or service accomplishments are unable to account for subjective career success (teaching $\beta = 0.087$; $p > 0.05$; Table 2; service $\beta = 0.118$; $p > 0.05$; Table 3). We also found that teaching was unable to account for objective career success ($\beta = -0.017$; $p > 0.05$; Table 3), thus failing to support the tenets of H2. As H3 anticipates, service was unable to account for objective career success ($\beta = 0.063$; $p > 0.05$; Table 3). Together, we see results as partial support for H3.

We also examined a possible moderation of the segments in higher education (teaching-research balanced and research intensive) on the effect sizes above. The interaction terms in Tables 2 and 3 (see Step 3) indicate the relationships between the academic job components and career success criteria remain constant across segments.

Discussion

We highlighted above some of the initiatives that higher education has put in place to restore balance among the distinct aspects of academic jobs. We surmised the impact of such initiatives should be observable in the relationship between the components of

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
1. Subjective success	(0.84)	0.34*	-0.17	0.31*	0.02	0.30*	0.24*	5.66	1.06
2. Salary	0.05	-	-0.05	0.40*	-0.04	0.35*	0.21*	161898.7	53801.7
3. Gender	-0.04	-0.03	-	-0.03	-0.11	-0.12	-0.06	0.30	0.46
4. Career length	0.25*	0.18	-0.09	-	-0.11	0.44*	0.17	16.77	12.30
5. Teaching	0.15	-0.03	-0.06	-0.11	-	0.03	-0.04	4.13	0.99
6. Research	0.25*	0.48*	-0.16	0.41*	0.07	-	0.13	81.54	121.60
7. Service	0.05	-0.06	0.12	0.06	0.07	-0.18	-	3.38	1.25
M	5.44	127125.6	0.31	13.88	4.06	33.73	3.39		
SD	0.94	30843.9	0.47	9.04	1.15	30.33	1.34		

Notes: Correlations above the diagonal are from the research-intensive institutions segment $N = 99$; correlations below the diagonal are from the teaching-research balanced institutions segment $N = 83$; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for females. Alpha reliabilities in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$

Source: Table by the authors

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations
among the study
variables

Predictor	β	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF
<i>Step 1</i>				
Gender	-0.096			
Career length	0.279*			
Segment	0.073			
		0.101	0.101	6.64*
<i>Step 2</i>				
Gender	-0.077			
Career length	0.208*			
Segment	0.037			
Teaching	0.087			
Research	0.165*			
Service	0.118			
		0.146	0.045	3.07*
<i>Step 3</i>				
Gender	-0.068			
Career length	0.191*			
Segment	-0.007			
Teaching	0.123			
Research	0.514			
Service	0.065			
Teaching \times segment	-0.054			
Research \times segment	-0.348			
Service \times segment	0.089			
		0.158	0.012	0.812

Table 2.
Regression analysis
for subjective career
success

Notes: Regression coefficients are standardized β s; $N = 182$; constants were omitted. Main effect variables were centered. Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for females. Segment was coded 1 for research intensive institutions and 0 for teaching-research balanced institutions; * $p < 0.05$

Source: Table by the authors

academic jobs (teaching, research and service) and career success criteria. Findings of the study proved us wrong. Not only are teaching and service disconnected from objective and subjective indicators of career success, but research accomplishment emerged as the only driver of professional success. Surprisingly, these outcomes remain constant across institutions of higher education regardless of the area of emphasis their mission statements indicate.

To clarify, we are not lamenting the relevance of research for academic career success. We celebrate its role regardless of the type of institution. Our concern deals with the inconsequential role of the other facets of academic jobs. For teaching, this outcome is something alarming, particularly for the large percentage of institutions where exceptional teaching is presumably nurtured and apparently rewarded (teaching-research balanced). Our findings contradict anecdotal evidence suggesting that teaching has become a significant driver of career success (Jepsen et al., 2014).

It is possible that career success is a lagging indicator of the changes unfolding in academe. Years ago, Gallos (1996) notes the stereotypical advice for doctorate students, “publish often and appropriately, teach *acceptably*” (p. 11, italics added). Uprooting a long-standing culture that relegates teaching (and service) to the back seat implies the implementation of significant structural changes that can ultimately rebalance the components of faculty careers. We might have to wait longer to see the impact of such changes on the indicators of career success.

