

ESP Benefits and Job Satisfaction: An Update

By Vicki J. Rosser

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Educational support professionals (ESPs) support the teaching, research, and service functions within the academic enterprise. Working in the areas of service/support, clerical/secretarial, technical/paraprofessional, service/maintenance, and skilled crafts, they rarely receive the attention they deserve. Higher education research virtually ignores this large group of workers. The few existing studies focus on the quality of their work and job satisfaction,¹ placement within higher education ESP positions,² job outsourcing,³ and health insurance contract language.⁴ But data recently compiled by the National Education Association (NEA) enables us to go beyond these studies.⁵

NEA periodically surveys its ESP membership across public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities. The association surveyed 1,000 of its postsecondary ESP

members by telephone between March 29 and April 26, 2007. Telephone surveys—an effective and thorough method of survey research—allowed NEA to gather candid answers from ESPs regarding their level of satisfaction with health insurance and retirement benefits, professional worklife and career issues, their jobs, outsourcing services, and their job descriptions and evaluations.⁶

This chapter provides the results from the 2007 NEA ESP survey in areas that may influence their job performance and their personal lives. First, the article presents the demographic and profile characteristics of the ESP survey respondents. Then follows data on ESP educational levels and/or required credentialing, including licensing and certification, job status and evaluation, health insurance and retirement benefits, ESP outsourcing, level of job satisfaction, and ESP career plans.

ESP DEMOGRAPHICS

Surveyed ESPs averaged almost 11 years of NEA membership. By sex, 741 (74.1 percent) were females and 259 were males (25.9 percent). By race, the sample included 871 Caucasians (87.1 percent), 54 African Americans (5.4 percent), 16 respondents who answered “mixed races” (1.6 percent), six Hispanics (0.6 percent), seven Asian/Pacific Islanders (0.7 percent), and four Native/Alaskan Americans (0.4 percent). The remaining 42 respondents (4.2 percent) responded “other” or provided no answer to the racial identity question.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the 1,000 surveyed ESP members by institutional type: 491 worked in two-year colleges (49.1 percent) and 400 worked in four-year colleges (40.0 percent). Only 89 (8.9 percent) ESPs worked in vocational/technical colleges, and the remaining 20 respondents (2.0 percent) answered “other” or “don’t know.” By control, 881 of the surveyed ESPs worked in publicly funded institutions (88.1 percent); only 44 worked in private institutions (4.4 percent). The remaining 75 respondents (7.5 percent) answered “other,” “don’t know,” or provided no answer.

Table 2 shows the position classifications of responding ESPs: 521 had administrative, clerical, or secretarial positions (52.1 percent); 162 had jobs in technical services (16.2 percent), 73 held professional positions or were teaching assistants (7.3 percent), 72 had employment

in custodial services (7.2 percent), 68 held positions in skilled crafts (6.8 percent), 64 worked in health and student services (6.4 percent), 17 (1.7 percent) had employment in security services, 14 (1.4 percent) worked in food services, and nine (0.9 percent) worked in transportation services. When asked if they held full or part-time positions, 903 (90.3 percent) answered “full-time,” 93 (9.3 percent) answered “part-time,” and four ESPs did not respond (0.4 percent).

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND/OR REQUIRED CREDENTIALS

The mean age for the surveyed ESP respondents was 54. The average ESP household had seven residents including the member, and at least two children under age 18. Figure 1 shows the education level for the ESP respondents: 114 held a master’s degree (11.4 percent), 230 had a bachelor’s degree (23.0 percent), 293 had a two-year degree (29.3 percent), 177 had less than two years of college (17.7 percent), and 168 had a high school diploma (16.8 percent). Nine respondents did not complete high school (0.9 percent), and nine provided no answer (0.9 percent). Only 125 ESPs (12.5 percent) were currently attending school or college; the remaining respondents were not enrolled, or provided no answer.

NEA’s survey asked ESPs about the credentials and the required level of education and/or

Table 1. ESP Respondents by Institutional Type

Location	Respondents	Percent
Two-Year Colleges	491	49.1%
Four-Year Colleges	400	40.0
Vocational/Technical Campuses	89	8.9
Other/No Response	20	2.0
Total	1,000	100.0

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Table 2. ESP Respondents by Position Classification

Job Group	Respondents	Percent
Administrative/Clerical/Secretarial	521	52.1%
Technical Services	162	16.2
Paraprofessional/TA	73	7.3
Custodial Services	72	7.2
Skilled Trades & Crafts	68	6.8
Health and Student Services	64	6.4
Security Services	17	1.7
Food Services	14	1.4
Transportation Services	9	0.9
Total	1,000	100.0

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

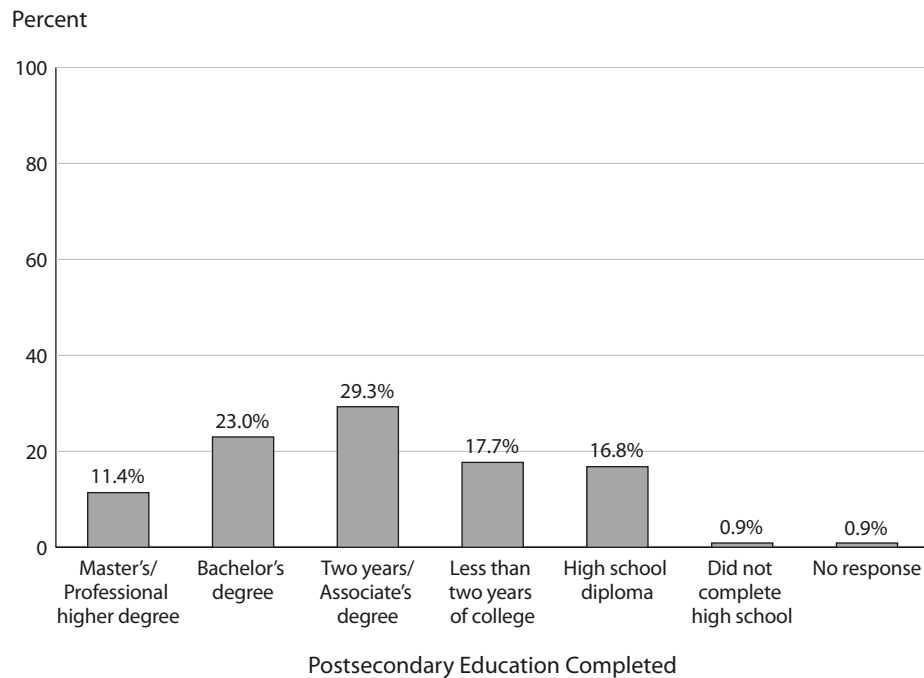
training for their positions. The breakdown: 182 needed a special certificate (18.2 percent), 101 needed a license (10.1 percent), 240 had to have some classes or take some exams (24.0 percent), and 140 had to take classes or exams on a regular basis to keep their current job (14.0 percent). The institution paid for educating 108 ESPs (10.8 percent) who had to take classes and exams. Among those surveyed, 197 ESPs needed a four-year degree (19.7 percent), 279 needed a two-year degree (27.9 percent), and 347 needed at least some college credits (34.7 percent).

