

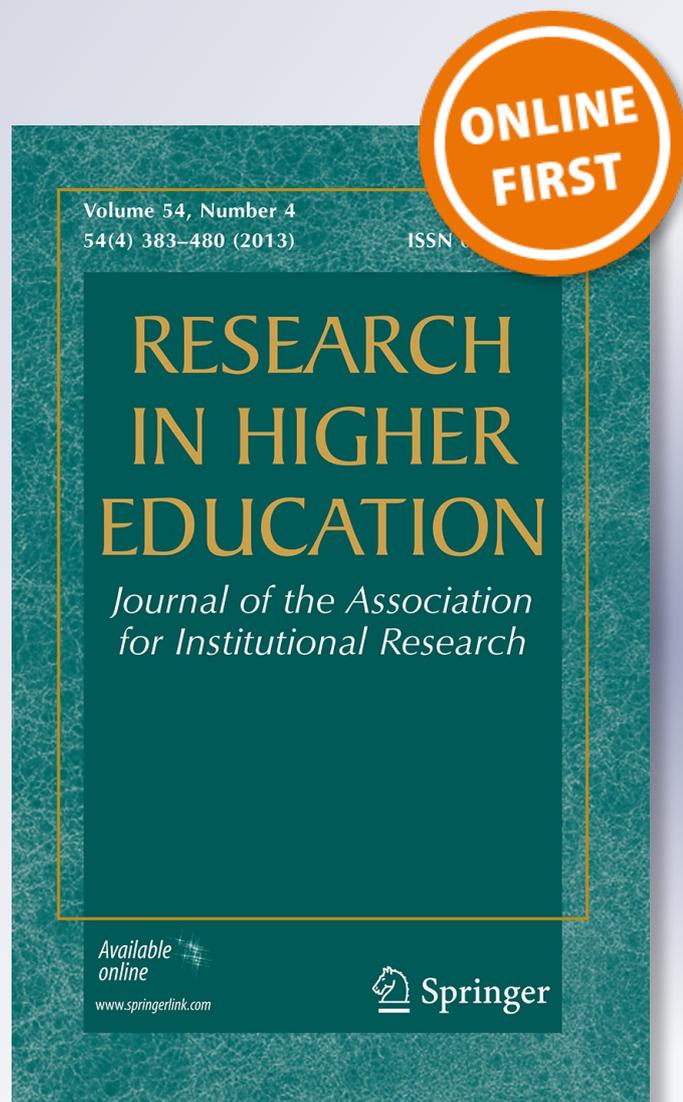
# *Faculty Agency: Departmental Contexts that Matter in Faculty Careers*

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**Research in Higher Education**  
Journal of the Association for  
Institutional Research

ISSN 0361-0365

Res High Educ  
DOI 10.1007/s11162-013-9303-x



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## Faculty Agency: Departmental Contexts that Matter in Faculty Careers

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Received: 26 May 2012  
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**Abstract** In a modern context of constrained resources and high demands, faculty exert agency to strategically navigate their careers (Baez 2000a; Neumann et al. 2006). Guided by the O'Meara et al. (2011) framework on agency in faculty professional lives, this study used Structural Equation Modeling to investigate which departmental factors (perceptions of tenure and promotion process, work-life climate, transparency, person-department fit, professional development resources, and collegiality) influenced faculty agentic perspective and agentic action. Results showed that faculty perceptions of certain departmental contexts do matter in faculty career agency, such as work-life climate, person-department fit, and professional development resources. These contexts have a particular influence on faculty agentic perspective. Results also showed a large effect of agentic perspective on agentic action. The study has important implications for administrators regarding departmental role in faculty agency and contributes to the growing body of literature on faculty sense of agency in academe.

**Keywords** Faculty · Agency · Department · Organization · Perspective

Two assistant professors, Jennifer and Erin, started their academic careers on the same day in two very similar research universities. However they had very different experiences based on their departmental context. Jennifer was given an opportunity to present some of her research in a department colloquium at the end of the first year and received positive feedback as well as good suggestions for future projects. By the end of the first year, Jennifer felt like she fit well in her department and her work was valued. While balancing the new demands of teaching, advising, and the stringent

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tenure requirements was challenging, she still felt her early pre-tenure career was navigable, and she was able to imagine the future possibilities for her research agenda. Erin, on the other hand, had been promised funding to attend her national conference but the department chair announced that because of some “restructuring,” faculty travel was not possible that year. When Erin walked down the hall, all of the doors were closed and she had no mentor in the department. By the end of the first year she felt like she was constantly running into walls, and she started wondering if she would stay—both at this university and in academe.

In both of these vignettes, created to illustrate the topic of this paper, department structures and cultures matter to faculty careers. Many scholars of faculty careers have observed the pivotal role department cultures play in faculty professional lives (Cipriano 2011; Rosser and Tabata 2010; Waltman and Hollenshead 2005). This is especially true for tenure track faculty in larger research and doctoral universities where the department “academic home” is the primary place where faculty are hired, evaluated for tenure and promotion, and associate their professional identity. The two vignettes provide a snapshot of one facet of the system that influences Jennifer and Erin’s experiences as faculty members, namely departmental context. If we widen the picture, we see all of the individual factors they bring to their situations, institution-level experiences, contexts within discipline and field, and the broader societal influences on faculty careers.

Furthermore, in these vignettes, Jennifer and Erin’s departmental contexts are connected to the agency they feel in their career advancement. The concept of agency, most developed in the fields of sociology and psychology, has been used by scholars to study many topics including collective social change and movement out of poverty (Alkire 2005; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Ganz 2010); life course and well-being (Archer 2003; Elder 1994; Marshall 2005), and most recently students (Baxter Magolda and Crosby 2011; Deil-Amen and Tevis 2010) and faculty in higher education (Archer 2009; Cerecer et al. 2011; Clegg 2005; Davis and Petersen 2005; Gonzales 2012; Kahn 2009; Neumann et al. 2006; O’Meara and Campbell 2011; O’Meara et al. 2008). In recent years, scholars have explored the role of agency in the race-related service of faculty of color (Baez 2000a; Cerecer et al. 2011), overall faculty professional growth and management of career (Archer 2009; Clegg 2005; Kahn 2009; O’Meara et al. 2008), faculty emphasis on teaching in research environments (Terosky 2005), faculty decisions regarding parental leave (O’Meara and Campbell 2011), and faculty learning (Neumann et al. 2006). While scholars have begun to explore the role of agency in faculty professional lives, research is still young in terms of defining and understanding the concept in the higher education context. A symptom of the newness of the application of agency to faculty careers is that agency is often ambiguously defined, if defined at all, in many of the studies that examine this construct. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), “The term agency itself has maintained an elusive, albeit, resonant vagueness” (p. 962). Additionally, several disciplines including psychology, sociology, education, and life span theories contribute theoretical perspectives to the construct of agency, each bearing a specific and often distinct definition (Ackerman et al. 2000; Bandura 1982; Elder 1994; Kahana and Kahana 1996; Lawton 1989; McAdams et al. 1993). Building from previous research, this study used the following operational definition of agency: “agency is taking strategic and intentional actions or perspectives toward goals that matter to oneself” (O’Meara et al. 2011). This definition focuses specifically on agency as the human capacity for intentional behavior or the human capacity to perceive life situations in intentional and strategic ways that further one’s goals.

Organizational context is a noted influence on human agency across social science fields. For example, psychological studies (e.g. Bandura 1982), sociological studies (Alkire 2005;

Sen 1985), life-course and human development studies (e.g. Elder 1994; Marshall 2005) and critical realist studies (Archer 2003) all assert that organizational environments influence individual and collective sense of agency. Several key studies of faculty behavior (e.g. Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Bland et al. 2006; Daly and Dee 2006; Hagedorn 2000) have observed the dynamic interplay of department and university contexts and specific faculty outcomes such as job satisfaction (Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Morrison et al. 2011), organizational commitment (Lawrence et al. 2012), productivity (Bland et al. 2006; Rosser and Tabata 2010; Smeby and Try 2005), and intent to leave (Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Xu 2008a, b). For example, Johnsrud and Rosser (2002) surveyed all faculty in a ten campus system of higher education in a western state, using a multi-level structural model for analysis and found that individual perceptions of faculty work-life, faculty professional priorities and rewards, administrative relations and support, and the quality of benefits and services had a substantial effect on faculty morale and intent to stay.

