

University of Pittsburgh

Staff Council

Data Analysis of Responsibility Creep Survey

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Section 1: Introduction

The data used in this report is derived from a survey conducted in June of 2021 by the University of Pittsburgh Staff Council (UPSC). The aim of the survey was to assess responsibility creep, or job creep, for staff at the University of Pittsburgh who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Through this survey, the Staff Council aimed to determine staff members' additional tasks before and during the pandemic, and after the Staff Early Retirement Program (SERP), to best advocate on their behalf.

The University of Pittsburgh implemented SERP in June of 2020, "to provide staff flexibility in navigating their personal response to the pandemic" (University of Pittsburgh [2020]). This plan allowed eligible staff members to elect to retire early in exchange for six months of salary and immediate access to their full retirement package. "Any staff member 59 or older as of May 1, 2020 with 10 years of continuous service as a full time regular employee" or "part time regular staff 59 and older who've had 10 years of continuous service and were hired before July 1, 2004" were eligible for the program (Jones, 2020).

The survey was developed by an ad hoc team of six UPSC members following Jessica Lutz's March 25, 2021, article in the University Times addressing job creep. This ad hoc group collectively drafted the survey questions and display logic. The survey included multiple choice and open text questions and was only available in English. All questions were voluntary, meaning that participants could skip any that they wished to not answer. 1,112 staff members (approximately 16% of non-union eligible staff) (University of Pittsburgh, 2021) completed at least one question on this survey. The number of respondents for each question (n) is recorded in the remainder of this report.

This voluntary and anonymous survey was distributed through the University's Read Green email listserv, which is sent to all staff members, the June 2021 UPSC newsletter, and further distributed through informal networks.

Distribution data was not available for the Read Green listserv at the time of this report's completion. The UPSC Newsletter, created via MailChimp, shows this survey was the third most clicked link in June Newsletter. Of the 2,153 recipients of the newsletter, 1,669 clicked on the link to open the newsletter, and 231 clicked on the Responsibility Creep Survey. The newsletter demographics reflect an audience that is 65% female and 45 years old or older, in keeping with the campus staff demographics.

While most survey questions were of a multiple-choice format, the end of the survey included an open text portion allowing participants to provide "any more information [they] wish to share about [their] experience working at the University during the COVID-19 pandemic". A total of 369 participants included written responses in this space. Most of these responses provided complaints about working at Pitt during the COVID-19 pandemic or spoke to working conditions that were already an issue before the pandemic or SERP. These are presented in the remainder of the report as they thematically relate to other data. Identifying information has been removed to protect participant anonymity.

There were also positive responses in the open text, including thanks to the staff council for providing an outlet to talk about responsibility creep. Responses also included grateful messages to the University for maintaining jobs and working conditions. However, some of the more positive responses also showed hesitancy for continued positive experiences, dissatisfaction in other areas, or an understanding that their working situation was abnormal.

In interpreting this report, please note that all survey results are self-reported, and survey participants are self-selected. Staff members who do not feel that they are experiencing job creep may be less likely to open an email and/or complete a survey on this topic. Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of some questions and possible concerns around anonymity and job security, reported results may not fully encompass responsibility creep experience of all University of Pittsburgh staff. In fact, multiple responses in the open text portion of the survey alluded to this fact.

Participants also had the option to provide their name and email address for follow-up discussion, but this was not a requirement to completing the survey. A total of 123 participants said that they would like to have a follow-up conversation about their responses (n=915), but only 26 participants provided contact information. Starting in July, the ad hoc UPSC survey team will conduct one on one qualitative interviews with survey respondents who provided contact information and wish to participate further.

Working from Home

As expected in a survey about working at the University during the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants provided written responses about working from home. These positions are outlined here, as they set the stage for the rest of the report. Responses primarily fell into three camps: 1) those who enjoyed the experience, 2) those who felt the experience had a harmful effect, and 3) those without the opportunity to work from home.

Some of those who enjoyed working from home felt supported by the department, or Pitt in general. Others enjoyed the flexibility and spoke about greater productivity with less distractions while working from home, even in cases where their workload increased. Additionally, participants said that working from home allowed them to save some of the expenses they usually incur through coming to work in person. Some participants enjoyed working from home and the added savings so much that they would leave their current position if these arrangements do not stay in place.

Conversely, many participants explained that working from home had a harmful effect. This included comments about their quality of work itself, as well as comments about their work-life balance suffering due to their work from home arrangement extending available work hours. Also, in contrast to staff members who found themselves saving money on expenses during work from home arrangements, some participants spent more money working from home. These expenses were usually related to technology and other office supplies.

The final group of staff did not experience the ability to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some did not mind these duties and shared an understanding of a unique situation. Others forced to work in person expressed feelings of frustration due to their working arrangements, as well as extra work on behalf of colleagues who were able to work from home. Furthermore, while many University efforts were tailored to work from home arrangements over the past year, these did not apply to staff forced to continue to report to work in person. Their responses include an awareness of this othered status on campus.

There was an additional group of participants who mentioned that childcare was a huge consideration in work from home conversations. These staff members did not necessarily all work from home or share the same feelings about work from home arrangements, but several agreed that employees that have children need more help. One respondent mentioned that there are very limited options for parents with regard to childcare. Another expressed that the lack of raises left them unable to keep up with increasing child care costs, and that this was especially taxing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 2: General Job Information

The following data provide general information about the jobs that survey participants do at the University of Pittsburgh. This survey was only open to staff who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement. For this reason, the first survey question asked if participants were covered by a collective bargaining agreement and those who answered “yes” were routed to the end of the survey. A total of 1092 participants answered that they were not covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and thus moved through the remaining survey questions. This explains some of the representation gaps in job classifications (See Figure 2) such as facilities and maintenance services, as many of these staff are covered by a collective bargaining agreement and thus would not have advanced to this point in the survey.

The three most common job classifications to complete the survey included: administrators (406), researchers (119), and systems programmer (69).