ESP JOB STATUS AND PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Most surveyed ESPs worked five days a week and averaged 37 hours per week within 12-month contracts. The median wage per hour was approximately \$14.00 (mean = \$12.13/hour). But ESP hourly wages varied dramatically by position classification—secretarial, technical, and

skilled crafts, for example—and by region. As for level of satisfaction, 669 ESPs (66.9 percent) were very satisfied or satisfied with their current wages or salaries, 325 (32.5 percent) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and six or 0.6 percent provided no response (Figure 2).⁷

There were 931 individuals who had a written job description, 46 indicated they did not, and 23 did not know or provided no answer. When asked if their position description accurately reflected the kind of work they do, 727 said yes (72.7 percent), 196 said no (19.6 percent), and 77 did not know or provided no answer (7.7 percent). When asked if their job description was revised on a regular basis (Figure 3), 389 ESPs said yes (38.9 percent), 479 said no (47.9 percent), and 132 did not know or provided no answer (13.2 percent). ESPs were then asked if they had any input on changes in their job descriptions, 489 said yes (48.9 percent), 431 said no (43.1 percent), and 80 did not know or provided no answer (8.0 percent)

Figure 1. ESP Postsecondary Education Completed

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

(Figure 4). Last, the survey asked ESPs if they performed duties they considered to be outside their job description, 416 said rarely or never (41.6 percent), 504 said sometimes or often (50.4 percent), and 80 did not know or provided no answer (8.0 percent) (Figure 5).

Of the 1,000 interviewees, 744 ESPs indicated they received formal job performance evaluations from their supervisor on a regular basis (74.4 percent), while 247 said they did not (24.7 percent), and nine provided no answer (0.9 percent). Moreover, 692 agreed somewhat or strongly that their performance evaluations were fair (69.2 percent), 42 disagreed or “disagreed somewhat” with the fairness of their evaluations (4.2 percent), and 266 did not know or provided no answer (26.6 percent) (Figure 6).

ESP BENEFIT AND HEALTH INSURANCE ISSUES

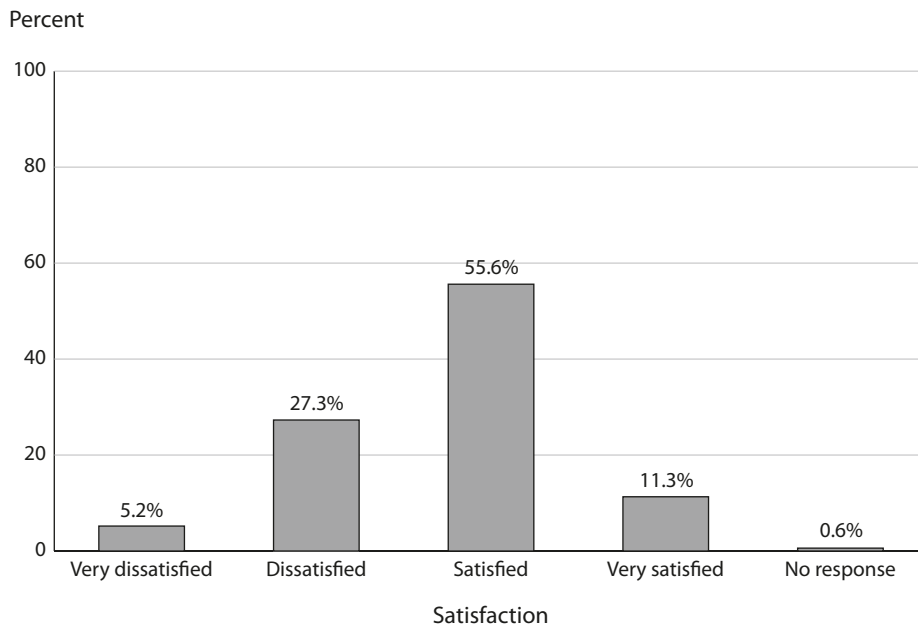
This section examines ESP satisfaction with retirement benefits and health insurance plans,

and with health and safety issues. To what extent did colleges provide health insurance to ESPs? Employer health insurance covered 967 respondents (96.7 percent), 30 reported no coverage (3.0 percent), and three respondents did not know (0.3 percent). Among covered respondents, 596 had a family health insurance plan, 260 had a single insurance plan, and 144 did not know or provided no answer.

Are ESPs satisfied with the health insurance provided by their employers? Most ESPs were satisfied or very satisfied with their health insurance (842 or 84.2 percent), 109 (10.9 percent) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 49 ESPs (4.9 percent) did not know or provided no answer (Figure 7).

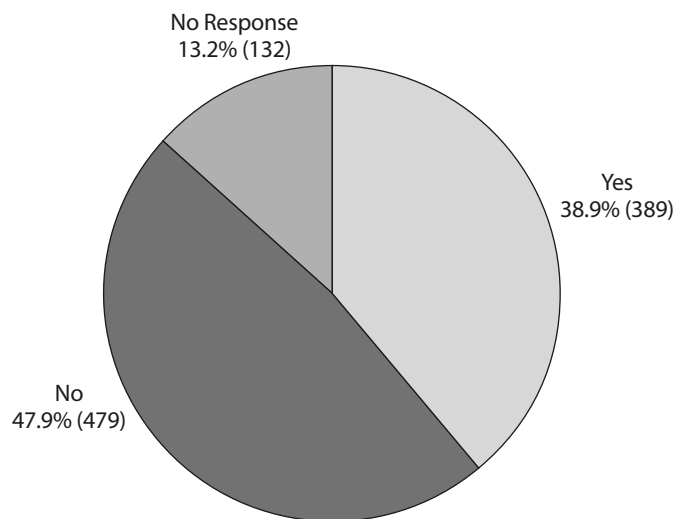
When asked if their health insurance benefits changed in the last two years, 484 ESPs (48.4 percent) answered, “remained the same,” 229 said their benefits increased (22.9 percent), 185 ESPs said their employer benefits decreased (18.5 percent), and 102 respondents did not