Of particular interest is the organizational climate at the department level. The norms and subcultures of individual departments and the disciplines within them have been found extremely influential on faculty work and roles (Becher and Trowler 2001; Bland et al. 2006; Clark 1987; Hermanowicz 2009). Yet, few, if any, studies have investigated the connection between departmental contexts and faculty agency in career. While this is the first study to explore the relationship between academic department contexts and faculty agency specifically, the premise of a relationship between the two is well grounded in previous social science research on agency and past research on the role of departments in key faculty outcomes. For example, Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found that recognition of research by department colleagues was a critical factor in job satisfaction among STEM faculty in research universities. Several studies of academic faculty have found faculty intent to leave or satisfaction tied to experiences of collegiality from department colleagues (Daly and Dee 2006; Hagedorn 2000; Lindholm 2004; Rosser 2004). Given the rise of dual career households, increased number of women in faculty roles, and increased role of men in child-care, several studies point to policies and cultures that promote work-life balance and time set aside to be academic parents as important to retaining faculty and increasing faculty productivity (Sallee 2011; Mason and Ekman 2007).

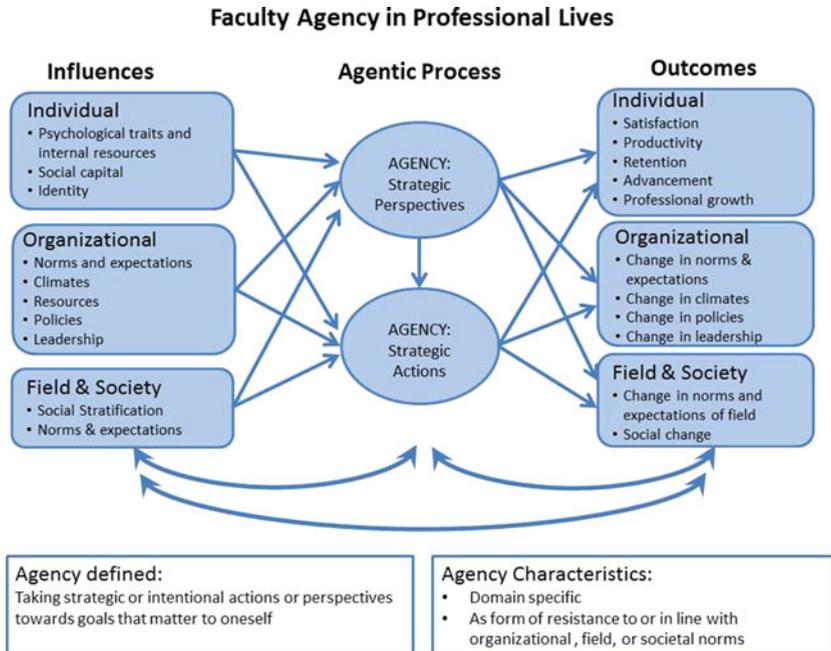
Understanding which aspects of departments cultivate or thwart faculty agency is important to deans, department chairs and faculty colleagues who want to facilitate cultures where faculty advance in their research, teaching, and service missions. This study makes a distinct contribution to the literature and practice by exploring the ways in which departmental contexts (which are changeable by administrators and faculty colleagues) influence faculty agency in career.

## Review of the Literature

In this section we outline (a) the overall conceptual framework guiding our research on agency (b) what is meant by agency as action and agency as perspective and (c) department contexts likely to influence faculty sense of agency in career advancement.

### Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the O'Meara et al. (2011) framework of agency in faculty professional lives (Fig. 1). Based on an extensive review of the psychological, sociological, and organizational literatures, O'Meara, Campbell, and Terosky posit that faculty agency



**Fig. 1** O’Meara et al. (2011) framework of agency in faculty professional lives

can be shaped by a number of individual (e.g. psychological traits, identities), organizational (e.g. policies, climates, resources) and societal (e.g. disciplinary norms, social stratification) forces. Likewise, the framework posits that faculty agency is associated with outcomes on three levels: individual faculty outcomes (e.g. professional growth, job satisfaction), organizational change, and social change. The O’Meara et al. (2011) framework also posits that agentic process can be about overcoming resistance (e.g. overcoming power structures) or, more generally, the exertion of will towards achieving one’s goals. Agency is always enacted in a specific content area or set of goals. As such an individual may exert a higher level of agency in one area of life (e.g. advancement) than another (e.g. work-life balance; Neumann and Pereira 2009). The social context where a person exerts agency also matters as a person might feel more agentic in a familiar environment or one in which they feel they belong (Marshall 2005).

While the focus of this study is the influence of departments on faculty agency, it is with recognition that every faculty member is influenced by an interplay of individual characteristics (such as social identity and psychological resources) and societal influences (such as social stratification and norms) that interact with the organizational influences under study. Both a strength and a limitation of the present study is its laser-like focus on the influence of organizational influences on faculty agency. However, we point readers to other recent studies that have focused on the role of social identity and interior resources (Baez 2000a; Neumann and Pereira 2009) and social capital (O’Meara and Campbell 2011) as well as societal and field norms and expectations (Gonzales 2012; Pickering 1993; Sallee 2011) influencing faculty agency.

Agency has often been conceptualized in social science literature as individuals overcoming resistance (Elder 1994; Heinz 1996). In academe, agency has been highlighted in

terms of its usefulness for underrepresented faculty who must overcome systemic challenges in order to pursue professional goals. For example, faculty of color have been found to exert agency in service roles despite reward structures that deemphasize service (Baez 2000a, b) and faculty parents were found to exert their agency in taking parental leave amidst “ideal worker” norms that discouraged parental leave usage (O’Meara and Campbell 2011).

Returning to the idea of what agency is and how it is expressed, we mentioned above that we define faculty agency, expressed in any content area (e.g. career advancement or balance of work and life priorities) as “taking strategic and intentional actions or perspectives towards goals that matter to oneself” (O’Meara et al. 2011). This definition is unique in that it teases apart strategic actions from strategic perspectives. Strategic actions would include any act undertaken in pursuit of a specific goal. The present study focuses on the content area of agency in career advancement. By career advancement we refer to the goal of moving up the institutional career ladder of appointment and gaining recognition and visibility in one’s field. As such, an example of a strategic action to advance in one’s career would be to contact one’s department chair to discuss one’s vita and likely chances of success in going up for promotion the following year. A strategic perspective might be viewing one’s promotion as within one’s grasp as long as he or she follows advice and keeps his/her priorities front and center in decision-making around time allocation. Both this “inner conversation” as Archer (2003) refers to the strategic perspective, and the strategic action of asking for advice move the faculty member toward her goal. To our knowledge, no quantitative studies in the field of higher education have attempted to create survey items to distinguish between these two expressions of agency, and understand the relationship between them.

### Faculty Agency and Departmental Contexts

Now we turn from the experience of faculty agency in career advancement to the departmental contexts that might influence it. Departmental contexts are best understood under the larger umbrella of organizational influences. Organizational contexts that influence agency include structural facets of an organization (such as policies) and culture (such as climate or norms). Research on organizational influences on faculty agency is perhaps most useful for administrators and policy-makers because it can reveal concrete actions that can be taken to shape faculty agency, such as creating supportive policies, mentoring opportunities, welcoming climates, and effective reward structures.

