Broadening Horizons
Understanding the Faculty Experience in Atlantic Canada

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Summary

In summer 2020, Science Atlantic staff worked in collaboration with the organization’s Membership Engagement Committee on an audience research project to learn how Science Atlantic might be able to serve the broader academic community.

Science Atlantic’s membership consists of 18 Atlantic Canadian post-secondary institutions represented by the Deans of Science (or equivalent). Science Atlantic currently provides services and programming in support of the Deans and approximately 150 faculty division representatives. Currently, Science Atlantic serves a small segment of the existing faculty population in the Atlantic region. This segment of faculty consists almost entirely of tenure/tenure-track faculty members. The goal of this research was to learn about the needs of faculty of various types who are not currently served by the programs Science Atlantic delivers.

A total of 44 of 422 faculty members polled, representing various disciplines and positions, agreed to participate in open-ended interviews with Science Atlantic staff. It is clear from the majority of responses that faculty in the Atlantic region have a great passion for their profession, especially as it relates to teaching and mentoring students. This devotion to teaching and mentoring provides satisfaction among faculty members and positively impacts the student experience. In contrast, when asked about challenges, the most commonly cited concerns included workload, administrative red tape, and the impacts of COVID-19.

The analysis revealed that new faculty may benefit from additional orientation and support. Teacher training was highlighted as a support that could help faculty feel more comfortable in their role when they first start out. Additionally, having more connection with senior colleagues was noted as a means to gain greater insight into institutional norms and lessons learned.

When looking to broaden engagement, Science Atlantic should consider the commonly cited factors that motivate faculty to get involved in associations and volunteer. Faculty are looking for volunteer opportunities that allow them to apply their expertise and to make an impact in their communities. They want to be part of associations to make connections and to gain access to information to help them stay relevant in their field. Additionally, faculty noted that they take advantage of professional development opportunities provided by associations. By focusing on these areas, Science Atlantic may be able to motivate a broader range of faculty members to participate in the organization.

A list of actionable recommendations was developed in breakout discussions on the three themes at the 2020 Annual Members Meeting (see page 17). It is recommended that the Strategic Planning Committee review this list of recommendations to assess how these suggestions align with the priorities outlined in the 2018-2022 strategic plan.

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1 We use the following definition of faculty members for this project: University or college employees who are responsible for conducting teaching and/or research activities within the institution.
Introduction

Science Atlantic is a federally incorporated, charitable association representing 18 post-secondary institutions in Atlantic Canada. Its mission is to advance post-secondary science education and research in Atlantic Canada by:

- providing opportunities that foster and enrich students;
- supporting and inspiring researchers, educators, and the broader scientific community; and,
- using our collective voice to address important regional science issues.

Science Atlantic has been providing networking and learning opportunities for students and faculty in the Atlantic region since 1962. Science Atlantic's membership consists of 18 Atlantic Canadian post-secondary institutions represented by the Deans of Science (or equivalent). Science Atlantic currently provides services and programming in support of the Deans and approximately 150 faculty division representatives. Science Atlantic activities include annual student conferences in ten disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, lecture tours by notable scientists, awards recognizing communication and research skills, and workshop and networking opportunities for students and faculty.

Currently, the faculty who participate in Science Atlantic represents a small percentage of the faculty population in the Atlantic region and consists almost entirely of tenure/tenure-track faculty members. The goal of this research was to learn about the needs of faculty of various types not currently served by the programs Science Atlantic delivers.

Methods

Ashley Greene, CEO of The Instratify Group (https://www.instratify.com), offered support throughout the entirety of this project.

Ethics

As a federally registered charity that does not receive tri-council funding, Science Atlantic is not bound by the research ethics protocols established for research institutions. This was not an academic research project and did not seek to generate results that can be generalized outside of Science Atlantic. For these reasons, research ethics approval was not obtained.