Figure 1: Length of time participants have worked at the University

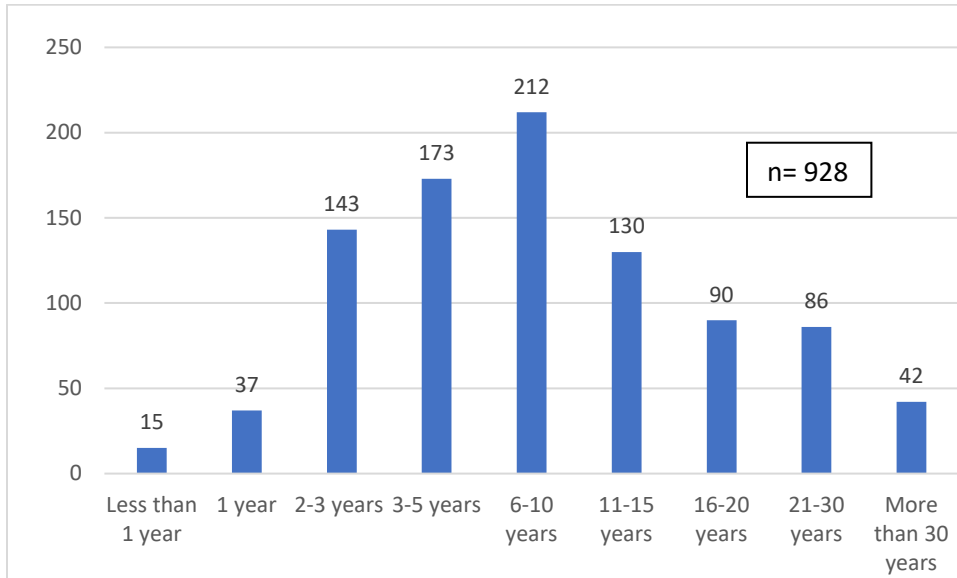


Figure 2: Distribution of Participants by Job Classification

Job Classification		Number of Participants
Administrator	Administrator I:	73
	Administrator II:	112
	Administrator III:	124
	Administrator IV:	76
	Administrator V:	21
	<i>Total Administrator Classification:</i>	406
Administrative Support	Administrative Support I:	17
	Administrative Support II:	10
	Administrative Support III:	15

	<i>Total Administrative Support Classification:</i>	42
Athletics	<i>Athletics I:</i>	1
	<i>Athletics II:</i>	1
	<i>Athletics III:</i>	2
	<i>Athletics IV:</i>	1
	<i>Athletics V:</i>	0
	<i>Total Athletics Classification:</i>	5
Buyer	Buyer II	3
	Buyer III	6
	Buyer IV	2
	<i>Total Buyer Classification:</i>	11
Campus Police and Security	Campus Police and Security II:	0
	Campus Police and Security III:	0
	Campus Police and Security IV:	0
	Campus Police and Security V:	0
	Campus Police and Security VI:	0
	<i>Total Campus Police and Security Classification:</i>	0
Child Development	Child Development I:	1
	Child Development II:	0
	Child Development III:	3
	<i>Total Child Development Classification:</i>	4
Communications	Communications I:	5

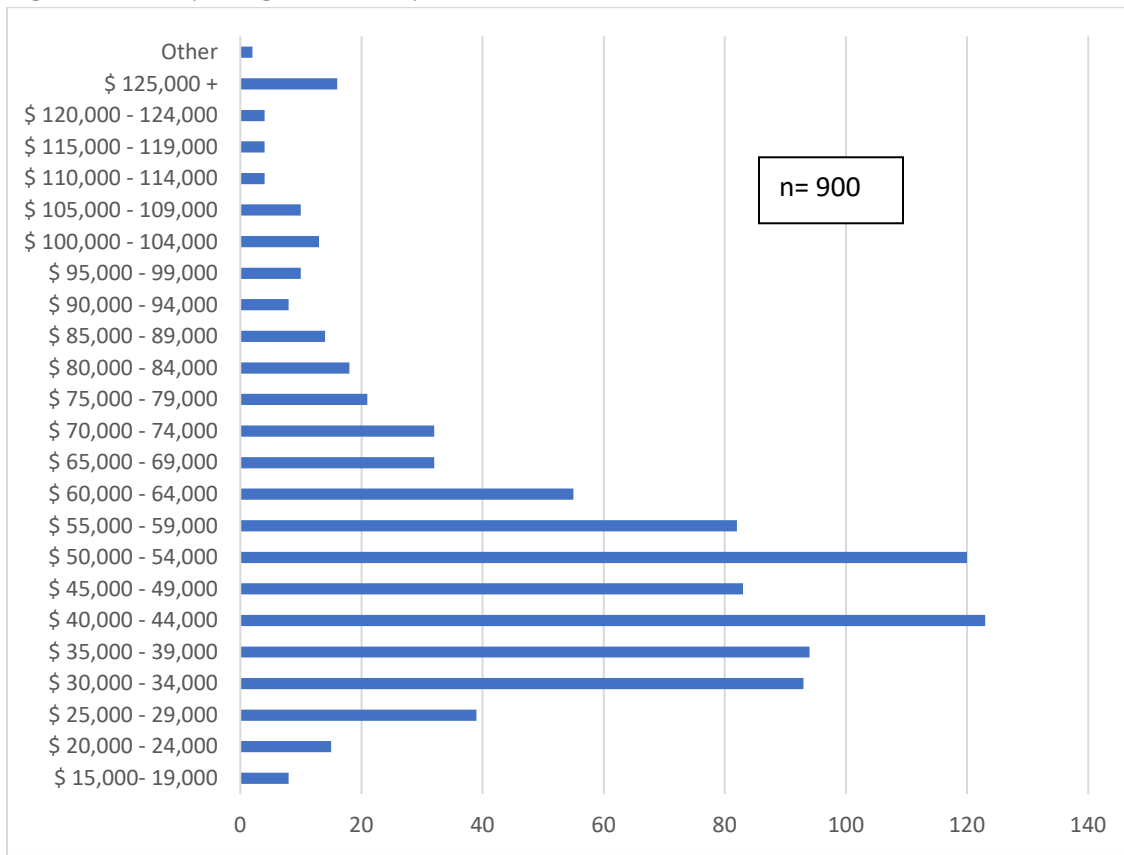
	Communications II:	13
	Communications III:	9
	<i>Total Communications Classification:</i>	27
Dental	Dental II:	3
	Dental III:	1
	<i>Total Dental Classification:</i>	4
Development	Development I:	0
	Development	1
	Development	3
	Development	4
	<i>Total Development Classification:</i>	8
Electronics	Electronics I:	0
	Electronics II:	1
	Electronics III:	4
	Electronics IV:	2
	<i>Total Electronics Classification:</i>	7
Facilities	Facilities I:	6
	Facilities II:	0
	Facilities III:	2
	Facilities IV:	0
	<i>Total Facilities Classification:</i>	8
Financial	Financial I:	3

	Financial II:	14
	Financial III:	24
	<i>Total Financial Classification:</i>	41
Health Professional	Health Professional I:	4
	Health Professional II:	14
	Health Professional III:	8
	<i>Total Health Professional Classification:</i>	26
Human Resources	Human Resources I:	0
	Human Resources II:	2
	Human Resources III:	1
	<i>Total Human Resources Classification:</i>	3
Instructional Development	Instructional Development I:	1
	Instructional Development II:	4
	Instructional Development III:	2
	<i>Total Instructional Development Classification:</i>	7
Library	Library III:	12
	Library IV:	2
	<i>Total Library Classification:</i>	14
Maintenance Services	<i>Maintenance Services I:</i>	1
	<i>Maintenance Services II:</i>	0
	<i>Maintenance Services III:</i>	1
	<i>Maintenance Services IV:</i>	0