Figure 2. ESP Satisfaction with Wages or Salaries



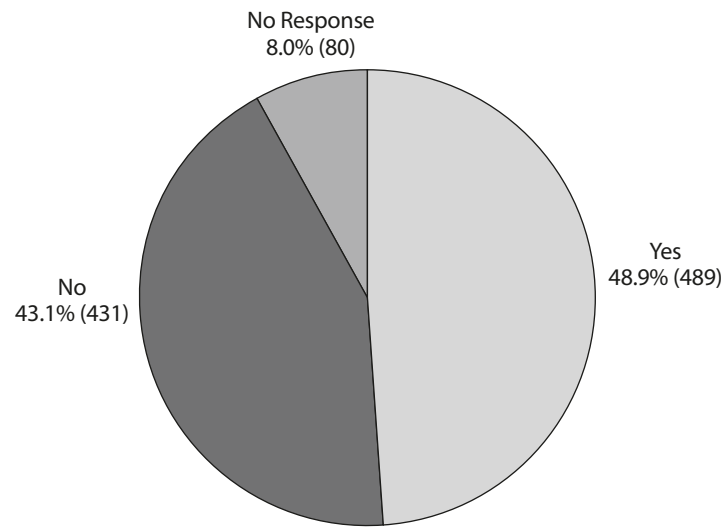
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 3. ESP Job Description Revisions



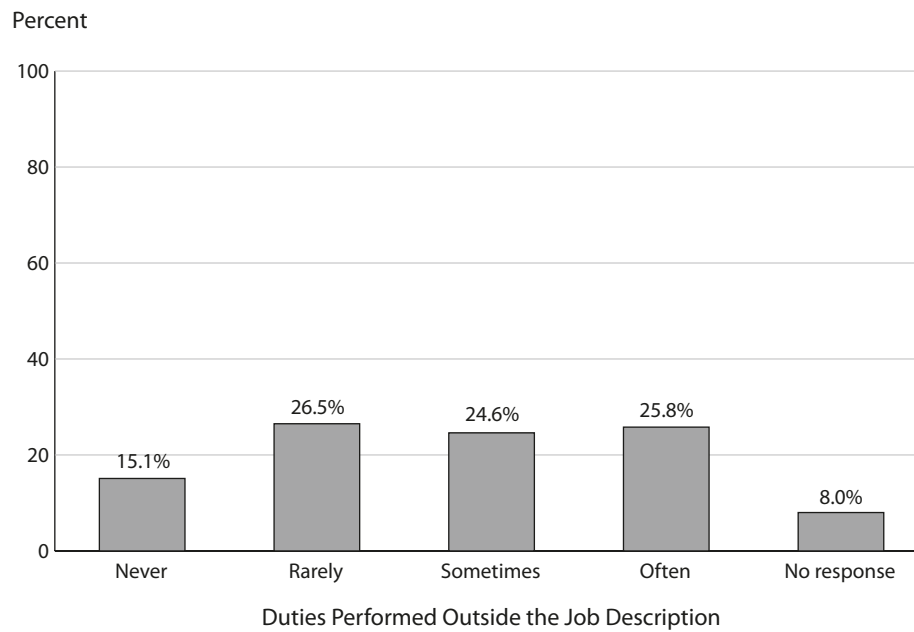
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 4. ESP Input on Job Description Revisions

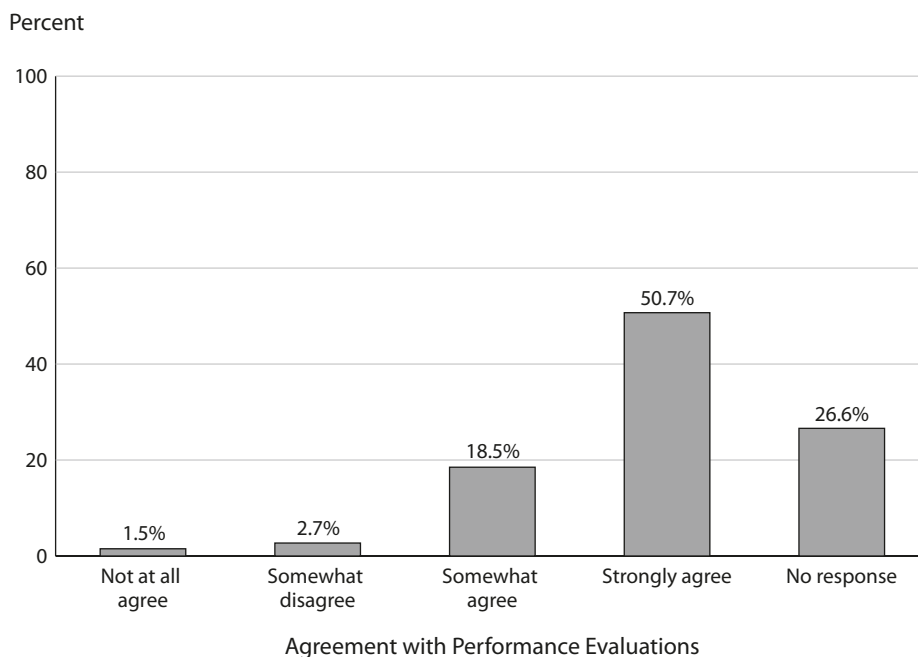


Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 5. ESP Duties Performed Outside the Job Description



Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 6. ESP Agreement with Performance Evaluations

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

know or provided no answer (10.2 percent) (Figure 8).

When asked if their employer offered dental insurance benefits, 878 ESPs indicated yes (87.8 percent), 86 said no (8.6 percent), 23 stated the employer offered the benefit but they didn't participate (2.3 percent), and 13 did not know or provided no response (1.3 percent). When asked to note their level of satisfaction with their dental insurance, 711 ESPs indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied (71.1 percent), 211 were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (21.1 percent), and 78 respondents (7.8 percent) did not know or provided no answer.