However, we do believe in following best practices and therefore designed our confidentiality and data management processes to ensure a professional approach for this project. Consent to record each interview was obtained verbally from participants at the outset of each session. Once transcribed, audio files were permanently deleted. Transcripts were stripped of identifying information and anonymized through the use of pseudonyms (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2). Only Science Atlantic staff have access to the transcripts, which will be deleted three years after the project.
Sampling

The goal of our sampling strategy was threefold:

1. To have faculty representation from a range of disciplines and departments
2. To have faculty representation from all of our member institutions
3. To have a diverse representation of faculty positions, responsibilities, and levels of experience

To collect a list of potential participants, staff searched the faculty directories at each member institution. Names and contact information of all faculty members in each science related discipline were entered into a master document, and the names of faculty that were recognized as currently or previously involved with Science Atlantic were removed. Faculty were randomly sampled from the remaining list to develop the final recruitment list. 422 faculty members were sent a recruitment email and follow-up emails were sent several days later to promote participation (Appendices A and B).

A total of 44 faculty members agreed to participate (>10% of the 422). Of the participants, one participant’s data was omitted due to technical issues with the recording software. The sample included faculty representation from 12 of the 18 Science Atlantic member institutions (Appendix C, Figure 1). Thirteen disciplines were represented by the sample, 10 of which fall under the science disciplines represented by Science Atlantic and three of which do not (Engineering, Communications, and Trades and Transportation) (Appendix C, Figure 2).

Years of experience ranged from 1-50 years. Participants were grouped into four categories based on their years of experience: unknown (n=1), 1-9 years (n=13), 10-19 years (n=13), and 20+ years (n=16) (Figure 3). The sample was also categorized into three categories of faculty based on their titles and participants’ description of their role (see Figure 4).
Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were asked 12 open-ended questions with 37 potential follow-up questions adapted to the response given (see Appendix D). Interviews ranged from 20-60 minutes in length. The majority of interviews were conducted by telephone; two participants opted to participate by email.

A qualitative data analysis software called Dedoose (https://www.dedoose.com/) was used to analyze the data. An initial coding framework was developed from the questionnaire (see Appendix E for a sample of the framework). Sub-codes were developed after extensive review of the transcript excerpts. Codes were then grouped into larger discussion topics.

Results

The results were grouped into three questions for discussion which were tackled by small breakout groups at the 2020 Annual Members Meeting. The following sections summarize each of the three discussion topics.

Theme I: What Types of Support Can be Provided to New Faculty Members?

This theme encompasses responses that were given by participants about their experiences as new faculty members. Through the analysis, three opportunities were identified to help support new faculty as they are starting out in their career.

What Types of Support Can be Provided to New Faculty Members?

- Expanding on Existing Orientation
- Strengthening Teaching and Time Management Skills
- Encouraging Connection with Senior Colleagues
1. Expanding on Existing New Faculty Orientation

Some participants felt that the initial orientation they received at their institution did not provide enough guidance at the beginning of their career. It was also noted that navigating the organizational structure of their institution was difficult for some.

“The biggest challenge I had was that there wasn’t any kind of orientation.”
- Participant 36

"Biggest challenges that I faced? I think probably was just navigating how higher education institutions work, you know, sort of who's who. Who's responsible for what.” - Participant 38

Additionally, getting familiar with the culture of the institution was mentioned as a challenge.

“So that sort of finding a spot in that department, finding my place was really a challenge in the beginning.” - Participant 19

“That transition for new faculty might not be about information. I should say the other new faculty challenge when I started was fitting in, you know, fitting into the culture because the culture here was different from the culture at another university.” - Participant 30

2. Strengthening Teaching and Time Management Skills

It was suggested by some participants that they were not comfortable with their teaching skills when they began in their role.

“One of the biggest challenges was learning how to teach reasonably well. That is something that we don't get trained for.” - Participant 9

“The open-endedness and lack of guidance. Just learning how to deal with that many students, how to control the classroom and stuff like that. That's stuff that people in those types of teacher roles don't really get trained in teaching. There's not really formal education.” - Participant 2
Some also noted having difficulties with managing their time.