	<i>Total Maintenance Services Classification:</i>	2
Media/Photography	Media/Photography I:	0
	Media/Photography II:	0
	Media/Photography III:	2
	Media/Photography IV:	1
	<i>Total Media/Photography Classification:</i>	3
Precision Production	Precision Production I:	0
	Precision Production II:	0
	Precision Production III:	3
	Total Precision Production Classification:	3
Printing	Printing II:	0
	Printing III:	1
	Printing IV:	1
	<i>Total Printing Classification:</i>	2
Research	Research I:	3
	Research II:	14
	Research III:	40
	Research IV:	46
	Research V:	16
	<i>Total Research Classification:</i>	119
Research Scientist	<i>Research Scientist</i>	7
	<i>Senior Research Scientist</i>	0

	<i>Total Research Scientist Classification:</i>	7
Secretary	Secretary II:	2
	Secretary III:	8
	Secretary IV:	0
	<i>Total Secretary Classification:</i>	10
Student Services	Student Services I:	11
	Student Services I- Resident Director:	2
	Student Services II:	36
	Student Services III:	13
	<i>Total Student Services Classification:</i>	62
Systems/Programmer	Systems/Programmer I:	3
	Systems/Programmer II:	7
	Systems/Programmer III:	22
	Systems/Programmer IV:	37
	Systems/Programmer V:	0
	<i>Total Systems/Programmer Classification:</i>	69
n:		890

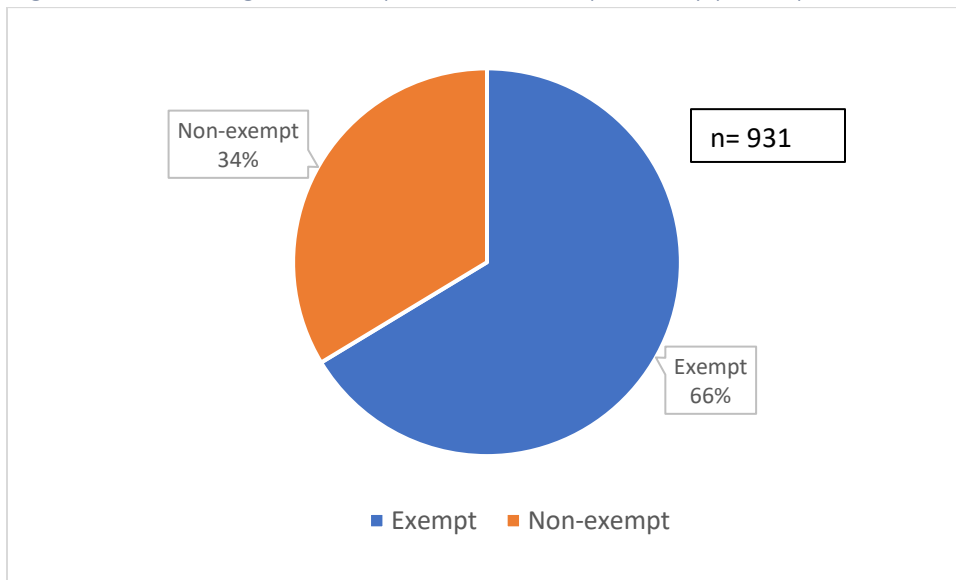
Figure 3: Salary Range of Participants



By far the most common theme in written responses were complaints about pay. Staff members expressed the financial constraints they are under, despite their positions at Pitt. Many expressed the knowledge that they could make more money elsewhere. Others explain that they enjoy working at Pitt, but that low pay is still an issue.

Relatedly, many respondents expressed that they see Pitt’s staff classifications and rules around promotions as a hindrance to advancing their careers. One response sharing this concern around advancement and pay came from a supervisor, concerned about these conditions for employees. Another staff member shared that they felt this responsibility creep, and corresponding inability to advance in their position was built into their job description.

Figure 4: Percentage of exempt vs. non-exempt survey participants



Exempt and non-exempt status refers to an employee’s ability to be paid for overtime. An exempt employee is exempt from being paid for overtime, while a non-exempt employee must receive additional compensation for any work that extends beyond a 40-hour work week. These status categories come from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Per the FLSA, exemptions are generally made for Executive, Administrative, Professional, Computer & Outside Sales Employees (U.S. Department of Labor [2019]).

In written responses, many staff members identified Human Resource (HR) and other University systems as a source of their troubles at work, above other factors. Some of these have to do with job type and classification, while others discuss the inability to hire folks to assist with extra work. Still other complaints express dissatisfaction with their experience interacting with HR.

Some participants explained that University communication was an added source of frustration, especially around technology and operating policies during the pandemic. For some participants, this frustration was exacerbated by a perceived focus on students and faculty over staff members.

Participants pointed to a March 11, 2021 article in the University Times as a particularly troublesome University communication. This article lauds Michael McConegly, administrator for the Swanson School of Engineering's Department of Mechanical Engineering & Materials Science, for working from "7:30 am to 9 pm, six days a week" (Levine 2021). McConegly admits that his efforts to take "one day a week for [himself]" don't always work, because he's responsible for so many tasks in the department (Levine 2021). Participants expressed that this account led them to believe that this overextension was what Pitt is looking for in employees.

Section 3: Supervision, Responsibility Creep, and Continued Employment

Section 3 includes analysis of survey questions around workplace supervision, responsibility creep, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and participants' plans for continued employment. Each of these topics is described in a subsection to follow. Display logic of the survey routed participants through questions based on their responses provided. This routing will be noted where applicable and will affect the number of respondents for certain questions.

Supervision:

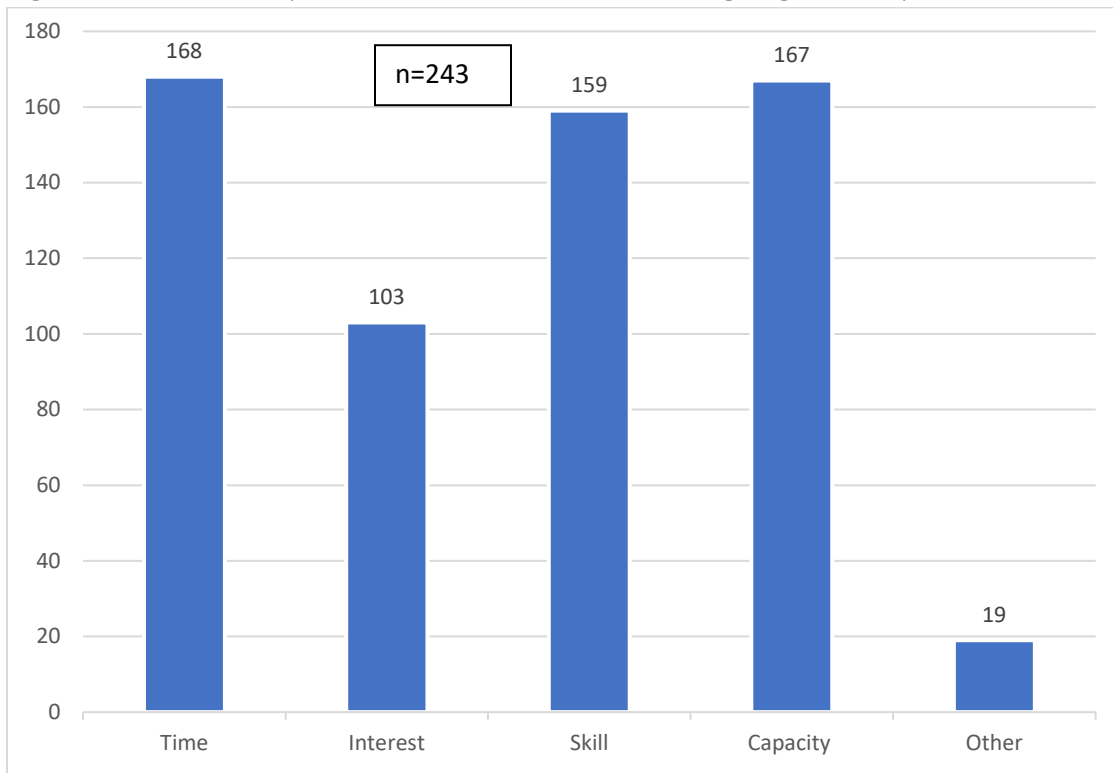
Almost two thirds (72.6%, or 678 individuals) of survey participants believe their supervisor is aware of which skills are their strongest. Only 5% (52 individuals) felt that this was not the case, while 21.8% of respondents (204 individuals) felt that their supervisor did not know which of their skills are the strongest (n=934).