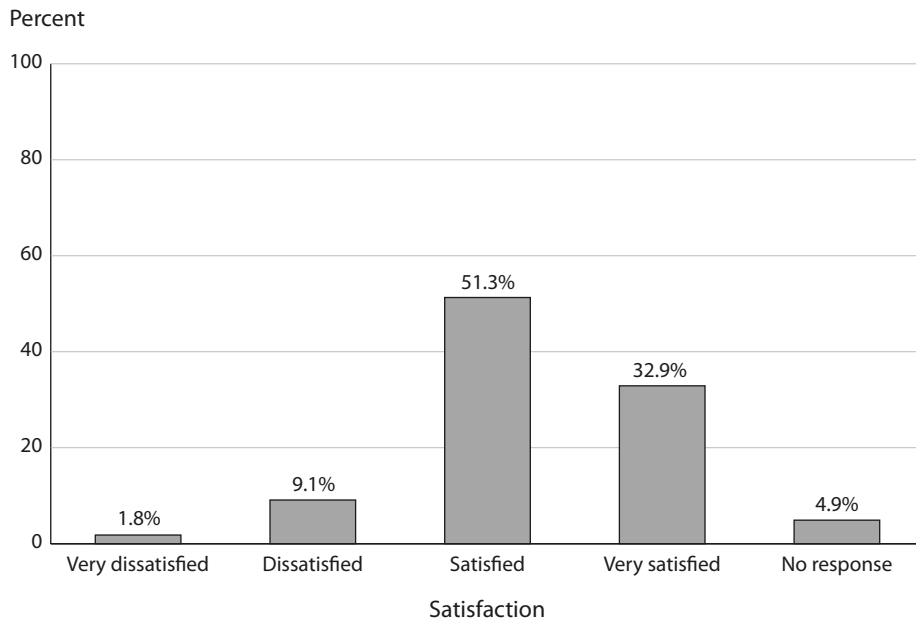
ESPs were asked if their health insurance included a vision care plan. The results were mixed: 559 ESPs answered yes (55.9 percent), 278 answered no (27.8 percent), and 163 did not know or provided no response (16.3 percent) (Figure 10).

When asked to assess the retirement benefit packages provided by their employers, 850 ESPs

were satisfied or very satisfied (85.0 percent), while 102 ESPs were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their employers' retirement benefits (10.2 percent). Only 48 did not know or had no response (4.8 percent) (Figure 11). ESPs were also asked if they participated in a pension or retirement plan. The results: 928 reported participation (92.8 percent), while 67 said they did not participate (6.7 percent). Only five ESPs said they didn't know or provided no answer (0.5 percent).

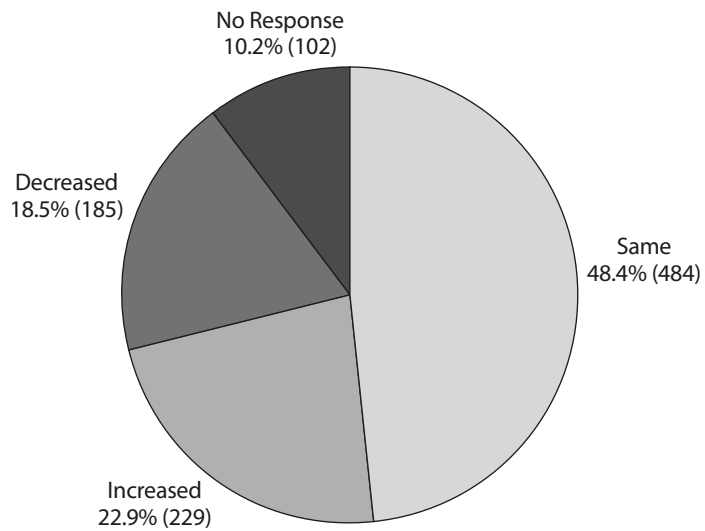
The survey asked if the respondent or any immediate family member ever avoided medical treatment due to concerns about medical costs: 116 ESPs answered yes (11.6 percent), 877 workers answered no (87.7 percent), and seven respondents (0.7 percent) did not know or provided no answer. When ESPs were asked who paid for their health insurance premiums, 492 (49.2 percent) indicated the employer paid for most of the cost, 239 stated the employer paid for all of the cost (23.0 percent), 93 said

Figure 7. ESP Satisfaction with Employer Health Insurance

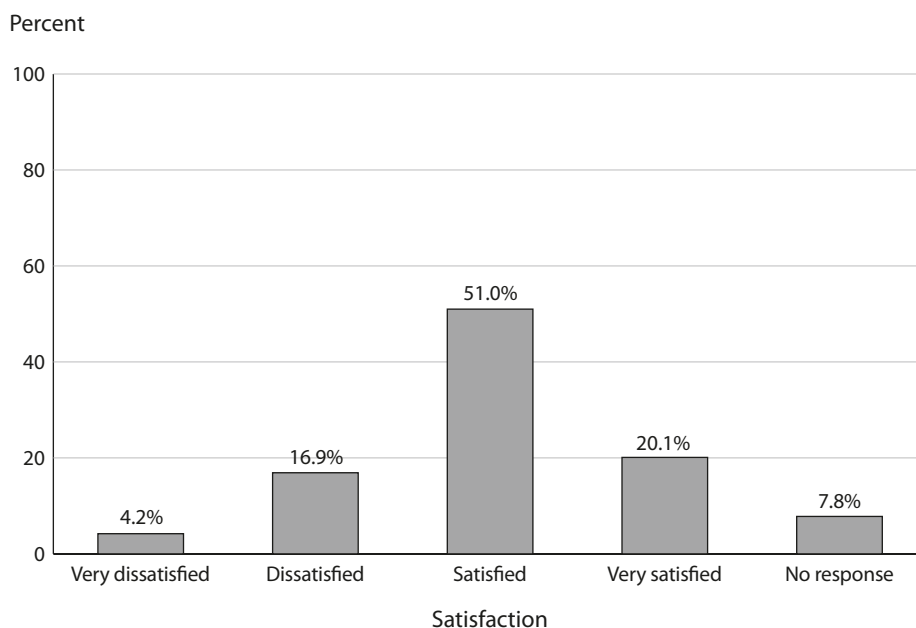


Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 8. Status of Employer Health Insurance Benefits



Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 9. ESP Satisfaction with Dental Care Plan

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

the employer and worker paid equal amounts (9.3 percent), 19 said they paid most or all of the cost (1.9 percent), and 157 did not know or provided no answer (15.7 percent).

When asked about job-related health and safety protections, 871 ESPs were satisfied or very satisfied (87.1 percent), and 107 respondents said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (10.7 percent), and 22 did not know or had no response (2.2 percent) (Figure 13). As for job security, 889 were satisfied or very satisfied (88.9 percent), 91 were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (9.1 percent), and 20 ESPs did not know or provided no answer (0.2 percent) (Figure 14).

