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## Research Panel: Department Chairs' Perceptions of Union Membership on Academic Human Resource Decision Making

Leigh Settlemoir Dzwik  
*Oakland University*

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# Department Chairs' Perceptions of Union Membership on Academic Human Resource Decision Making

Leigh Settlemoir Dzwik

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# Background

- Department Chairs
- Responsibilities
  - 80% of higher education decision making occurs in the departments (Wolverton, Gmelch, Wolverton & Sarros, 1999)
- Brief History of Faculty Unionization and Supervision
  - Yeshiva (1980)
  - Pacific Lutheran (2014)
- Faculty Unionization and the Department Chair

# The Leadership Challenge

# Need for Research

"Unfortunately, current higher education research provides few insights for leaders who seek to engage creatively the paradoxical tensions present in the cultures of their respective institutions. To address this limitation, higher education scholars need to frame new empirical studies of organizational culture around concepts such as paradox and interplay. By incorporating these concepts into higher education research, the field can better inform leaders regarding the ambiguity, complexity, and transformative capacity of organizational culture" (Dee, 2011).

# A Summary of the Literature

- Affiliation – Ron Elsdon (2003)
- *Chris Argyris (1949) – Role of the foreman*
  - (1957) - *Loyalty to the structure*
- James March (1994)
  - Multiple Identities
- *Boundary Spanning – Lee Bolman and Joanne Gallos (2011) call it "leading from the middle"*

# Research Question

Does faculty unionization make academic human resource decision making for department chairs more complex? In other words, is faculty unionization a variable in decision making that makes it more difficult for chairs to come to a decision?

# Scope of Academic Human Resource Decisions

The scope of academic human resource decisions\* for this study is limited to the following:

- Faculty Hiring
- Re-Employment, Promotion and Tenure Decisions
- Other Faculty Performance Review Types
- Discipline and Discharge Decisions



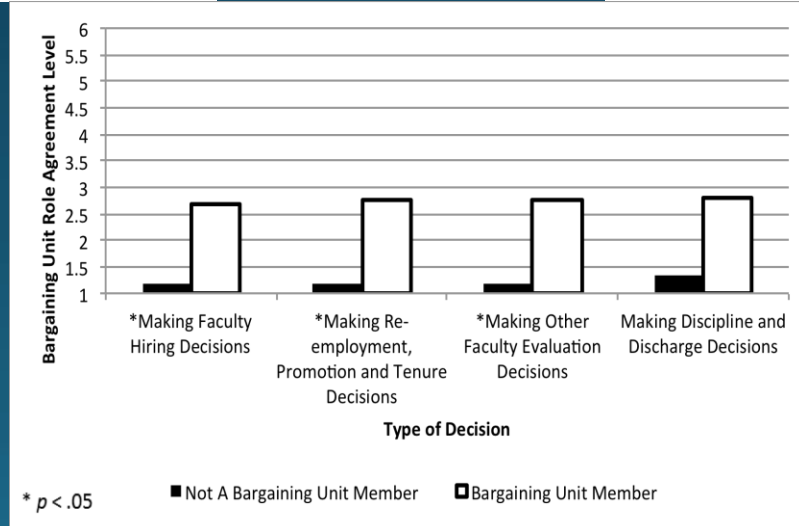
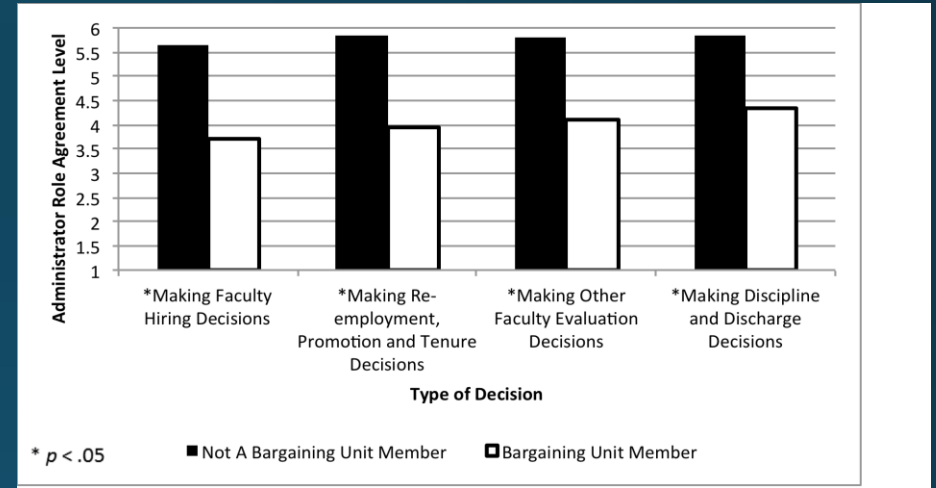
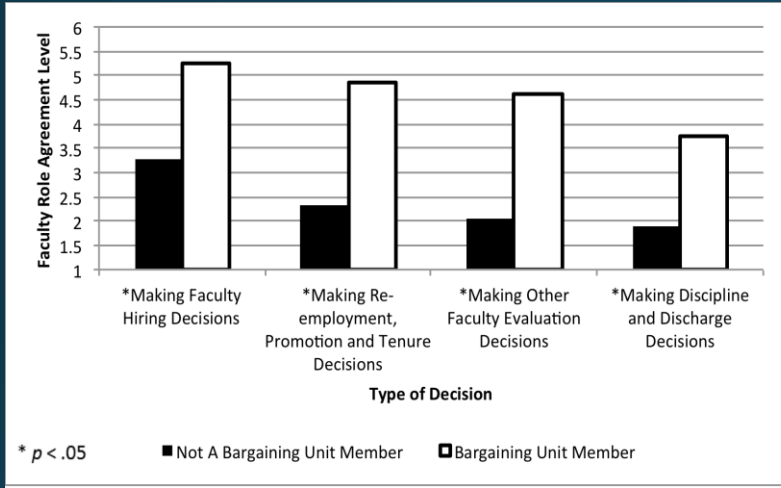
# The Study