Unfortunately, there are only a few studies of organizational influences on faculty agency. Recent studies have explored the role of neoliberal management policies (Canaan and Shumar 2012), striving cultures (Gonzales 2012) and work-life policies (O’Meara and Campbell 2011; Sallee 2011) on faculty sense of agency. However, no studies have focused specifically on the role of departmental contexts on different expressions of agency (perspective and action). In order to predict the kinds of department contexts most likely to influence faculty agency in career advancement, we turned to the findings of the few studies conducted on faculty agency and studies of department contexts that are most influential in other kinds of faculty outcomes such as faculty productivity, satisfaction, intent to leave, learning, time management and balance of work-life priorities. This review of the literature caused us to see the following six department contexts as likely influential on faculty sense of agency in career advancement: professional development resources, work-life climate, the clarity and fairness of the tenure process, transparency, person-department fit, and collegiality.

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### *Professional Development Resources*

Institutional support for faculty research and travel, finding grants, and access to research and teaching assistants to protect one's time, have been found in a number of studies to influence key faculty outcomes (Hagedorn 1994; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Lindholm 2008). In a study of early, post-tenure faculty, (Neumann et al. 2006) found that organizational climates that offered resources for professional development were facilitators of scholarly learning. Time is often one of the most valuable and scarce resources for university faculty; thus resources that save faculty time or provide time—such as the assistance of teaching or research assistants are important resources for the amount of time faculty can spend on research and publication (Creamer 1998; Long 1990).

### *Work-Life Climate*

Faculty having role models for work-life balance and feeling that they can make decisions to balance work and life priorities without hurting their careers is critically important to faculty retention and satisfaction. In studies of faculty parents, O'Meara and Campbell (2011) found the presence of role models influenced faculty sense of agency in career and in ability to balance work and life priorities. Sallee (2011), Mason and Ekman (2007), and Mason and Goulden (2004) all found that organizational work-life climate was an important facilitator of faculty satisfaction and intent to leave, especially for women. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) found that departments that women experienced as "greedy" for their time and in terms of productivity expectations made it difficult for women to balance work and life priorities.

### *Person-Department Fit*

Academic institutions are value-laden environments where faculty are constantly assessing perception of their success and using such perceptions to guide actions (Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Kezar 2005). The sense that one's department colleagues value one's teaching, research and service contributions and that there is a good fit between one's values and those of one's unit has been found critical to faculty satisfaction and well-being (Lindholm 2008). For example, Lindholm (2008) found that value congruence between a faculty member's personal values and those of their department and institution were critical to their sense of fit in the institution and plans to stay or leave over time. Olsen et al. (1995) also found that feeling recognized by colleagues was related to job satisfaction.

### *Transparency*

Transparency appears to play a role in faculty satisfaction and success. Xu (2008a, b) examined turnover decisions in different disciplinary clusters and found that engaging faculty in decision-making and free expression of ideas, both of which are related to the idea of transparency, are important to turnover intentions. Cipriano (2011) describes the importance of transparent decision-making for faculty satisfaction and collegiality. Daly and Dee (2006) found that communication openness, a construct related to transparency, was positively associated with intent to stay. Additionally, recent research from an NSF ADVANCE grant at the University of Michigan demonstrates the importance of

transparency (i.e. making information available and easy to find) in faculty retention and enabling faculty to thrive in their careers (Waltman and Hollenshead 2005).

### *Perception of the Tenure Process*

Clear and fair tenure processes have been linked in national studies to overall satisfaction, intent to leave, gender, race and ethnicity and rank (Trower and Chait 2002). Clarity of the “rules of the game” and perceived sense of fairness are particularly important for women and minority faculty who may feel like outsiders in a tenure system that was not created to serve them (Tierney and Bensimon 1996; Trower and Chait 2002). Daly and Dee (2006) found perceived sense of justice of their work environment influential, as one part of a larger model on turnover intention.

### *Collegiality*

Finally, collegiality has been indicated in many quantitative and qualitative studies to be a critical ingredient in the faculty work experience and career (Daly and Dee 2006; Gappa et al. 2007; Jayakumar et al. 2009; Lindholm 2008; Rosser 2004). There are several reasons the perception of collegiality, positive social interactions, and feeling connected to others in a department are likely to influence faculty agency. Relationships and networks are a critical aspect of professional growth (O’Meara et al. 2008), can facilitate ‘expressive networks’ for personal support (Ibarra 1992), and ‘instrumental networks’ for career advancement (Ibarra 1992). Engagement in professional relationships have been shown to provide faculty (a) social support (Bland and Bergquist 1997; Gappa et al. 2007; Walker 2002) (b) useful feedback on the quality of their work and strategies for improvement (Walker 2002), (c) “pull” within their fields (Laird 2006) and (d) allies (Dickens and Sagaria 1997).

This study focused on the impact of these six department contexts on faculty agency in career advancement. Using the O’Meara et al. (2011) framework on agency in faculty professional lives, this study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1 Do departmental contexts influence faculty sense of agency (action and perspective)?
- RQ2 If so, which departmental contexts are most influential contributors to faculty sense of agency (action and perspective)?
- RQ3 Do departmental contexts influence agency action both directly and indirectly through agency perspective?

## **Methods**

The present study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional, survey methodology (Groves et al. 2004). The site of the study was a large, public, research-extensive institution in the mid-Atlantic (Hereafter, MAU). We chose to conduct this research on departmental contexts that influence agency in one research university for two main reasons. First, studying a single research institution allowed us to focus on the interactions between faculty experiences within departments in one institutional context. Multi-institutional studies can drown out departmental contexts because of variation across institutions, and institutional effects were not the focus of this study. Secondly, single institution studies can be

particularly important for understanding organizational influences on faculty because they allow for an understanding of the full context of the institution—and departmental factors can be contextualized by broader institutional trends. The findings of the present study can be situated within a broader understanding of MAU, which provides particular insight into the practical applications of this research. This could not be done with a multi-institutional study.

The context of MAU is important as an indicator of whether and how the results of this study may apply to other institutions. One year prior to this study, MAU had been awarded an NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant. The purpose of the grant was to support and study the retention of women faculty in the STEM disciplines, and the grant activities were also funded by MAU for disciplines outside STEM such that the whole institution would participate in the grant activities. As a part of the grant, the university conducted a census of all faculty to investigate the institutional contexts for faculty success. It was the first survey of its nature in the history of the institution, and provided evidence that the institution was interested in studying the work environment for faculty.

The data for this study were collected as a part of the MAU Faculty Work Environment Survey that was conducted in the Spring of 2011. The goal of the Faculty Work Environment Survey was to assess to what extent faculty perceived the University was investing in their professional growth and providing a work environment where they could thrive and be successful. The survey broadly covered several topics related to faculty professional lives, such as faculty scholarly learning, networks, recognition, productivity, leadership, organizational commitment, perceptions of departmental climate, perceptions of institutional climate, use of family policies, among others. The survey was mainly conducted online, but a print option was available.

The survey instrument went through rigorous validation processes including expert reviews and a small pilot test. Experts were asked to associate the various survey items with a specific construct (in this case agency), providing initial evidence of the validity of the constructs. Additionally, pilot testing of the survey instrument produced qualitative responses that tested response process validity of the instrument, and results from the pilot provided initial evidence linking organizational climate to faculty agency.