OUTSOURCED ESP SERVICES

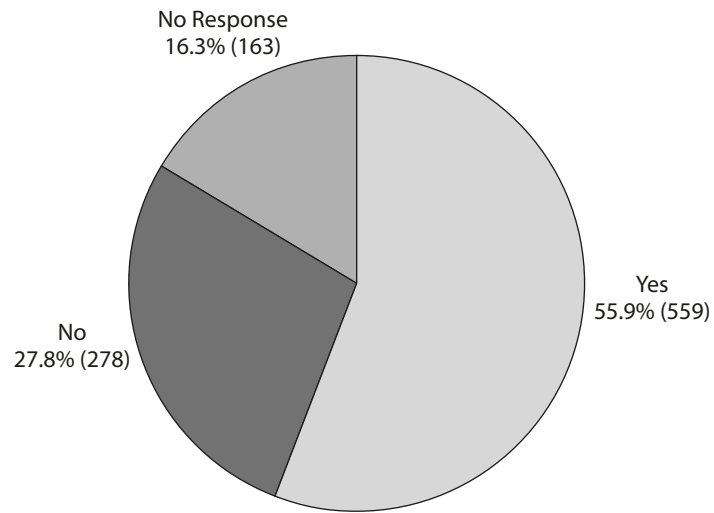
ESPs often take the brunt of cost containment.⁸ Outsourcing—contracting out their work to external sources—disproportionately affects the ability of these workers to offer their professional and skilled services. Table 3 displays ESP responses to the services they perceived as outsourced by their institutions, in rank order.

Nearly half the respondents perceived food services as the most outsourced work category (490 or 49.0 percent), followed by custodial services (242 or 24.2 percent), skilled trades and crafts (228 or 22.8 percent), technical areas (227 or 22.7 percent), security (145 or 14.5 percent), transportation (135 or 13.5 percent), administrative/clerical/secretarial positions (134 or 13.4 percent), health and student services (71 or 7.1 percent), and paraprofessional/teaching assistants (68 or 6.8 percent).

ESP WORK SATISFACTION

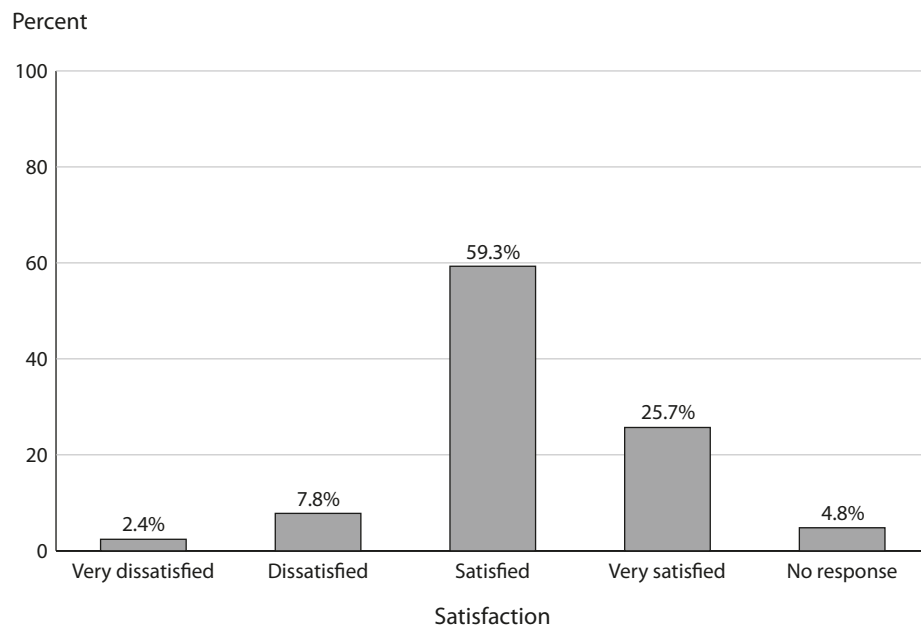
The next questions examined the degree to which ESPs are satisfied with their job and professional opportunities. The first three questions asked for the number of hours ESPs worked, their daily work schedule, and their personal fulfillment with the job. Then followed questions regarding ESP satisfaction with their opportunities for professional development and for promotion. The final questions assessed their overall job satisfaction.

Figure 10. Vision Care Plan Included in Health Insurance



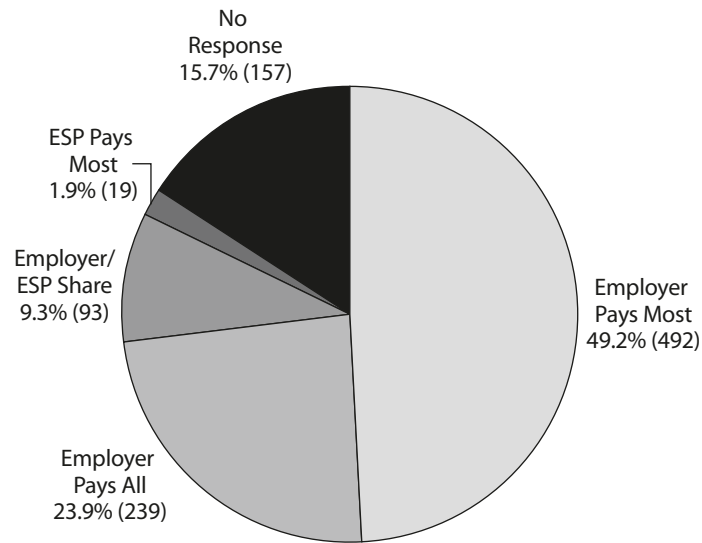
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 11. ESP Satisfaction with Retirement Benefits



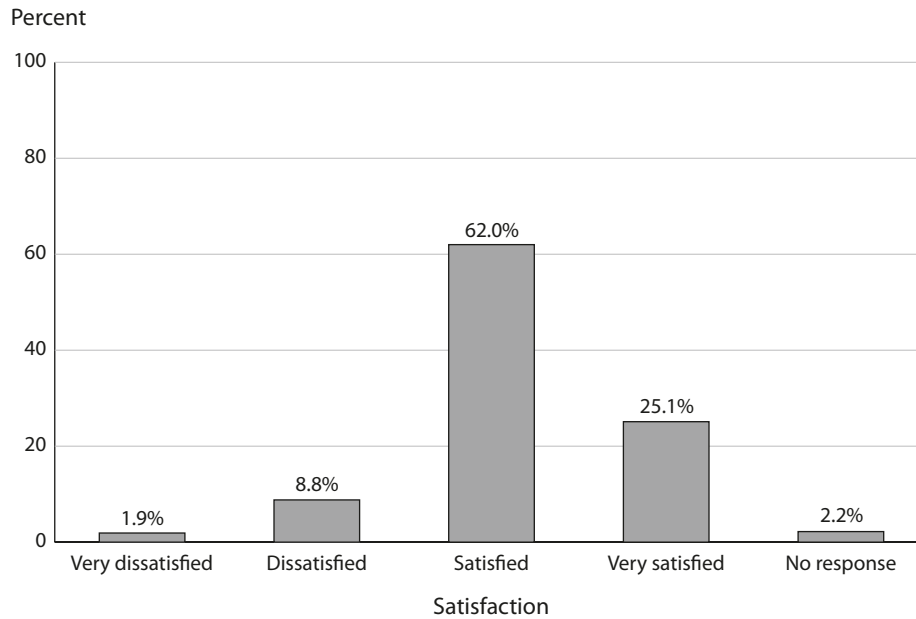
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 12. Who Pays for the Cost of Health Insurance?