The next question asked if participants felt that their supervisor "mindfully adjusts" their workload to keep it balanced when assigning new tasks. Over half of respondents (51.6 %, or 475 individuals) answered no, meaning that they do not believe their supervisor mindfully adjusts their workload when assigning new tasks. A smaller portion, 21% (193 participants) answered "I don't know" and 27% (252

participants) answered yes, meaning that their supervisor does mindfully adjust their workload when assigning new tasks.

Those participants who answered that their supervisor did mindfully adjust their workload when assigning new tasks were next asked what these decisions were based on. Figure 5 shows these responses. Participants were able to select more than one answer to this question. Of the 19 “other” responses, 13 participants (68% of those who chose other) reported that the assigning of new responsibilities was based on priority, urgency, or “what needs done”. The remaining six other responses included things like other coworkers’ workload, “lowest man on the ladder”, and title or responsibility.

Figure 5: Perceived supervisor considerations when assigning new responsibilities



Next, the survey asked participants about their ability to advocate for themselves to their supervisor regarding their needs at work and their workload. These responses are shown in Figures 6 and 7. For each of these questions, only one response was permitted.

Participants were also asked if they felt they are “able to speak honestly about [their] needs as an employee without fear of retribution or termination.” Of the 929 individuals who answered this question, 555 (59.7%) said that yes, while 374 (40.3%) said no.

Figure 6: Participant responses to "I feel my supervisor allows me to prioritize the work I do best."

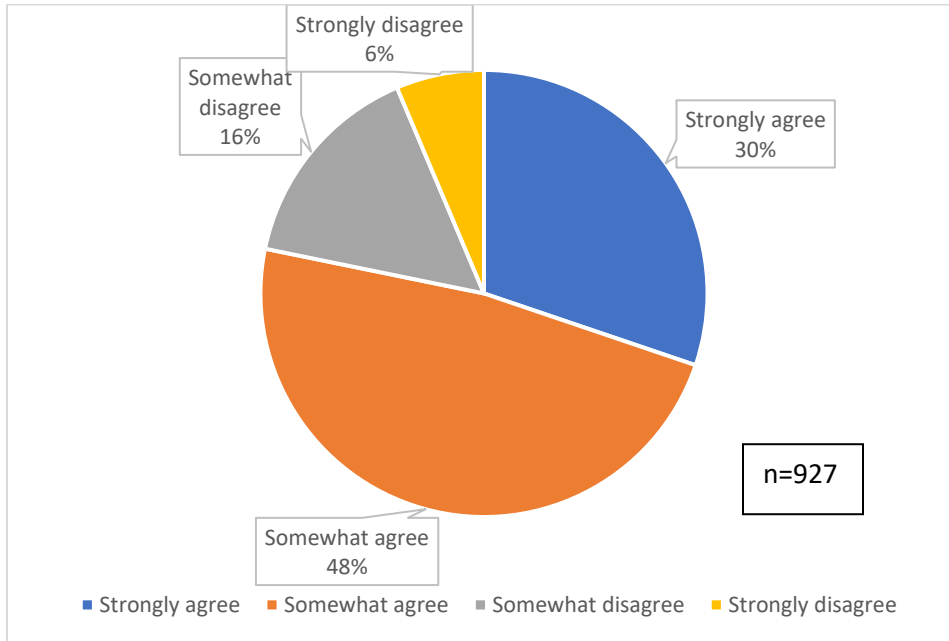
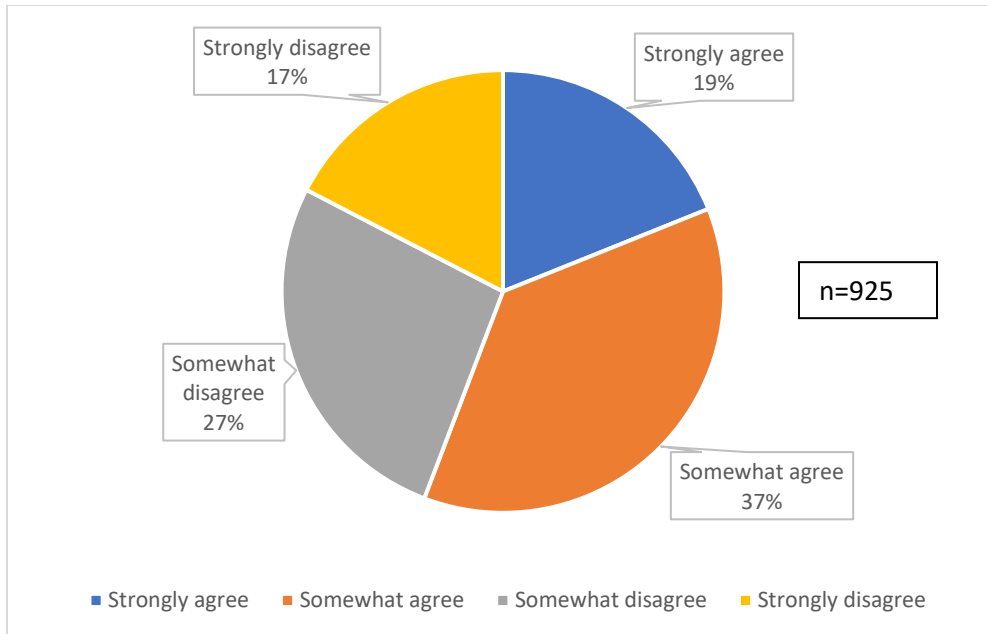


Figure 7: Participant responses to "I feel safe and heard in saying I have a lot on my plate at work and cannot take on more responsibilities."