## Constructs

This study investigated the relationships among departmental contexts and faculty agency. Following the O'Meara et al. (2011) framework, faculty agency consists of two constructs: action and perspective. Agentic action is strategic and intentional behavior towards one's goals. Agentic perspective is viewing one's self, the contexts in one's environment, and their interactions, in ways that facilitate a goal (O'Meara 2012). In this study the goal for both agentic actions and perspectives is career advancement. This study defines departmental context along six organizational constructs: perceptions of the tenure process, transparency, work-life climate, person-department fit, professional development resources, and collegiality. The six dimensions of departmental climate that are included in the present study have all been linked to important faculty outcomes, such as satisfaction, retention, and productivity (Birnbaum 1988; Bolin 2000; Bolman and Deal 2003; Bowen and Schuster 1986; Cipriano 2011; Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Lindholm 2008, 2004; Mason and Ekman 2007; Mason and Goulden 2004; Neumann et al. 2006; O'Meara and Campbell 2011). Specific survey items that tap the six posited dimensions of departmental climate and the two faculty agency outcomes can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1** Constructs, items, and descriptives

Constructs	Survey item	Total		
		Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Tenure Process	In my unit, the tenure requirements are clear	3.69	451	1.150
	In my unit, the tenure process is fair	3.78	432	1.121
Transparency	The transparency of decision-making within my unit	2.88	443	1.276
	Resource allocation in my unit (e.g., space, funded research assistants) is transparent	2.82	445	1.188
	Decisions regarding salary increases in my unit are transparent	2.78	441	1.168
	Information is available to understand my relative standing among my peers	2.91	437	1.166
Work-life climate	I am satisfied with my unit's culture around work-life balance	3.06	448	1.176
	There are role-models in my unit of how to create a satisfying work-life balance	2.87	450	1.107
	The amount of work my unit expects me to perform makes work-life balance difficult. REVERSE CODED	2.63	453	1.142
	In my unit it is generally expected that people need to make work their top priority	2.43	452	0.968
Person-department fit	The sense of fit between my values and those of my unit	3.27	441	1.200
	Faculty in my unit value my teaching contributions	3.45	443	1.065
	Faculty in my unit value my research/scholarship	3.63	444	1.077
	Faculty in my unit value my service contributions	3.38	442	1.131
Collegiality	Faculty in my unit are aware of the service that I do for our program	3.48	444	1.101
	I feel that I can voice my opinions openly in my unit, even if my colleagues disagree with me	3.48	445	1.200
	Major decisions in my unit are made with adequate input from faculty	3.31	445	1.279
	I feel isolated in my department. REVERSE CODED	3.52	474	1.306
	I am satisfied with the amount of professional interaction I have with senior colleagues at the University	3.08	474	1.204
	I am satisfied with the collegiality in my unit	3.28	477	1.338
	I have a voice in decision-making that affects the direction of my department	3.49	445	1.144
	I receive useful feedback from colleagues at my institution that improves my work	3.10	477	1.169
	I have been effectively mentored by someone in my unit	2.75	473	1.323
Professional development	Assistance with finding grants (four point scale; top two categories collapsed)	2.63	447	1.023
	Professional assistance for improving teaching (four point scale: top two categories collapsed)	3.05	440	0.859
	My unit has financially supported my learning in my field or discipline (e.g., provided funds to attend conferences, buy software, books or equipment for my research)	2.93	480	1.382
	Amount of access to TAs, RAs	2.75	441	1.198
	Assistance with research administration in your unit	3.00	438	1.210

**Table 1** continued

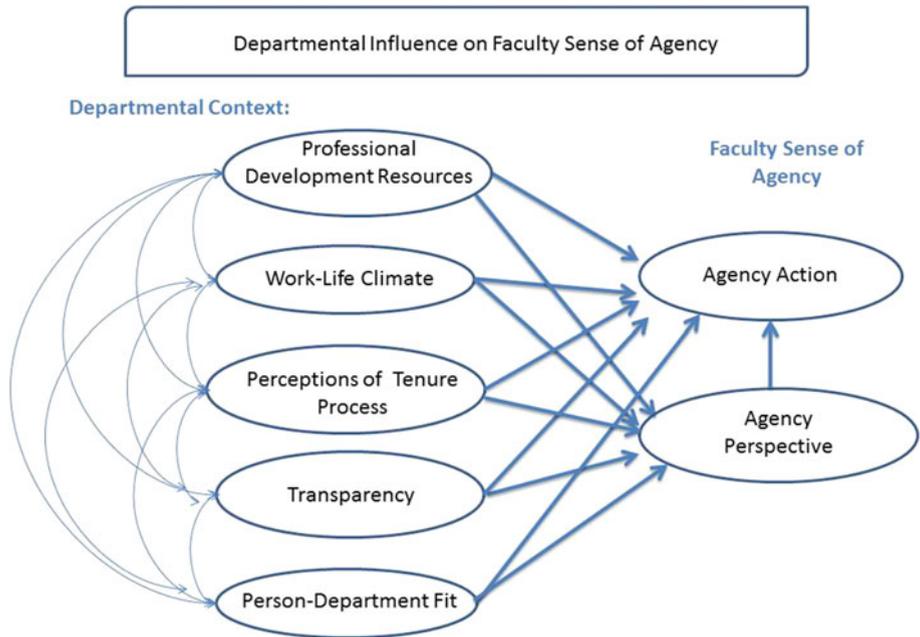
Constructs	Survey item	Total		
		Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Agency action	I have been strategic in achieving my career goals (four point scale; bottom two categories collapsed)	2.72	459	0.996
	I seize opportunities when they are presented to me to advance in my career (four point scale; bottom two categories collapsed)	2.97	464	0.880
	I have intentionally made choices to focus my career in ways that are personally meaningful to me (four point scale; bottom two categories collapsed)	3.12	460	0.783
	I have taken strategic steps towards creating a satisfactory work-life balance (four point scale; bottom two categories collapsed)	2.69	454	0.981
Agency perspective	I am in charge of the direction of my research agenda (three point scale; bottom three categories collapsed)	2.37	446	0.664
	I feel stuck in my ability to advance in my career. REVERSE CODED	3.43	460	1.161
	I have little control over whether I advance in my career. REVERSE CODED	3.61	459	1.129
	I feel in control of my participation in service activities (the amount and level of participation)	3.23	450	1.120
	Managing my teaching responsibilities is largely under my control	3.64	445	1.077
	In general, I feel I have control over creating a satisfying work-life balance	3.21	452	1.120

Response scales for items are 1 (strongly disagree or very dissatisfied)–5 (strongly agree or very satisfied) unless otherwise noted

### Model

The model that was tested in this study was derived from the O’Meara et al. (2011) framework of agency in faculty professional lives (Fig. 1). While the O’Meara et al. framework includes several forms of influences (individual, organizational, and societal), the present study focused solely on the organizational influences of faculty agentic perspectives and actions. There are two main reasons to focus in on the organizational aspects of the framework. First, organizational factors are changeable by institutions. Therefore, this study can inform institutional leaders, such as department chairs and provosts, of the kinds of climates and environments that will scaffold faculty sense of agency in career. Secondly, previous studies of faculty agency have largely focused on individual influences on faculty agency, such as race, rank, and professional capital (Baez 2000a; Neumann et al. 2006; O’Meara et al. 2008) and field or societal influences such as neoliberalism (Cannanan and Shumar 2012) or gender norms (Sallee 2011). This study sought to make a unique contribution by focusing in on the influence of organizational contexts on faculty agency.

The O’Meara et al. (2011) framework provides theoretical rationale for including paths from organizational constructs to both agency perspective and action. Yet, we had to look to previous literature to guide our selection of which specific organizational constructs to include in our model. While there was little research that linked specific organizational constructs to faculty agency, there were many studies that demonstrated the powerful influence of these six departmental contexts on related faculty career outcomes, such as



**Fig. 2** Posited model of departmental influences on faculty agency

intent to stay, satisfaction, and productivity (Birnbaum 1988; Bolin 2000; Bolman and Deal 2003; Bowen and Schuster 1986; Cipriano 2011; Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Lindholm 2008, 2004; Mason and Ekman 2007; Mason and Goulden 2004; Neumann et al. 2006; O'Meara and Campbell 2011). As a result, our model posited the following six department contexts as influencers of faculty agentic perspective and action: professional development resources, work-life climate, the clarity and fairness of the tenure process, transparency, person-department fit, and collegiality.