“One thing is dealing with it through a balance of the different aspects of the job. How much time spent on teaching, how much time spent on research, how much time to spend doing committees, things like that.” - Participant 6

“I think probably the biggest one is balancing your time, time management. How much time do you give to this versus that? So, the time management piece is an important skill.” - Participant 1

3. Encouraging Connection with Senior Colleagues

When asked what advice participants would give to their younger self, the most common recommendation was to seek help from their senior colleagues.

“I think the biggest thing would be not to be afraid to go to the chair of the department or the Dean's office or if there’s like a teaching and learning centre, you know, to be able to step forward and ask those questions.” - Participant 38

“A lot of people feel like they're on their own and I probably would have asked for more support either from my academic chair or from other colleagues who were in the same boat. I might've asked for us to have some team teaching or to connect once a week to kind of have a mentor.” - Participant 39
Theme II: How can the Faculty Experience be Improved?

From the transcripts, we were able to learn about what leads to role satisfaction and what challenges faculty are commonly facing in their roles. By highlighting this information, areas of role satisfaction can be leveraged to further enhance fulfillment, and solutions to common challenges can be developed to improve the overall faculty experience.

1. Leveraging Aspects of Role Satisfaction

Four common areas of role satisfaction emerged from participants’ responses: Teaching and mentoring, collaboration, role diversity, and research. Excerpts from the transcripts are provided below to demonstrate each area.

a. **Teaching and Mentoring**: “Oh, well that’s when I can help a student. When I see a student who’s really struggling and I know that I can help them and that’s very satisfying.”
   - Participant 20
b. **Collaboration**: “Being able to talk to another faculty member and say: Hey, have you ever had this happen?” - Participant 31
c. **Role Diversity**: “I enjoy the variety. I enjoy doing all these different things so that I have that ability to sort of change things up.” - Participant 18
d. **Research**: “That’s pretty satisfying, being able to conduct research, find interesting results and being able to disseminate that through journal articles or at conferences.” - Participant 10
2. Encourage Faculty to Focus on Activities From Which They Never Want to Retire

Aspects of participants’ roles that they would like to continue in retirement align with those that provide them with role satisfaction. Teaching and mentoring and conducting research were both mentioned as aspects that participants would like to continue into retirement.

“I will always be a mentor... I won't always be teaching in class. But I still help students that graduated 25 years ago and I'm proud, so honoured to do it. That's what life's about.” - Participant 20

“I would definitely continue doing research. There's no question about that.”
- Participant 19

Although conducting outreach and community work was not commonly noted as an aspect that contributes to participants’ role satisfaction, it was a recurrent theme when asked what they’d like to continue to do in retirement.

“I would want to contribute my knowledge and my skills that I learned through nonprofits. That's what I admire, when people use their experience to enrich their community.” - Participant 30

“It would definitely be to do more community service....when you’re working with a community group, you can definitely see the practical impact that it has.”
- Participant 8

20% of participants made statements that alluded to the idea that they were happy to continue all aspects of their jobs and never retire.

You caught me off guard here because I've never thought about retirement. Not something I plan to do, I mean I plan to work until the last day in my life.”
- Participant 2

“I model myself after those who don't retire! I will when I have to (i.e., health reasons, inability to do my work).”- Participant 12

“I don't think about retirement. So I would say I'm going to continue to work until I can't, I guess.” - Participant 10
3. Providing Resources to Help Faculty Overcome Challenges

When discussing ideas for overcoming their challenges, participants offered solutions such as:

- **Faculty training** to:
  - Help faculty improve their time management skills
  - Improve technological and online teaching skills

- **Faculty networking** to:
  - Enable the sharing and acquisition of resources between faculty members
  - Share experience and tips and tricks for dealing with administrative processes

- **Additional resources** to:
  - Manage larger class sizes
  - Hire administrative support to reduce admin workload
Theme III: How can Science Atlantic Broaden Engagement?

Within this theme we identified ways in which the organization can broaden community engagement beyond the existing membership structure. Historically, the Science Atlantic membership is siloed by discipline, with ten divisions represented by faculty members from each relevant Member Institution. We looked at answers participants provided explaining what motivates them to volunteer and what motivates them to engage with professional associations in order to identify potential areas for Science Atlantic’s growth.