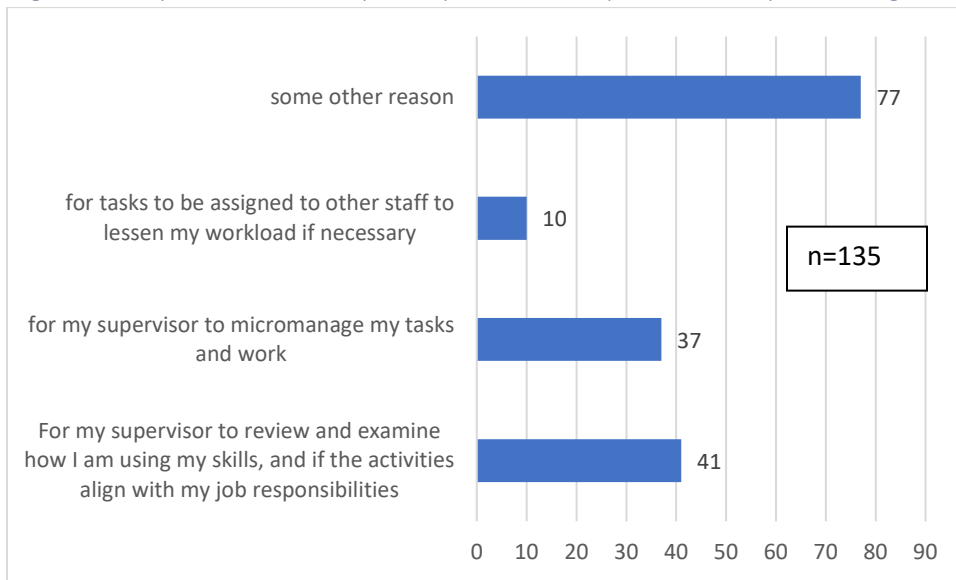


Several survey participants shared thoughts about their supervisor(s) in the open text portion of the survey. Some saw their supervisors as out of touch with the reality of their job. Others felt that the responsibility for additional work came from somewhere outside of their supervisors' hands. Some supervisors echoed this sentiment.

Most respondents (797 individuals, 85.4%) reported that they are not required to keep a log to illustrate how they spend their time at work (n=933). The 136 individuals (14.6%) who are required to keep a log at work were then asked what they believed the purpose of this log to be. These results are displayed in Figure 8. Participants were able to select all responses that applied, and an open text box was available to elaborate on "other" responses.

A total of 72 participants included open text responses to why they are required to keep a work log. Of these, 21 reported that the purpose of their work log was for reporting to administrators, those who manage their grant(s), or those with authority over their supervisor. An additional 19 participants listed the reason as the ability to track tasks in their office, while 17 listed that the work log was used to ensure employees were working, with many mentioning that work logs were implemented during work from home situations. Thirteen survey participants reported that they did not know the purpose of the work log or believed that their supervisor did not really open the documents. One participant saw the work log as a replacement for HR's timesheet requirement for exempt employees and one used the work log for their own purposes to support their annual review.

Figure 8: Reported reasons participants are required to keep work log



Responsibility Creep:

When asked about a change in job responsibilities over time, 91% of respondents (852 individuals) believed that their responsibilities have increased over time. 81 individuals (8.7%) believed that their job responsibilities have stayed the same, and two participants (0.2%) expressed that their job responsibilities have decreased over time. (n=934)

Those who believed that their job responsibilities had increased over time were asked to identify the origin of this increase. Of those who believed that their job responsibilities had increased over time, 534 respondents (63.2%) described this increase as happening before the COVID-19 pandemic, while 509 respondents (60.2%) said their job responsibilities have increased after the COVID-19 Pandemic in March 2020. A smaller group of participants (247 individuals, or 29.2%) identified their job responsibilities as increasing after the Staff Early Retirement Plan (SERP) in September 2020.

Respondents were able to select more than one response to this question (n=845). Many participants identified multiple times when their job responsibilities increased.

When asked about the point at which job responsibilities began to decline, those who identified a decline (n=2) were split on its origin. One participant (50%) said this began before the COVID-19 Pandemic, while the other one (50%) said that their job responsibilities declined after the COVID-19 Pandemic in March 2020.

Figures 9 and 10 display the frequency with which participants worked more than their expected work hours before and since the COVID-19 pandemic. A single response was required in each instance.

Figure 9: Frequency with which participants reported working more than their expected hours BEFORE the pandemic and resulting SERP

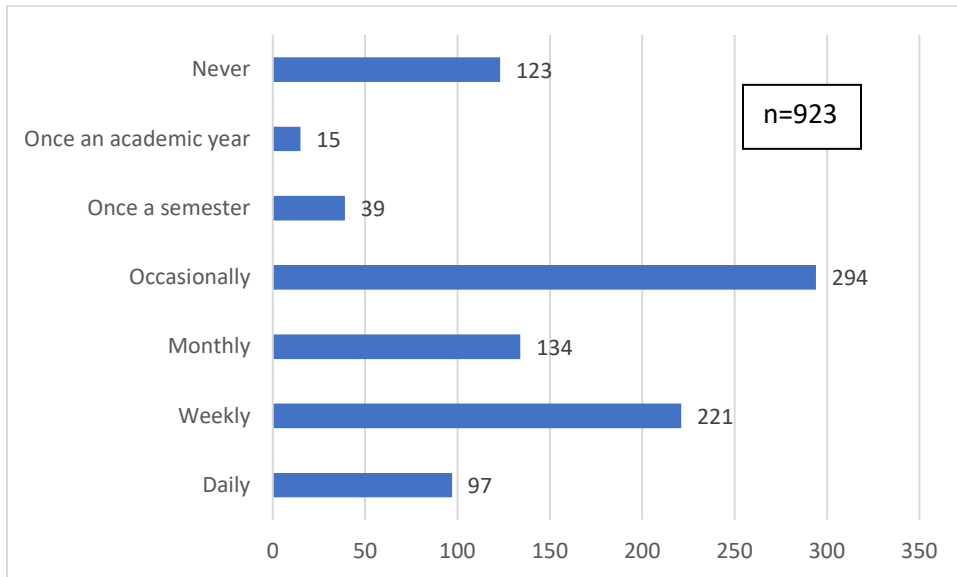
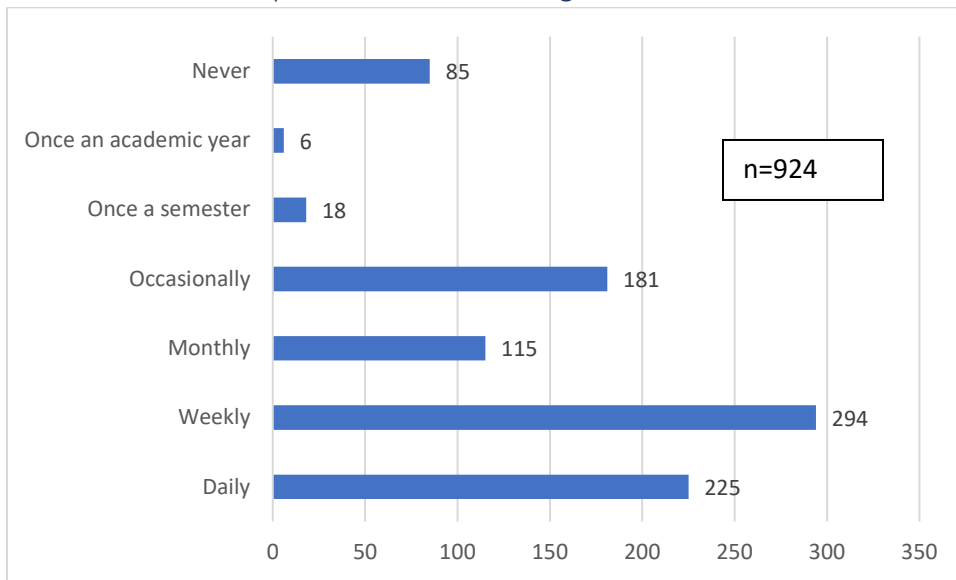