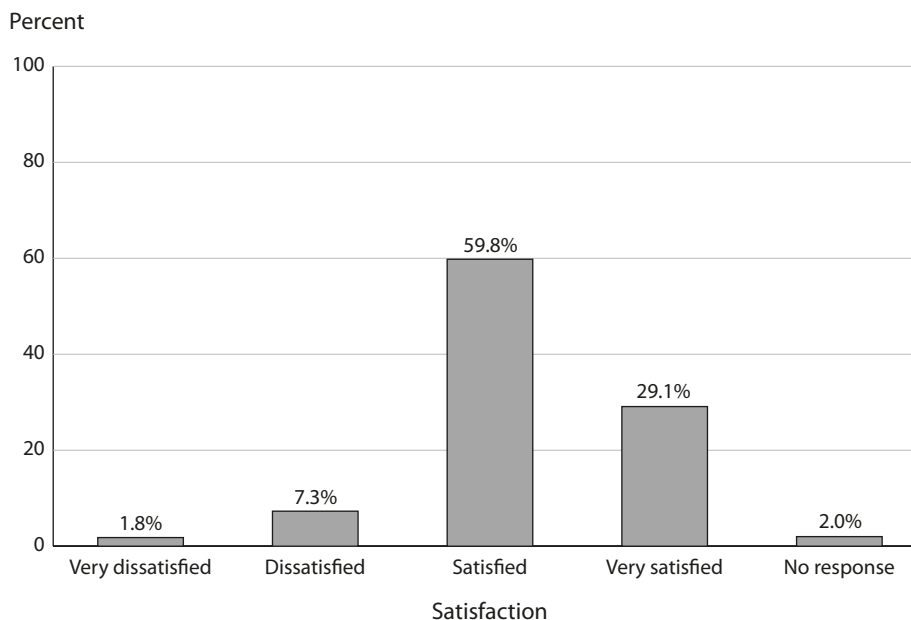


Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 13. ESP Health and Safety Protection on the Job



Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 14. ESP Job Security

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

To what extent were ESPs satisfied with the number of hours they worked per week? Most respondent ESPs (925 or 92.5 percent) answered satisfied or very satisfied. Only 72 ESPs were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (7.2 percent), and three did not know (0.3 percent). When asked about their daily work schedule, 935 ESPs were satisfied or very satisfied (93.5 percent), 61 ESPs were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (6.1 percent), and only four respondents did not know (0.4 percent). When asked about their personal fulfillment with their jobs, 902 ESPs were satisfied and very satisfied (90.2 percent), while 88 answered dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (8.8 percent). Ten ESPs didn't know or provided no answer (1.0 percent) (Figures 15, 16, 17).

As for opportunities for professional development on the job, 762 ESPs were satisfied or very satisfied (76.2 percent), 201 were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (20.1 percent), and 37 did not know or provided no answer (3.7 percent) (Figure 18). ESPs were divided when

asked about promotional opportunities: 508 ESPs replied they were satisfied or very satisfied (50.8 percent), 429 were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (42.9 percent), and 63 did not know or provided no answer (6.3 percent) (Figure 19).

ESPs, overall, were satisfied with their jobs: 939 ESPs across different types of institutions and positions indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied (93.9 percent). Only 57 respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the job (5.7 percent), and four respondents (0.4 percent) indicated they did not know (Figure 20).

ESP CAREER PLANS

One of the most interesting questions on the survey asked ESPs to select the best answer regarding their career plans: 603 ESPs indicated they would stay in their current job until retirement (60.3 percent). An additional 177 individuals said they would seek a promotion within ESP job classifications (17.7 percent), 53 noted they would find a job outside of education (5.3 percent), 43 said they would find a job

Table 3. Outsourced ESP Services

Outsourced ESP Services	Yes		No		No Response	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Food	490	49.0%	363	36.3%	147	14.7%
Custodial	242	24.2	634	63.4	124	12.4
Skilled Trades & Crafts	228	22.8	563	56.3	209	20.9
Technical	227	22.7	590	59.0	183	18.3
Security	145	14.5	695	69.5	160	16.0
Transportation	135	13.5	648	64.8	217	21.7
Administrative/ Clerical/Secretarial	134	13.4	722	72.2	144	14.4
Health	71	7.1	719	71.9	210	21.0
Paraprofessional/ Teaching Assistants	68	6.8	696	69.6	236	23.6

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

within education (4.3 percent), 40 indicated they would find another ESP job (4.0 percent), and the remaining 84 ESPs answered “other,” did not know, or provided no answer (8.4 percent) (Figure 21).

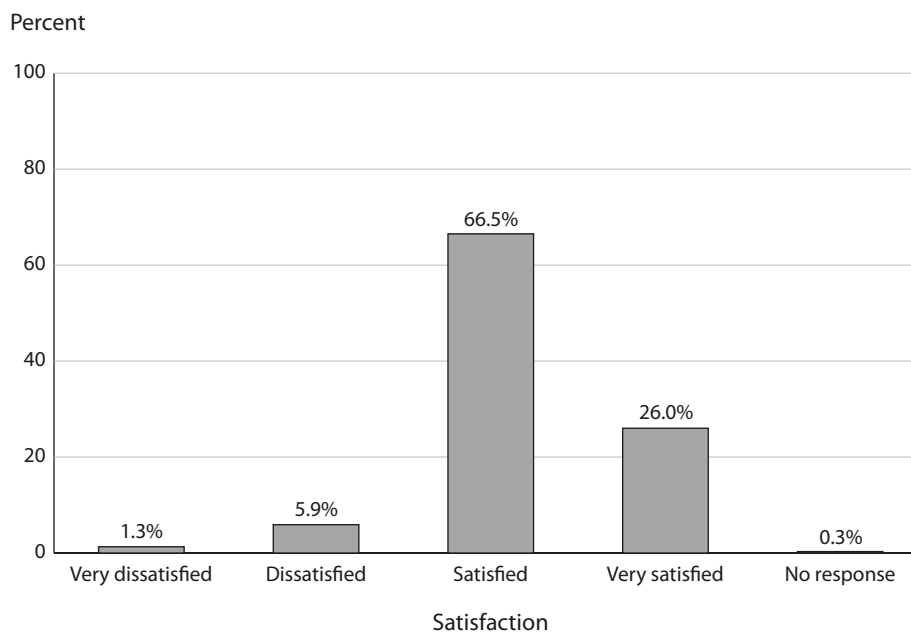
CONCLUSION

ESPs were largely satisfied with their jobs, their work schedules, the hours they work, and the level of personal fulfillment provided by the job. They were also satisfied with their salaries and wages, job security, health and safety, retirement and health insurance benefits. ESPs reported mixed results with employer provided vision care plans, opportunities for job promotions, and their job descriptions. These job descriptions did not always accurately reflect their current duties and were not always up to date. ESPs had little or no input when employers revised their job descriptions. Some ESPs received no performance evaluation. ESPs were also attuned to the education and certification requirements for their current job.