1. Leverage Members’ Expertise and Interests

Being able to apply specific expertise and work in areas of interest motivated some participants to engage in volunteer work.

“I do it all just to be a value, in terms of feeling like I have experience to share or connectivity with my education background or teaching. So in the past I would sit on various associations or committees based on my knowledge base and experience.” - Participant 39

“I am a member of that. So these things reflect my interest in biological conservation issues and environmental issues.” - Participant 20

1. Leverage expertise and interests
2. Create impactful work
3. Foster connection
4. Offer professional development
5. Host conferences
6. Help members stay current
2. Create Impactful Work

Participants mentioned that they enjoy volunteering for associations because they are able to make an impact in their communities.

“Some of the things that we’ve done have really helped our students to succeed as well. The service work has been quite rewarding in terms of improving the academic life of the university, the employment life for other faculty, and also opportunities for students. That does get quite rewarding when you look back on it.” - Participant 8

“You’re helping people, needy families, raising money for playgrounds, stuff like that. Right. It just makes me happy to make people happy, to see them happy.” - Participant 4

3. Foster Connection and Collaboration

Many participants mentioned that the networking component of associations was a major draw. The networking that is facilitated by such associations was cited as being conducive to learning, finding job opportunities, feeling like a part of a community and making connections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>“One positive thing for me about associations is the satisfaction I get from interacting with other people, sharing what I know and also learning from them.” - Participant 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding job opportunities</td>
<td>“Being able to connect with people is certainly a very valuable experience and, you know, I find my students are looking for internship opportunities. And so I can rely on my professional organizations to help with that.” - Participant 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling a part of a community</td>
<td>“I look to that society as really enabling some high level scientific discussions and ensuring that there’s a community of research across the country on a given topic.” - Participant 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making connections</td>
<td>“My experiences with associations have led to many opportunities for research beyond the volunteering experience. So I’ve been able to stay connected to people because of it.” - Participant 10</td>
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</table>
4. Offer Opportunities for Professional Development

Participants noted that they join associations to be part of their professional development activities.

“They provide professional development, they would be considered experts in the field and I often collaborate with them to get training for our work professionals and volunteers that are working in the community.” - Participant 30

“I sit on the diversity committee because I want to ensure that I'm a faculty who can bring inclusivity to the classroom and I can learn ways to do that. So it's not because I'm an expert, it's just because I want to learn more on how to support my learners.” - Participant 39

5. Host Conferences for Faculty

Another benefit of belonging to an association is attending conferences and having access to discounted tickets.

“I think some of the positive experiences with them would be just going to conferences and networking. Bringing those tools back to your employer and developing some of the things you've learned from them.” - Participant 2

“I sometimes join organizations like that because you get discounts on going to a conference.” - Participant 29

6. Help Members Stay Current in Their Field

Some participants noted that they join associations so that they can stay on top of new research in their field and to be apprised of news in their areas of interest.

“They're the place that you go to when you want to know more about making care safer and it's all evidence-based as well. I have positive experiences with that organization.” - Participant 30

“The Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution, you can find out what's going on with ecology in Canada and that's also nice to get.” - Participant 29
Conclusion

It is clear from the majority of responses that faculty in this region have a great passion for their profession, especially as it relates to teaching and mentoring students. This devotion to teaching and mentoring provides satisfaction among faculty members and positively impacts the student experience. In contrast, when asked about challenges, the most commonly cited concerns included workload, administrative red tape, and the impacts of COVID-19. Enabling faculty to focus on areas of interest while at the same time tackling the common challenges facing faculty members could serve to strengthen the post-secondary community in the Atlantic region.

It seems that new faculty may also benefit from additional orientation and support. Teacher training was highlighted as a support that could help faculty feel more comfortable in their role when they first start out. Additionally, having more connection with senior colleagues was noted as a means to gain greater insight into institutional norms and to access lessons learned. By incorporating these needs into orientation or new faculty support programs, the new faculty experience may be improved.