Figure 10: Frequency with which participants reported working more than their expected hours SINCE the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting SERP



Relatedly, 61% of participants (566 individuals) felt that they are not “able to take accrued time off without having to work during the time off or work the equivalent amount of time to make up for the time taken off.” Conversely, 39.1% of participants (363 individuals) felt able to take time off without making up the working time (n=929). When out of the office, only 13.8 % of participants (129 individuals) reported that another person provides back-up for their responsibilities. 38.3% of participants (357 individuals) said that this was not the case, while 47.9% reported that they sometimes had another person to provide back-up for their responsibilities when out of the office (n=933).

In written responses, participants elaborated on these feelings of job creep in terms of feeling like they did not have enough time to complete their assigned tasks. Many respondents identified job creep coming from the loss of other staff in their department, or not enough staff to match the expected workload. These responses included some feedback from supervisors sharing this concern for their teams. Themes from this grouping echoed some of the frustrations shared earlier in this report about HR and hiring delays. Some departments previously relied on student workers, who were not available to work during the pandemic, causing job creep for other staff.

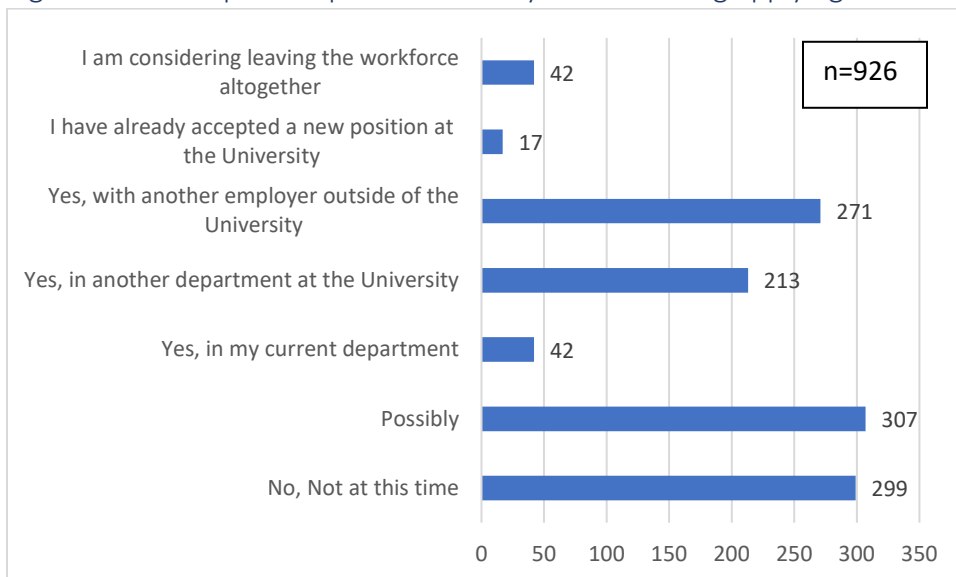
Participants had split responses when asked about their job classification; 52.5% (485 individuals) felt that their current job duties fall outside of their job family or classification while 47.5% (439 individuals) did not think this was the case (n=924). Many of these participants shared more about their views on their job description, some of which are captured earlier in this report (See Section 2).

A large group of participants (401, or 43%) did not know that it was an option “to ask for an increase in pay during the upcoming appraisals due to taking on more responsibilities and work during the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic”. 28% (261 respondents) plan to do so, while 16.3% (152 respondents) do not plan to ask for an increase in pay. The remaining 12.7% (118 respondents) are unsure (n=932).

Continued Employment:

The next group of questions asked participants about their plans to stay in their current position or seek a change in their employment. Based on answers to these questions, participants were prompted to provide more information. All questions in this section allowed for multiple applicable answers.

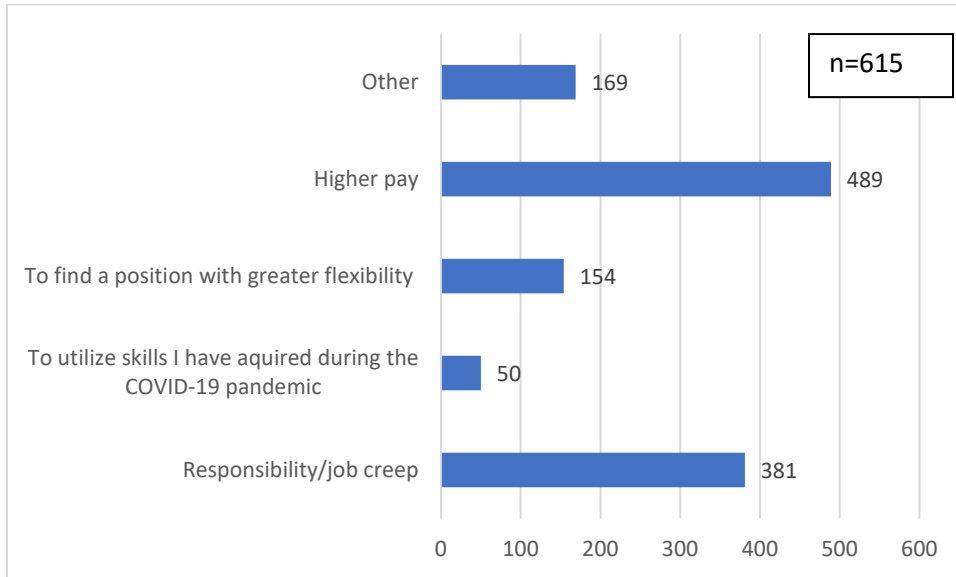
Figure 11: Participant responses to "Are you considering applying for a new position?"