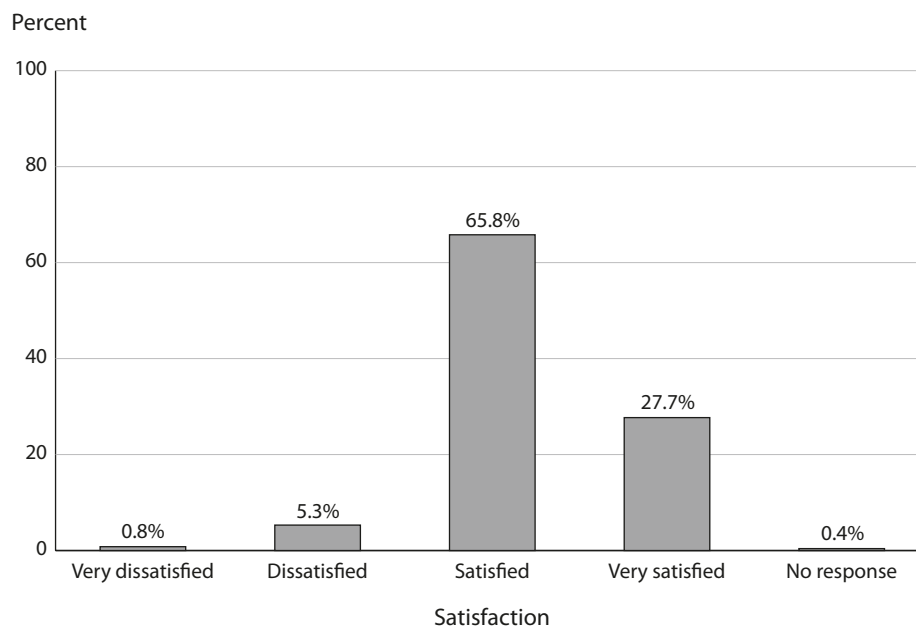
Employers need to examine the currency of ESP job descriptions and seek ESP input regarding position description revisions and the job ESPs perform. Employers must reciprocate by providing professional development opportunities to support ESPs, if they continue to require educational experience, degree attainment, or licensure and certification credentials. These opportunities, in turn, may provide ESPs with increased promotional opportunities.

Another area of concern is the outsourcing of ESP professional and skilled services. Employers must protect the critical positions ESPs hold within the academy. Outsourcing, even as a temporary fix, often has negative long-term effects on ESPs and their institutions.

ESPs, the survey results confirm, continue to be satisfied and dedicated to the work they perform to support the academic mission of colleges and universities—despite the job-related challenges they face. Employers must recognize the importance of these “unsung” professionals and their work, for that satisfaction to continue.

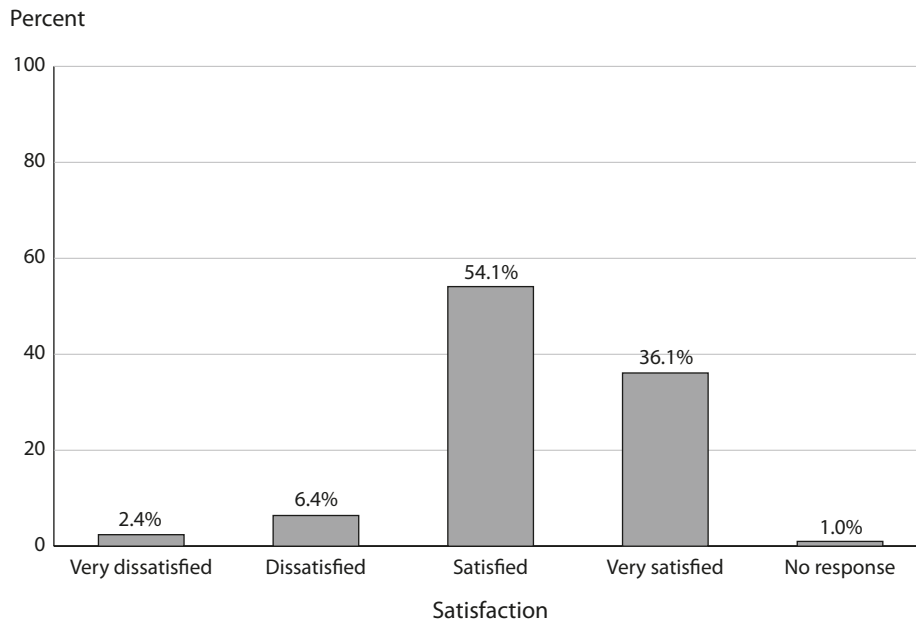
Figure 15. ESP Satisfaction with Hours Worked

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 16. ESP Satisfaction with Daily Work Schedule

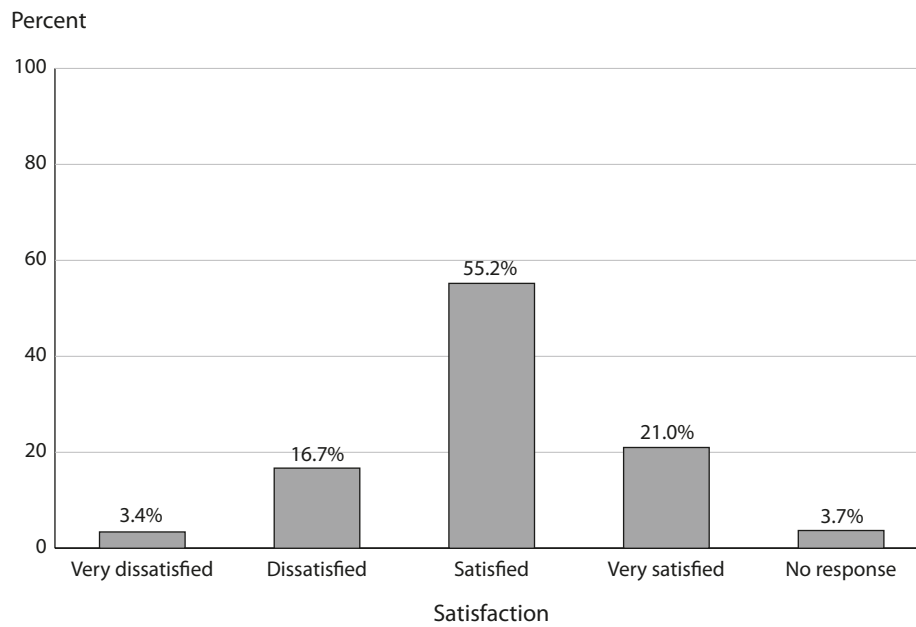
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 17. ESP Satisfaction with Personal Fulfillment of the Job