Finally, the O'Meara et al. (2011) framework posits that agentic perspective influences agentic action. The relationship between perspective and behavior is supported by psychological and organizational literature that finds a connection between perceptual constructs, such as self-efficacy (Bandura 1982) or motivation (Vroom 1964), and actions. As such, this study included a path between agentic perspective and agentic action. Figure 2 is a visual of the structural model that was tested.

### Sample

The sample for this study is the tenured or tenure-track faculty at MAU who completed the Faculty Work Environment Survey. After data were cleaned and unduplicated, the tenure track response rate was 32 % (488 respondents). While a response rate of 32 % is not ideal, it is a common response rate faculty for surveys at the focus institution. Additionally, national surveys of faculty experiences, such as the HERI, commonly have a response rate between 30 and 50 % (e.g. Milem 1999). Of the tenure track respondents, 43 % were female and 57 % were male. Regarding race, 0 % were American Indian, 9 % Asian American, 3 % Black/African American, 5 % Hispanic, 3 % International, 78 % White, <1 % Multiracial, and 3 % had unreported race. Lastly, tenure-track respondents were

24 % Assistant Professors, 32 % Associate Professors, and 44 % Full Professors. Of tenure-track/tenured respondents, 8 % were administrators (Chairs, Directors, and Deans).

Non-respondent analyses demonstrated that women were over-represented in the respondents when compared to the populations of faculty in 2010 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, White and Hispanic faculty were overrepresented in this sample when compared to their representation of all 2010 faculty ( $p < 0.05$ ). Asian American and Black/African American faculty were underrepresented in this sample when compared to their representation in the population ( $p < 0.05$ ). The respondents were representative by rank of the population of 2010 Tenured/Tenure-track faculty. The biases by gender and race should be considered when contextualizing the findings.

## Analysis

First, descriptive analyses were obtained to determine the normality and variability of the data. Five variables were recoded to deal with low variability, and one was subsequently coded as categorical during analysis. Certain variables were reverse coded due to negatively worded items. Missing data were handled with list-wise deletion.

Next, data were analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM; Byrne 2006; Hancock and Mueller 2006; Mueller and Hancock 2008). CFA and SEM are appropriate techniques for the present study for three reasons. First, they are confirmatory methods that allow the testing of a theoretically driven model. Second, SEM allows for the study of multiple exogenous or dependent variables, which is the case in the present study. Third, CFA and SEM can account for measurement error, which is crucial in a survey of perceptions. Other common statistical techniques, such as OLS Regression or Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) cannot account for measurement error.

In order to answer the three research questions we tested a Structural Equation Model that demonstrated the posited direct and indirect relationships among the six departmental climate variables and the two faculty agency scales. Analyses were run using EQS software. Because our data departed from normality ( $Mardia > 5$ ) and included one variable coded as categorical, we used least squares robust methods. We adopted a two-step strategy in answering our research questions. First, we used CFA to ascertain the psychometric properties of each latent factor, setting the variance of each latent construct associated to each benchmark to one, allowing us to determine the extent to which the items loaded in their corresponding conceptual latent factor (Kline 2005). Next, in answering research questions 1, 2, and 3, we used SEM to determine which of the departmental contexts were associated with faculty agentic action and agentic perspective.

We used five measures of fit to judge the CFA and SEM models. These indices include: (a) the Satorra-Bentler Scaled estimate of Chi square ( $S-B\chi^2$ ), (b) the Yuan-Bentler Residual-based F-Statistic (c) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), (d) the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), and (e) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The Satorra-Bentler Scaled estimate of Chi square ( $S-B\chi^2$ ) and the Yuan-Bentler Residual-based F-Statistic are estimates of absolute fit. The CFI and the NNFI are estimates of incremental fit. The RMSEA is an estimate that takes into account the parsimony of the model. According to Byrne (2006), considering multiple forms of fit indices are critical to having a full understanding of model fit. Particularly, there has been a debate in the SEM literature regarding whether the absolute fit measures are too sensitive for real world data and also evidence that the Chi squared statistic is unduly sensitive to sample size.

We guided our selection of goodness of fit values based on recommendations from the SEM literature (Byrne 2006; Hu and Bentler 1999). CFI and NNFI values of 0.95 or higher

would signify an excellent fit; but, we also considered values greater than 0.90 to be appropriate. In terms of RMSEA, we judged values ranging from 0 to 0.05 excellent; but, we also considered RMSEA values less than 0.08 to be suitable, and values between 0.08 and 0.1 to be marginal. In addition, we estimated 90 % confidence intervals to check that RMSEA values did not fall beyond the cut off value of 0.10, signifying the rejection of the model. Finally, we sought a  $p$  value  $> 0.05$  in the Satorra-Bentler Scaled estimate of Chi square ( $S-B\chi^2$ ) and the Yuan-Bentler Residual-based F-Statistic. According to the SEM literature, we took all five indices of fit into account when deciding the fit of the model. Finally, we used the Lagrange Multiplier Test results to assist in guiding respecification of the model to improve fit.

## Limitations

There are several notable, but not insurmountable, limitations to the present study. First, the present study is based on a relatively small sample size (488 tenure track/tenured faculty) at one, research extensive institution. Findings should be replicated at other institutions and across institutional types to determine generalizability of findings. While this limitation is notable, single institution studies can also contribute substantially to a nuanced understanding of organizational contexts because the institutional norms, history, and culture can provide important context to the findings. While MAU may be similar to other large, public, research extensive institutions, it is a limitation that the findings may not be generalizable to non-research institutions, where a large proportion of faculty work. Second, this study deals with survey data, which by its very nature is about perceptions. Although the survey asked about departmental climate or behavior, this study looks at individual *perceptions* of departmental climate or *perceptions* of their own behavior. Third, this study focused on organizational influences on agency, and did not take into account individual or societal influences on agency, which could change estimates.

## Results

### Descriptives

Table 1 presents means,  $N$ s, and standard deviations for each item within a posited construct. This descriptive analysis allows for an understanding of the absolute value of each of the items within constructs. For example, it appears that with regard to the organizational factors, participants were slightly favorable about the tenure process, person-department fit, and collegiality and neutral about transparency, work-life climate, and professional development. With regard to the agency factors, participants were slightly favorable about exhibiting agency actions and having agency perspective—the average score was between “neutral” and “agree” on all agency related items.

### Construct Validity

First, we tested the construct validity of each construct (the two agency constructs and six departmental constructs) using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The following constructs showed poor fit as indicated by  $NNFI < 0.95$ ;  $CFI < 0.95$  and/or  $RMSEA > 0.1$ : agency perspective, agency action, perceptions of the tenure process, work-life climate,

**Table 2** Item Loadings and Reliabilities for the Final Seven Factor CFA Model

Constructs	Survey item	Item loading	Coefficient H
Tenure process	In my unit, the tenure requirements are clear	0.802	0.876
	In my unit, the tenure process is fair	0.917	
Transparency	The transparency of decision-making within my unit	0.873	0.880
	Resource allocation in my unit (e.g., space, funded research assistants) is transparent	0.820	
	Decisions regarding salary increases in my unit are transparent	0.720	
	Information is available to understand my relative standing among my peers	0.710	
Work-life climate	I am satisfied with my unit's culture around work-life balance	0.860	0.817
	There are role-models in my unit of how to create a satisfying work-life balance	0.749	
	The amount of work my unit expects me to perform makes work-life balance difficult. REVERSE CODED	0.503	
Person-department fit	The sense of fit between my values and those of my unit	0.893	0.871
	Faculty in my unit value my teaching contributions	0.605	
	Faculty in my unit value my research/scholarship	0.743	
	Faculty in my unit value my service contributions	0.711	
Professional development	Assistance with finding grants	0.489	0.648
	Amount of access to TAs, RAs	0.569	
	Assistance with research administration in your unit	0.715	
Agency action	I have been strategic in achieving my career goals	0.890	0.750
	I seize opportunities when they are presented to me to advance in my career	0.720	
	I have intentionally made choices to focus my career in ways that are personally meaningful to me	0.526	
Agency perspective	I am in charge of the direction of my research agenda	0.568	0.797
	I feel stuck in my ability to advance in my career. REVERSE CODED	0.833	
	I have little control over whether I advance in my career. REVERSE CODED	0.735	

person-department fit, professional development resources, and collegiality. Items were removed in each of these constructs based on low loadings or intercorrelated errors, suggested by the Lagrange Multiplier test. In each case, removal of the items increased model fit to be appropriate and all loadings were  $>0.5$ .