Predictor	β	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	Drivers of academic career success
<i>Step 1</i>					193
Gender	-0.023				
Career length	0.319*				
Segment	0.320*				
		0.233	0.233	17.98*	
<i>Step 2</i>					
Gender	-0.006				
Career length	0.215*				
Segment	0.273*				
Teaching	-0.017				
Research	0.241*				
Service	0.063				
		0.281	0.049	3.96*	
<i>Step 3</i>					
Gender	0.010				
Career length	0.190*				
Segment	0.205*				
Teaching	-0.015				
Research	0.770*				
Service	-0.005				
Teaching \times segment	-0.004				
Research \times segment	-0.528				
Service \times segment	0.122				
		0.303	0.022	1.78	

Notes: Regression coefficients are standardized β s; $N = 182$; Constants were omitted; Main effect variables were centered. Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for females. Segment was coded 1 for research intensive institutions and 0 for teaching-research balanced institutions; * $p < 0.05$

Source: Table by the authors

Table 3.
Regression analysis
for objective career
success – Salary

Our concern, however, is that we might have reached the point where changes to business education are unpostponable. Higher education is under immense pressure with the prospects of many institutions closing for good (Kim & Maloney, 2020). Increasing the value to stakeholders seems the only way out of the lurking crisis (Paquette, 2021). Not by coincidence, *impact* is now the buzzword in business schools as an aspiration to find ways that add value to their constituents. Under these circumstances, it is baffling that teaching and service remain sidelined. Arguably, the highest impact in higher education occurs in the personalized exchanges that unfold in classrooms (e.g. teaching relevant skills; Varela, 2020) or in the services that assist with the flourishing of communities and forge tight-knit connections with local business (e.g. applied-research consulting).

Moreover, voices warning about the detriments of overvaluing research are getting louder (Tourish, 2020). A research-centric culture has made research an end to itself (Butler & Spoelstra, 2020) with disregard to whether scholarly work contributes to the advancement of management practices (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Chapman, 2012) or adds to the knowledge to be imparted in classrooms (Aguinis, Ramani, Alabduljader, Bailey, & Lee, 2019). Research can remain in a bubble of scholarly dialogue that widens the gap between science and practice while lowering the returns of higher education to society (Huang & Pearce, 2012).

In an environment where the excessive reverence for research can defeat its own purpose (i.e. contribute to society; Tourish, 2020), initiatives for increasing the impact of teaching and

service must be embraced. These initiatives, however, will be inconsequential unless incentives – in the form of career success criteria – are considered (Bak & Kim, 2015). Career success must reflect the institutional changes aimed at restoring the pluralistic nature of faculty jobs. Otherwise, we will continue the minimization of teaching and service, the alienation of faculty devoted to mastering the distinct areas of the job, and the decoupling of teaching from its original conception as an intrinsic part of academic careers.

Limitations and future research

A potential study limitation deals with our emphasis on four-year public institutions in the USA. Private business schools are not bounded by many of the traditional employment practices of publicly held institutions and, consequently, the relationships between the faculty job components and career success criteria might differ in such institutions. We similarly foresee different relationships between job components and career success criteria in European or Asian business schools where higher education tends to be susceptible to more government-mandate salary and promotion structures. There is a need to expand our study to other institutions in higher education.

One could argue the self-assessments of teaching and service carry biases that misled the results of the study. We acknowledge biases in self-assessments is a plausible assumption. Yet limitations in alternatives for assessing teaching and service have led scholars to rely on self-assessment as primary option (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). While we attempted to cross-validate teaching self-assessments with publicly available data, results of the study must be interpreted in light of this potential limitation.

Conclusions

Initiatives to rebalance academic jobs led us to test the prevalence of the so-called research-centric culture in higher education. Results indicate the prevalence for publishing remains true in the life of academics. Many warn that embracing a culture where publishing seems more important than what we publish (Tourish, 2020) could lead to the demise of business schools (Parker, 2018). At the risk of being naïve, we hold a more optimistic view of the future; one in which business schools strengthen their role in their communities first by further elevating their commitment to provide the skills for a competent labor force and second by finding distinct ways to bolster the competitiveness of local businesses. It is hard to envision this future if teaching and service remain disconnected from career success criteria.

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Further reading

Australian Business Deans Council (2019). *Journal quality list*. Retrieved from <https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-list/>

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