When looking to broaden engagement, Science Atlantic should consider the commonly cited factors that motivate faculty to get involved in associations and volunteer. Faculty are looking for volunteer opportunities that allow them to apply their expertise and to make an impact in their communities. They want to be a part of associations to make connections and to gain access to information to help them stay relevant. Additionally, faculty noted that they take advantage of professional development opportunities provided by associations. By focusing on these areas, Science Atlantic may be able to motivate a broader range of faculty members to participate in the organization.

Next Steps

The results of this project were presented and discussed at the 2020 Science Atlantic Annual Members Meeting. Breakout groups were asked to provide actionable recommendations based on the results that were presented. We recommend that the Strategic Planning Committee review this list of recommendations to assess how these suggestions align with the priorities outlined in the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan and can inform the development of the next plan. See the next section for a list of recommendations.
Recommendations Resulting from 2020 AMM Discussions

Improving the Faculty Experience

- Host mentoring sessions (both inter-institution and intra-institution)
- Match new faculty with experienced faculty
- Develop a “Mentorship-in-a-Box” program
- Host professional development sessions for new faculty
  - Help with navigating expectations and responsibilities
  - Offer tools for time management
- Host a series of networking meetings
  - Discussing shared experiences
  - Addressing collective needs and issues
- Create an online hub for faculty projects
  - Connect those seeking/willing to collaborate on projects
- Coordinate a lecture program for faculty

Broadening Engagement

- Create new Science Atlantic Divisions (e.g., engineering, food security, interdisciplinary divisions)
- Create student membership opportunities
- Engage in community outreach at the high-school level
- Provide faculty-specific events during conferences (include NRC labs, agriculture food labs, and private science labs)
- Offer support for non-tenured faculty
- Take part in international science conferences
- Create a job portal
- Put more emphasis on speaker tours and special lectures
- Create a member orientation package
Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello ____,

My name is _________. I am a fourth year _________ co-op student working on a project on behalf of a regional charitable association with a mission of supporting post-secondary science faculty and students in their learning and professional development.

My goal is to identify ways in which the organization can serve a broader audience. I wish to interview tenured/tenure-track faculty, sessional faculty, and technical/teaching staff to better understand their professional goals and experiences, and I was hoping you could help through your participation. The interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted via telephone.

Participation is voluntary and your confidentiality will be respected. With your permission, the interview will be recorded to allow the interviewer to prepare summary notes from the interview. The recording will be destroyed once the notes have been finalized. The final report will include only aggregate responses and anonymized quotations that cannot be attributed to you as an individual. All your identifying information will be securely stored, and only the students involved in the project and the organization's staff will have access to the information about individual participants and the transcripts. If you are interested in participating, please use the button above to book a 30 minute call, or click on the following link: https://calendly.com/richardsa/interview

In appreciation of your time, your name will be entered into a draw for one of three $25 Tim Hortons gift cards.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact Michelle McPherson, Science Atlantic Membership Support Officer, at michelle@scienceatlantic.ca.

If you don’t think you are the right person for this interview, I would appreciate it if you could recommend other potential contacts.

Thank you for your time,

[Name of interviewer]
Appendix B: Recruitment Email Follow-Up

Hi _____,

I am reaching out to follow-up on my previous email regarding a project I am working on for a regional charitable association with a mission of supporting post-secondary science faculty and students in their learning and professional development.

Currently, our membership represents a small percentage of the faculty population and consists almost entirely of tenure/tenure-track faculty members. Through this project, we are aiming to learn about the needs of various types of faculty (i.e. tenure/tenure-track, contract/sessional, technical/teaching, etc.) who are not currently served by the programs that we deliver.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to get your input. If you are interested in participating in a brief 20 minute phone interview, please book a time with me through Calendly: https://calendly.com/richardsa/interview.