Participants who answered either “possibly”, “Yes, in my current department”, “Yes, in another department at the University”, “Yes, with another employer outside of the University” or “I have already

accepted a new position at the University” were asked about their reasons for pursuing a new position. These responses are shown in Figure 12. Participants were able to select all answers that applied. They also had the option to elaborate in an open text box if they chose the “other” option for this question.

Figure 12: Reported reasons for seeking a new position



Other reasons participants reported seeking new positions fell under three main themes: 1) those about work environment, 2) those about their job specifically, and 3) those that about larger structural factors. These themes are elaborated below, and additional illustrative quotes are included in Figure 13.

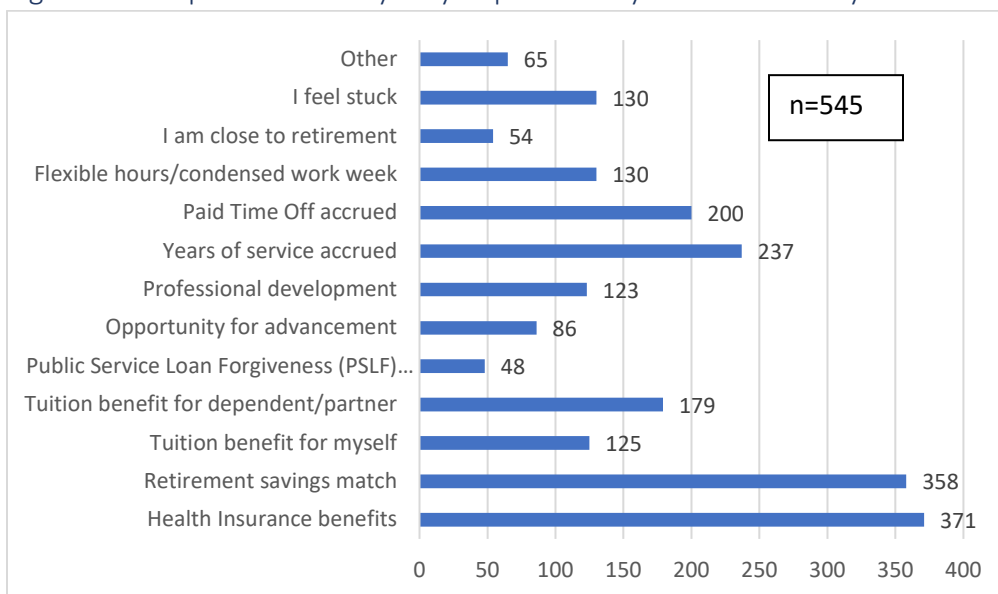
Respondents who reported that they were seeking a new position because of their work environment mentioned having a problem with their supervisor, wanting to feel valued, working in a more inclusive space, or seeking a greater work life balance. Supervisor complaints included those about direct supervisors and their decision making, as well as higher ranking university personnel. While this question did not specifically ask about these reasons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many respondents in this grouping mentioned that their quality of supervision, feelings of value, or work-life balance suffered during this time.

Those who were seeking a new job based on their job specifics mentioned a lack of job security, a lack of path towards advancement, a mismatch between their workload, job classification, and/or pay, or seeking a job that was more aligned with their interests, passions, values, and skills. Again, though this question did not specifically ask for reasons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many respondents in this group attributed their dissatisfaction with their position and/or workload and classification to changes that came about during the pandemic.

Larger structural factors included respondents who had a life change that impacted their work, were part of a department that lost funding, or were moving out of higher education.

Participants who answered that they were applying for a new position in their current department, in another department in the University, have already accepted a new position at the University, or are not considering applying for a new position at this time (see Figure 11) were asked why they planned to stay at the University. These responses are shown in Figure 13. Participants were able to select all answers that applied and had the option to elaborate in an open text box if they chose the “other” option for this question.

Figure 13: Responses to "Why do you plan to stay at the University?"

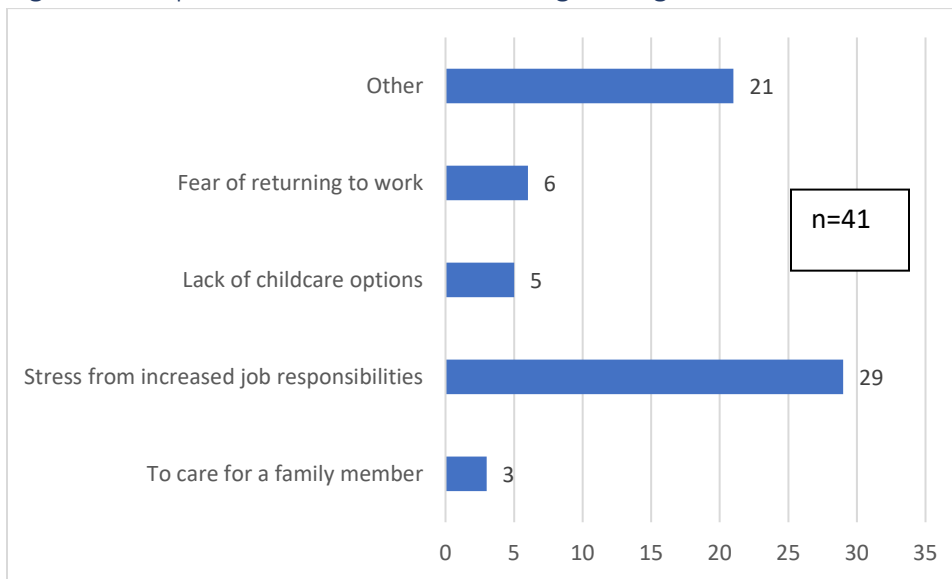


Of the 63 participants who provided an open text response to elaborate on their choice of “other”, almost half (29 respondents or 46%) said that they simply like their job. Another eight (12.7%) reported liking their coworkers and/or supervisor and an additional six respondents (9.5%) like working at Pitt. The remaining 20 responses include reasons like time invested into the role, or flexibility.

Finally, participants who answered that they were considering leaving the workforce altogether (See Figure 11) were prompted to list their reason(s) for doing so. Figure 14 shows these responses.

Participants were able to select all applicable answers and elaborate on “other” in an open text box.