Next, we ran Confirmatory Factor Analyses on all eight constructs together (two agency constructs and six departmental climate constructs) freeing the covariance between constructs in order to ascertain the intercorrelations among the constructs. This CFA model indicated very high correlations among several constructs. Most notably, collegiality had high intercorrelations with three other departmental constructs: professional development resources (0.730), transparency (0.896), person-department fit (0.896). These very high intercorrelations indicated that collegiality may be entirely explained by other constructs in the model, thereby causing problems with multicollinearity. In addition to the results of the CFA, the high correlations are also theoretically valid. According to Birnbaum (1988),

transparency and feeling valued are a part of collegial climate. As a result, we removed the collegiality factor, and re-ran the CFA with seven constructs (five organizational contexts and two agency constructs).

This seven factor CFA resolved the problems with high intercorrelations and showed excellent model fit on robust statistics (NNFI = 0.975, CFI = 0.980, RMSEA = 0.053, CI (0.045, 0.061)). Additional evidence of a strong psychometric model lies in the loadings. The model had standardized loadings that range from 0.498 to 0.890. Only one item had <0.5 loading and 16 out of 22 items had >0.7 loadings. We accepted this as the final measurement model. The final model standardized loadings and factor reliabilities can be found in Table 2.

### Structural Model

After validation of the agency and departmental climate constructs, we proceeded with the structural equation model (SEM) to ascertain whether the five departmental climate constructs (perceptions of tenure process, work-life climate, professional development resources, person-department fit, and transparency) influenced agentic action and agentic perspective. Equations for the structural portions of the model are as follows:

$$F6 = *F1 + *F2 + *F3 + *F4 + F5 + D5$$

$$F7 = *F1 + *F2 + *F3 + *F4 + *F5 + F6 + D6$$

F1: fair advancement F2: work-life climate F3: professional development resources F4: transparency F5: person-department fit F6: agency perspective F7: agency action

Results showed excellent model fit (Fig. 3). While the Satorra-Bentler Scaled estimate of Chi square was significant ( $S-B\chi^2 = 128.84$ ,  $df = 64$ ), the Yuan-Bentler Residual-based

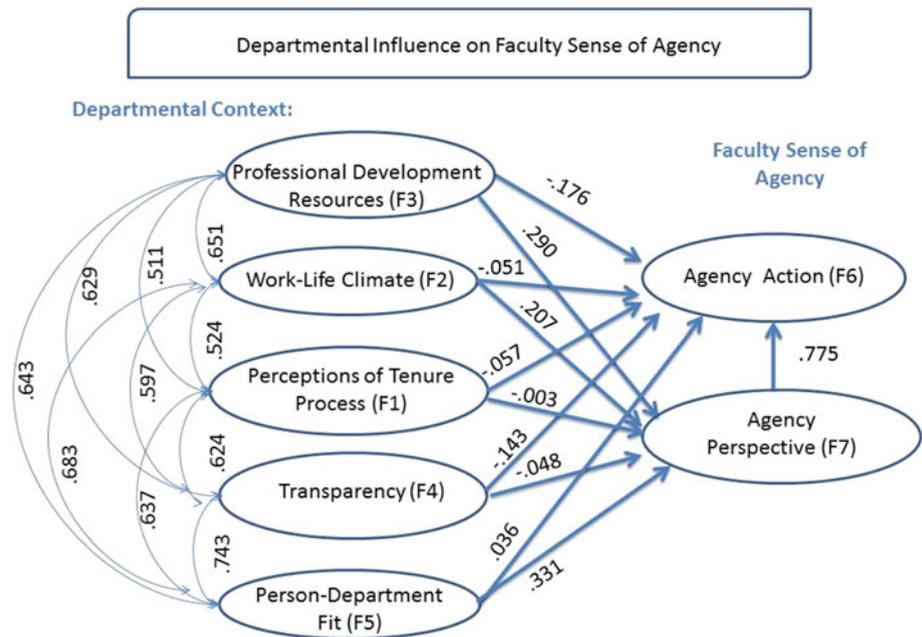


Fig. 3 Confirmatory results of posited model of departmental influences on faculty agency

F-Statistic was not significant ( $F = 0.0461, p > 0.05$ ) and the NNFI (0.975), the CFI (0.980), and the RMSEA [0.053, CI (0.045, 0.061)] were all excellent. All intercorrelations among the five organizational factors were positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Regarding the causal model, the only factor that had a significant influence on agentic action was agentic perspective, and this relationship was strong and positive. No organizational factors had a significant influence on agentic action. By contrast, three of five organizational factors had a significant influence on agentic perspective. Work-life climate, professional development, and person-department fit were all small to moderate, positive, significant contributors to agentic perspective. Below are the standardized structural equations for the model:

$$F6 = 0.775 * F7 - 0.057 * F1 - 0.051 * F2 - 0.176 * F3 - 0.143 * F4 + 0.036 * F5 + 0.783 \quad (r^2 = 0.387)$$

$$F7 = -0.003 * F1 + 0.207 * F2 + 0.290 * F3 - 0.048 * F4 + 0.331 * F5 + 0.723 \quad (r^2 = 0.478)$$

Note: tenure process (F1), work-life climate (F2), professional development (F3), transparency (F4), person-department fit (F5), agency action (F6), agency perspective (F7)

While the fit for this model was strong, there were several non-significant paths. In addition, the Lagrange Multiplier test suggested removing paths from all of the organizational factors to agency action with the exception of professional development resources. As a result, we explored a respecification of the model by removing those paths and also removing the non-significant factors (transparency and fair tenure process) to create greater parsimony (i.e. to create the simplest model with no unnecessary constructs).

The resulting exploratory model, presented in Fig. 4, demonstrated excellent fit to the data. While the Satorra-Bentler Scaled estimate of Chi square ( $S-B\chi^2 = 174.46, df = 96$ ) and the Yuan-Bentler Residual-based F-Statistic ( $F = 1.40, df = 96$ ) were significant

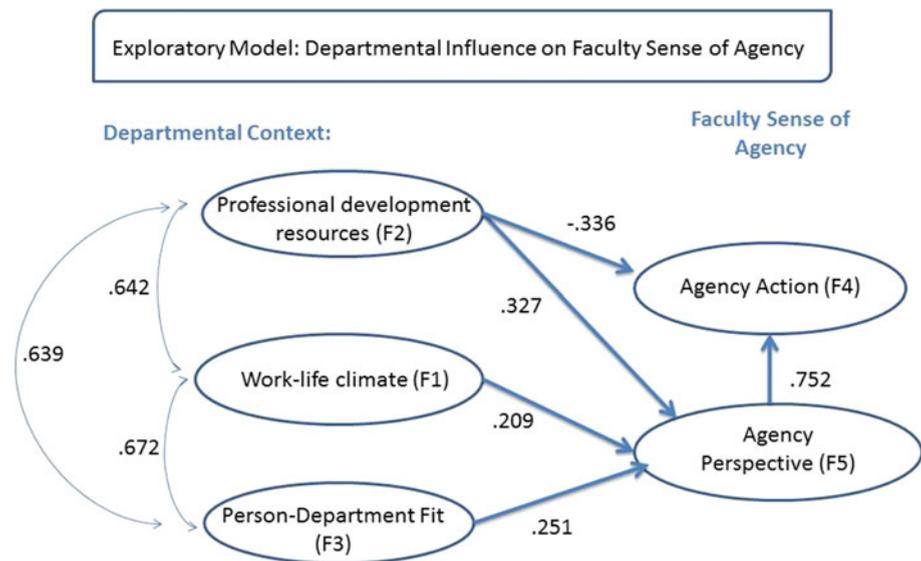


Fig. 4 Exploratory model of departmental influence on faculty sense of agency

**Table 3** Direct, indirect, and total effects of departmental factors on agency

Construct	Agency action			Agency perspective		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Professional development	-0.336	0.246	-0.090	0.327	-	0.327
Work-life climate	-	0.157	0.157	0.209	-	0.209
Person-department fit	-	0.189	0.189	0.251	-	0.251