- Comparative Study Between Bargained and Non-Bargained Chairs
- Primarily Quantitative: Originally a Two-Phase Study

# Methods

- Quantitative Survey with one Qualitative Item
  - Includes: Likert-type scales, multiple choice and open ended items
- Description of the Participants
  - Chairs from thirty-eight U.S. public institutions with four plus year undergraduate, or graduate degree programs
    - All institutions have full-time faculty bargaining units
    - Nineteen institutions have chairs in the unit
    - Nineteen institutions have chairs out of the unit
    - All chairs have a regular appointment with more than one year of service in the role
  - 136 qualified participants (12.2% return rate)
  - Survey data was collected through an online instrument

# Multiple Roles in Decision Making



# Perception of Unionization as a Complicating Factor ( $p < .05$ )

- 78% of the bargaining unit chairs indicate that unionization is *not* a factor in academic human resource decision making
- 56% of the non-bargained chairs indicate that unionization is *not* a factor in academic human resource decision making

# Narrative to Support Complication Result

- Less hostility encountered for a chair when making decisions as part of the bargaining unit.
- Processes tend to be followed better when articulated in a collective bargaining agreement; unionization complements the decision making process.
- Unionization of chairs requires input from both the academics and the administrators.
- No difference between being a member of the bargaining unit and not belonging to the bargaining unit.

# Study Limitations

- Low return rate
- Political sensitivity of the research
- No known listing of institutions or campuses with department chairs in the bargaining unit

# Areas for Future Research

- Qualitative inquiry to provide depth to participant survey responses and department chair experiences.
- A possible second solicitation after connecting with bargaining agents about the initial study.
- Adding an item to the National Center Directory to indicate whether campuses have chairs in the bargaining unit for further exploration.
- An inquiry into the connection with the union for chair not in the bargaining unit.

# Conclusions

- *No*, unionization is not a complicating factor in making academic human resource decisions.
- What it is: A perception problem! Where Birnbaum (1988) suggests the academic and administrative levels of authority in higher education are diametrically opposed, the study suggests they are not.
- What can be done? More boundary spanning – a willingness to work on the perception problem by both faculty and administration.



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