Thanks for your time,
[Name of interviewer]
Appendix C: Demographics Data

Fig. 1: Institution of Employment

Number of Participants

Institution

Fig. 2: Represented Disciplines

Number of Participants
Appendix D: Questionnaire

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your role?
   ● Follow up:
     ○ How long have you been in this role?
     ○ What are your main responsibilities?
     ○ Do you fulfil any other roles within the university?

2. What aspects of your job bring you the most satisfaction?
   ● Follow up:
     ○ What do you love about doing _________ [the activity they mentioned]?
     ○ Is there anything in particular that frustrates you about what you do?
       ■ How do you wish it could be different? How would you improve it?

3. What was the biggest challenge you faced as a new faculty member?
   ● Follow up:
     ○ Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self?
     ○ Are there any resources you would have found helpful during that time?
     ○ In comparison, what are your biggest challenges now?

4. What kinds of things do you do to stay current in your field?
   ● Follow up:
     ○ Can you tell me more about ___________? [Something they said in initial question]
     ○ Do you have any challenges or frustrations staying current?
       ■ If yes, can you tell me about them?

5. How important is it to you to connect with others in your field?
   ● Follow up
     ○ Why/why not?
     ○ What is your favorite way to connect? Why? What is your least favorite way?
     ○ [Are there any other ways you connect with others in your field?]
o How often do you connect with others in your network?
○ What is the primary benefit you receive from connecting with others in your field?

6. As a faculty member are you required to complete any service work? [If no service required, change to “do you volunteer for any organizations?” and continue]
   • Follow up:
     ○ What activities do you participate in [to fulfill this aspect of your position]?
     ○ Why did you choose this activity [these activities]?
     ○ Is there anything you’d like to do that you aren’t?
     ○ If a great volunteer opportunity presented itself, would you be able to fit more service/volunteer work into your schedule?
     ○ If yes, roughly how many hours/month?

7. Are you part of any professional associations or volunteer groups?
   • Follow up:
     ○ [If not, why not? What about in the past?]
     ○ Which ones do you belong to?
     ○ Are you a part of any science organizations?
     ○ Why do you belong?
     ○ Could you share a positive experience you’ve had with an association or volunteer organization you’ve been involved with? (past or current)
     ○ Can you give an example of something that’s been a not so good experience?

8. How do these associations/organizations get you involved?
   • Follow up:
     ○ What do these associations do well to draw your attention?
     ○ What could these associations do better?
     ○ Is there anything associations might do that turn you off from interacting with them? [eg, too many emails, ask for money all the time, etc.]
     ○ Has the pandemic changed how they interact with you? How?
     ○ What’s the best online experience you’ve had so far?
9. Imagine you are starting your retirement tomorrow. If you could look into a crystal ball, are there any aspects of your career that you think you would be continuing?
   ● Follow up:
     ○ Is there anything now that you don’t get enough time to devote to doing? [career-related activities]
     ○ Which faculty member have you seen retire that you would like to model yourself after and why?

10. If an organization in our region had unlimited resources with a mission of supporting science faculty and students, what would you have them do?
    ● Follow up:
      ○ The sky’s the limit; imagine you could wave a magic wand…
      ○ [Alternate language: “brainstorm anything”, “no censoring”, “anything goes”, “blue sky”, …]

11. Are you familiar with Science Atlantic (APICS)? Can you share any experiences you’ve had with the organization?
    ● Follow up:
      ○ [If they’re not aware, have a little blurb to explain the org and then skip the rest of this question]**
      ○ Have you attended a Science Atlantic conference (other names: APICS, AUPAC, AUGC, ChemCon) as a faculty member?
      ○ Did you attend/present as a student at a Science Atlantic/APICS conference? (If they are aware of SA but haven't participated, ask why not?)

12. Is there anything else you’d like to mention that you thought of during this interview?
## Appendix E: Sample Coding Framework

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<th>Discussion Topic</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Sub-code</th>
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<td>How can the faculty experience be improved</td>
<td>Role satisfaction</td>
<td>Teaching and mentoring</td>
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<td>Research</td>
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<td>Unengaged students</td>
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