( $p < 0.05$ ), the NNFI (0.979), CFI (0.983), and RMSEA [0.045, CI (0.034, 0.056)] indicated excellent fit for the data. In addition, all model parameters, including individual paths and intercorrelations were significant. Professional development exerted a moderate positive influence on agentic perspective, but a moderate negative influence on agentic action. Work-life climate and person-department fit exhibited small, but non-trivial positive influences on agentic perspective. Finally, agentic perspective had a very strong positive influence on agentic action. In all, the model explained 37 % of the variance in agentic action and 48 % of the variance in agentic perspective. Direct, indirect, and total effects of each organizational factor on agentic action and perspective can be found in Table 3. Below are the standardized structural equations for the model:

$$F4 = 0.752 * F5 - 0.336 * F2 + 0.797 D4 \quad (r^2 = 0.365)$$

$$F5 = 0.209 * F1 + 0.327 * F2 + 0.251 * F3 + 0.723 D5 \quad (r^2 = 0.477)$$

Note: work-life climate (F1), professional development (F2), person-department fit (F3) agency action (F4), agency perspective (F5)

## Discussion

Considering all of the results comprehensively, we found four main contributions of this study. First, to our knowledge, this is the first study of the relationship between departmental contexts and faculty agency in career advancement, providing additional evidence that departmental context matters in faculty careers. Second, this study contributes to our understanding of *how* agency manifests in faculty careers: departmental contexts influence faculty agentic perspective, which in turn influence faculty agentic actions. Third, we found that of five departmental contexts, three had a significant influence on faculty agency in career, all of which are changeable by institutions and therefore have direct implications for practitioners. Finally, as this is, perhaps, the first quantitative study of faculty agency, this study contributes to a more nuanced conceptual understanding of the constructs of faculty agency. In this section we discuss each of these contributions in light of the findings.

With regard to Research Question 1, whether departmental context matters in faculty sense of agency, the answer was a definitive ‘yes.’ The excellent model fit for the confirmatory model provides evidence that, as posited, departmental contexts matter in faculty agency in career advancement. When individual paths were considered, it appears that departmental contexts made a particularly important contribution to agentic perspective in career advancement at this public research extensive institution. Overall, departmental factors made a strong contribution to faculty agency at MAU, explaining about half of the

variance in agency perspective. The model explained about a third of the variance in agency action.

The finding that departmental contexts matter to faculty agency is consistent with a long line of research that shows departmental influences on the professional work lives of faculty. For example, departmental or institutional contexts have been linked to important faculty behaviors such as staying (Birnbaum 1988; Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Lindholm 2008, 2004), career advancement (Mason and Ekman 2007), faculty productivity (Bland et al. 2006), and scholarly learning (Neumann et al. 2006). Recent studies have begun to explore the relationship between institutional contexts and faculty agency. For example, Clegg (2005) explored how departmental environments (e.g. informal discussions in hallways or priorities set by a department chair or dean) contribute to faculty agency towards achieving teaching goals. Likewise, O'Meara and Campbell (2011) found that departmental policies and norms had the ability to facilitate or frustrate faculty member's feeling of agency with regard to their decisions around work and family. Our study used an advanced quantitative technique and found, similarly, that departmental contexts influenced faculty agency in career advancement.

### Specific Departmental Contexts

In addition to addressing whether departmental contexts influence faculty sense of agency, this study provided insight into which contexts matter for tenure line faculty at this public research institution. While neither this study or any could account for every potential influencing factor, this study was able to examine five departmental contexts (transparency, work-life climate, perceptions of the tenure process, professional development resources, and person-department fit) and whether, and if so how, they mattered for faculty agency. One of the advantages of using an advanced statistical technique, such as SEM, is that it simultaneously accounted for the influence of the five organizational factors on both forms of faculty agency (action and perspective) while also estimating intercorrelations among the organizational constructs. The moderate and strong positive intercorrelations among the organizational factors illustrated the dynamic interplay of facets of faculty environments, and the importance of this interplay in understanding faculty agency.

Next, we discuss each specific departmental context we studied. We focus on the findings in the context of both the broader literature in higher education as well as the context of MAU specifically. We highlight the MAU context because in a study of organizational factors, the institutional culture, norms, and history may provide nuanced insight into understanding the findings and how the findings may or may not generalize to other institutions.

### Work-Life Climate

Previous studies of faculty have found that institutions and departments with positive work-life climates facilitate success for faculty, especially women faculty and faculty parents (Mason and Ekman 2007; Mason and Goulden 2004; O'Meara and Campbell 2011). This study found that work-life climate exerted a small, positive, direct effect on agency perspective and a small, positive, indirect effect on agency action via agency perspective. While many studies have drawn connections between positive work-life climates and balancing work and family, here we showed a connection between work-life climate and agency in career advancement. Additionally, at the time of this survey, MAU did not have a formal parental leave policy. Because institution-wide policies were less

supportive, departmental work-life context may have been particularly important to faculty at MAU.

### Person-Department Fit

This study found that a greater sense of fit in the department at MAU (i.e. feeling valued by departmental colleagues and a fit between one's own scholarly values and those of the department) positively influenced MAU faculty sense of agency in their professional goals. According to Lindholm (2004), "person-organization fit, reflects congruency between the values, interests, needs, and abilities of an individual and corresponding characteristics of the organization within which he or she works" (p. 128). It is important to note that person-department fit is not only shaped by making good hiring choices—a "fit" is not something that necessarily occurs "with the right people." Instead, person-department fit requires departmental colleagues to express support and recognition of other faculty in their department. As noted earlier, Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found sense of recognition by department colleagues critical to job satisfaction. Thus, to enhance faculty agency, department chairs and colleagues must help orchestrate opportunities for recognition among colleagues and help faculty to see themselves in the values of the department.

### Professional Development Resources

Overall, professional development resources had a positive influence on agentic perspectives and a negligible influence on agentic action at MAU. It is important to note that the form of resources that was included in the final construct was administrative support for research and grants and access to Research Assistants and Teaching Assistants. Several studies have found an important positive link between professional development resources or administrative support on faculty attitudes and experiences, such as satisfaction and stress (Hagedorn 1994; Rosser 2004). Similarly, this study found that professional development resources influenced faculty agency in career advancement. In addition, the economic context of MAU at the time of the survey should be considered in light of these findings. When the survey was administered in Spring of 2011, MAU had been facing considerable financial hardships, which were passed down to the faculty through furloughs and tighter budgets at the departmental level. Perhaps findings would be different if there were an overall increase in financial support for RAs, TAs, and grant administration as well as faculty salaries.

### Perceptions of the Tenure Process

Scholars who study tenure have recommended an overhaul of the tenure process. They recommend reform in clarity of requirements, recognition of multiple forms of scholarship, and greater flexibility in time to earn tenure (Chait 2002; O'Meara et al. 2005; Rice and Sorcinelli 2002). In this study, the confirmatory model that included perceived clarity and fairness of the tenure process as a contributor to faculty agency demonstrated excellent fit, providing support for this posited relationship. Yet, this study found that the paths from the clarity and fairness of the tenure process to faculty agency perspective and action were not significant. This finding must be contextualized by other literature on faculty at research institutions. For example, August and Waltman (2004) found that clarity and fairness of the tenure process were not related to career satisfaction for women faculty at a research I

institution in the mid-west. It appears that for research institutions, there may be other organizational factors that are more important, such as a feeling of fit or positive work-life climate. For example, if a faculty member feels valued and supported by colleagues, she might be more likely to trust the tenure process regardless of the clarity around requirements.