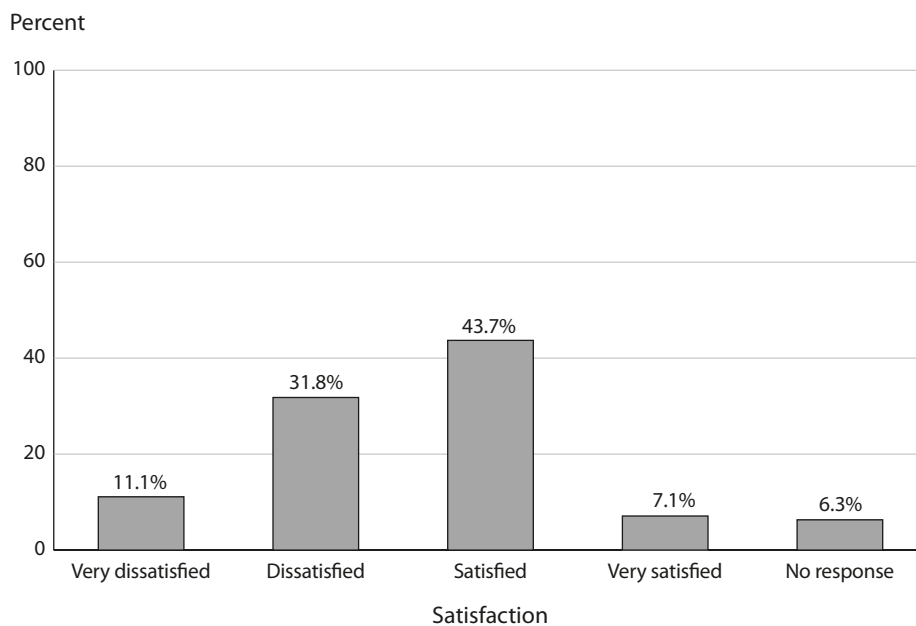


Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

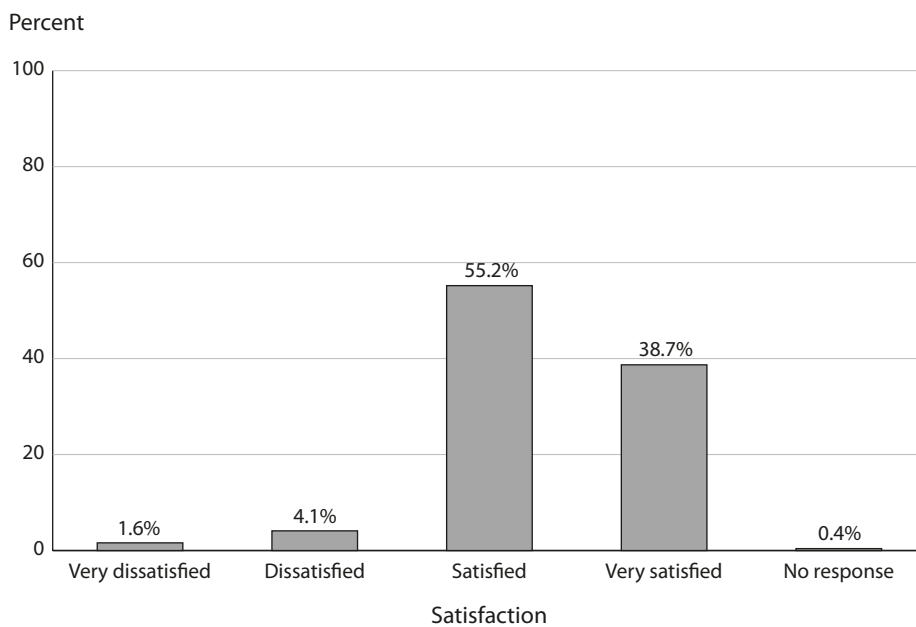
Figure 18. ESP Satisfaction with Professional Development Opportunities



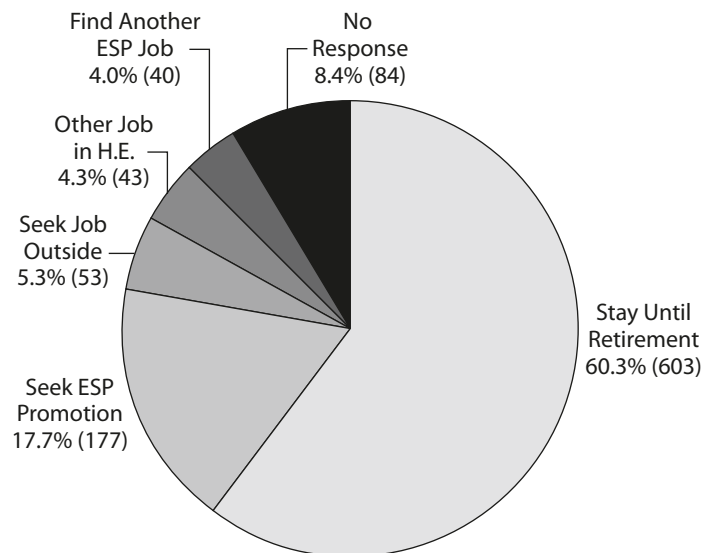
Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 19. ESP Satisfaction with Promotional Opportunities

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 20. ESP Overall Job Satisfaction

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

Figure 21. ESP Current Career Plans*

Source: NEA 2007 Higher Education ESP Membership Survey.

* Results were drawn from different survey questions. Figure does not total 100%.

NOTES

¹ Johnsrud, 1999; Johnsrud, 2004; Rosser, 2004.

² Johnsrud, 2001; Rosser, 2006.

³ Johnsrud, 2000.

⁴ Rosser, 2007; National Education Association, 2006.

⁵ See also Knapp et al., 2007.

⁶ Dillman, 2007.

⁷ The text collapses ESP responses by combining “very satisfied” with “satisfied” and “very dissatisfied” with “dissatisfied.”

⁸ Johnsrud, 2000.

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