### Transparency

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of transparency to both external and internal stakeholders in higher education and also on academic and shared decision-making (Birnbaum 1988; Eckel and Kezar 2006). The strong model fit of the original confirmatory model that included a path from transparency to agency perspective and action would support the role of transparency of decision-making in faculty agency. Yet, when model paths were examined, this study found that transparency with regard to salary increases, information sharing, resource allocation, and decision-making within one's unit was not a significant contributor to agency perspective or action. Although transparency as a concept is important to study with an overall sample of tenured/tenure track research university faculty as we did here, it may be more important as an organizational context for those under-represented in their departments (such as STEM women and faculty of color) or with less prestigious appointments on the outside of decision-making (non-tenure track and part-time appointments).

### Connecting Perspective and Action

Returning to research question three, the "how" of the model, our study revealed a new understanding about the relationships between departmental contexts and the two, distinct, agency constructs (perspective and action). Our study found that faculty agency can be motivated by departmental contexts (as indicated by excellent model fit), but departmental contexts mainly influence a faculty member's agentic perspective, which in turn influences agency actions. Additionally the effect of agency perspective on agency action was rather strong and positive, and deserves attention. The sociological and psychological literature posits that the connection between perspective and action is intertwined (Clausen 1991; Marshall 2005). Bandura (1982) posits that agency mediates self-referent thought (i.e. self-efficacy) and action, which seems to corroborate the findings of this study. This study suggests that certain departmental contexts (e.g. supportive work-life climate, sense of fit, resources for professional development) help facilitate agentic thinking, which subsequently translates into agentic action.

### Understanding the Construct of Faculty Agency

While not a main focus of the research questions, this study contributed to understanding the construct of agency in faculty professional lives. Because this was, possibly, the first quantitative study of faculty agency, there are three main findings about the agency constructs that warrant further discussion. First, the confirmatory factor analyses for the agency perspective and agency action constructs revealed that agency is domain specific. For example, the items regarding agency perspective in work-life did not hang together with the items about agency perspective in professional goals. Secondly, the confirmatory factor analyses demonstrated that agency action and agency perspective are distinct, yet

related constructs. Previous studies of faculty agency had not made clear the distinction between agentic perspective and agentic action. Lastly, the final two constructs of agency action and agency perspective demonstrated strong construct validity (as indicated by high loadings) and internal consistency (as demonstrated by the high Coefficient H values). This finding is important for future research on faculty agency as it indicates the potential for continued quantitative work in this realm. All of these findings must be contextualized by the site of this study in a large, public, research institution. The influence of department contexts may differ in institutional types where departments play less of a central role in faculty professional lives and institutional contexts matter more.

### Implications

This study has several direct implications for deans, department chairs, and faculty colleagues. The organizational contexts that mattered most for faculty agency in this study are changeable by institutions. The three organizational factors that were predictors of faculty agency (person-department fit, work-life climate, and professional development resources) are all aspects of MAU that could be influenced at the departmental level by faculty colleagues or a department chair. Here, we focus on three practical implications: the importance of person-department fit, developing a positive work-life climate, and the potential power of faculty agency to be transformative in institutions.

The finding that person-department fit matters in agency has important implications, particularly considering the way that person-department fit was measured in this study. In this study, person-department fit was measured by the faculty respondent having a sense that their department valued their work (scholarship, teaching and service) and that their own values were congruent with those of the department. Administrators and faculty colleagues can help other faculty to feel that their work is valued. This organizational adjustment has little financial cost and can be implemented by a single faculty or administrator advocate or by a climate of valuing and appreciation. Additionally, departments could institutionalize a norm of valuing faculty work and create a sense of belonging via recruitment (seeking a good fit with scholarly values and promoting this congruence in interview practices), orientation practices (e.g. connecting faculty with similar scholarly interests), and mentoring activities (intentionally assigning mentor matches with similar scholarly values).

Similarly, departments that had positive work-life climates helped faculty in this study to have a sense of agency in career advancement. Administrators and faculty colleagues can work to facilitate departmental norms that are flexible and understanding of work-life balance. While there is often a fear that a culture of balance will lead to lower productivity, this study provides evidence that facilitating a positive work-life climate leads to agency in career advancement. Concrete actions could include ensuring that departmental meetings are not held at times that would conflict with family responsibilities, promoting honesty around time needed for care-taking, and highlighting role models of work-life balance. Other institutional policies, such as paid parental leave, part-time tenure track policies, and dual career hiring practices may also engender an agency perspective via a positive work-life climate (Sallee 2011; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004).

Thirdly, the early literature on faculty agency in career indicates that individual agency is not a purely selfish endeavor. The larger literature links human agency to productivity and well-being thus suggesting agentic faculty members have more capacity to accomplish institutional goals and remain vital across one's life course (Alkire 2005; Sen 1985). Also research on agency in social movements (Ganz 2010) and research on faculty unionizing

and faculty activism (Rhoades 2012) suggest faculty who assume agency can help challenge institutional scripts and narratives that maintain the status quo. Faculty who enact agency can help institutions meet new goals. For example, in Gonzales's (2012) study, faculty who exhibited operational agency in a striving institution, galvanized around the new institutional priorities and facilitated the new research mission. If departments participate in supportive practices for faculty agency, a collective organizational sense of agency can fuel both individual and institutional goals.

In addition to practical implications, the findings raise several questions for future research on agency in faculty careers. This research was based on faculty at a single, large, public, research-extensive institution. Future research should determine whether departmental climates would influence faculty career agency in other institutions or institutional types. A second consideration, relates to the kinds of department climate contexts examined in this study. Future research could consider the influence of other departmental factors that were not studied here, such as faculty development programs (e.g. Lilly Fellows, ADVANCE programs, peer mentoring, discriminatory climates, and participatory governance). Third, the present study investigated individual faculty *perceptions* of departmental climate and agency. The cross-sectional nature of these perceptual data raise questions regarding whether there is also a reciprocal nature of the influence of faculty agency on perceptions of departmental contexts. Future studies should use longitudinal data and/or pseudo-experimental design to further understand influences of departmental climate.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, future research should investigate whether the departmental contexts that facilitate agency in career differ for women, faculty of color, LGBTQ faculty, and faculty at different career stages and disciplines. It was important to understand the departmental contexts that matter for a general population of research university faculty before analyzing subgroups. However, given that expression of agency is often intertwined with individual identities, social contexts, and power and prestige, it will be important for future research to examine individual differences in the department contexts that matter. Understanding the interplay of individual identity, social capital, history, organizational context, larger social forces, and individual faculty agency may be at the heart of the faculty agency research agenda moving forward.

## Conclusion

In a context of constrained resources and high demands, institutions must learn what environments enable faculty to thrive, achieve, and be satisfied in their roles (O'Meara et al. 2003; Schuster and Finkelstein 2006). A supportive or hostile environment could either facilitate or frustrate faculty members' senses of agency in their careers and work lives. Some department contexts are likely to influence faculty agency more than others. Guided by the O'Meara et al. (2011) framework on faculty agency, this empirical study used an advanced quantitative technique (SEM) to examine specific departmental influences on faculty agency. The specific departmental influences that this study investigated are changeable by institutions and administrators (e.g. person-department fit, work-life climate, and professional development resources). This study found that certain departmental conditions facilitate agentic perspective. Departments and institutions can emulate these best practices (supportive work-life climates, helping faculty to believe their work is valued), thereby providing scaffolding for faculty success, and possibly their retention and institutional commitment. Understanding contexts that facilitate agency provides

policy-makers, academic administrators, and faculty with a better roadmap for improving work environments.

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