Figure 14: Reported reasons for considering leaving the workforce



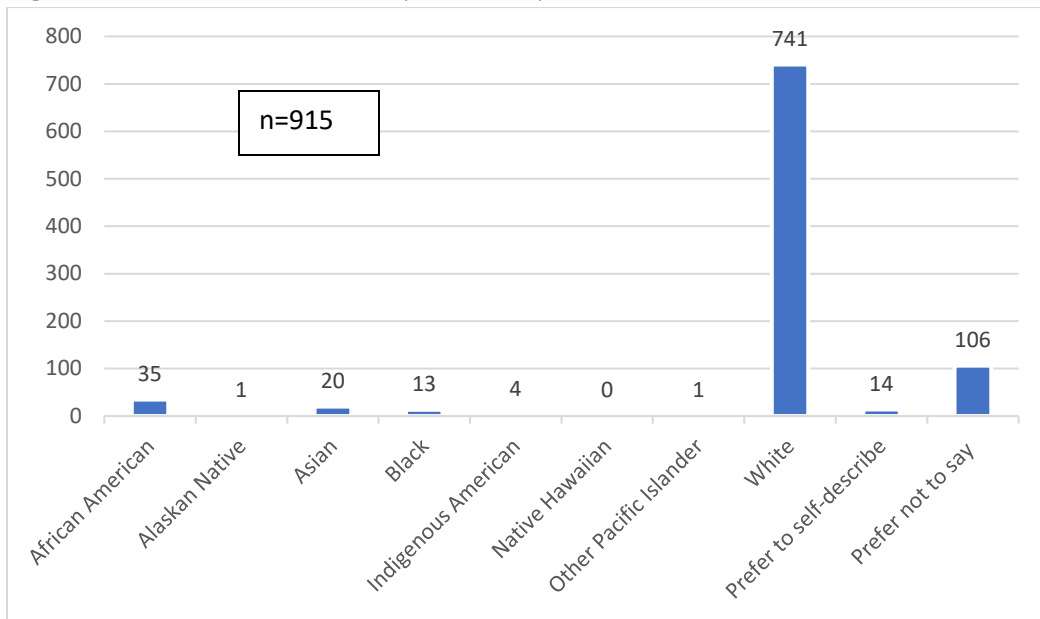
Of the 16 individuals who included an open text response, six (37.5%) were considering leaving the workforce due to burnout or otherwise described job stress. Another five (31.3%) were considering a life change like retirement, career change, or graduate school. The remaining respondents reported considering leaving the workforce due to things like their supervisor, job instability, or low pay.

Regardless of their intentions to stay in their current position or seek other employment, many participants spoke about the toll that working at the University during the COVID-19 pandemic had on their mental health.

Section 4: Demographics

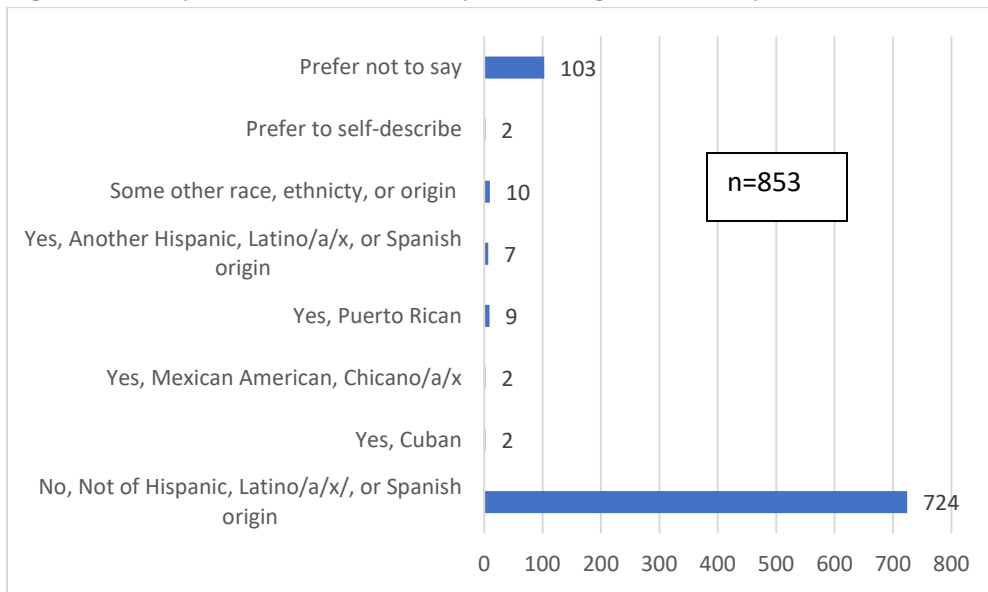
The following figures show participants' self-reported demographic data. The questions about race and ethnicity allowed participants to select multiple from a list, while gender identity required a typed response. As in the rest of the survey, all questions were optional. Demographic details are only reported in aggregate to protect anonymity of survey respondents.

Figure 15: Racial/Ethnic Identity of Participants



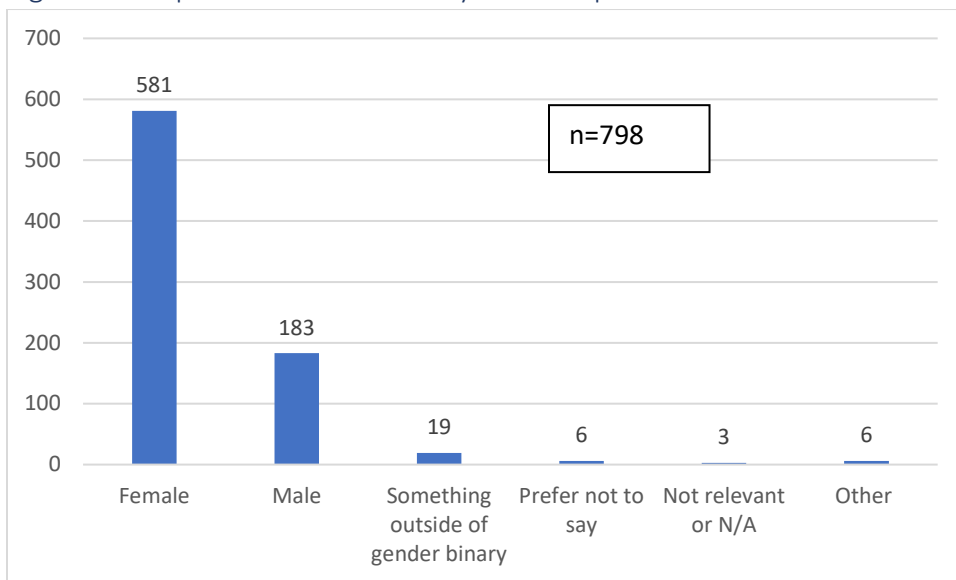
Participants were able to select all answers that applied in this question. Of the 14 participants who chose to self-describe, six included some other ethnic identity (for example, “European” or “America”) while four included responses like “human being” or “why does it matter?”. The remaining four participants who chose to self-describe did not include anything in the open text portion of this question.

Figure 16: Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish Origin of Participants



Participants were able to select all answers that applied for this question. Of the two participants who wished to self-describe, neither provided an open text description.

Figure 17: Reported Gender Identity of Participants



Because gender identity was asked in an open text format, I collapsed similar answers for analysis. Collapsed categories should not be seen as a commentary on gender identity or the use of pronouns to determine gender identity. Rather, this collapsing is a simplification of the data to estimate the gender

identity of survey participants with the information provided. A more in-depth study of responsibility creep as related to gender identity would be necessary to speak to any association between the two.

The “female” category includes responses like: “woman”, “she/her”, “cisgender woman”, “straight woman” and “feminine”. Similarly, the “male” category includes responses like: “man”, “he/him/his”, and “I am male”. Responses grouped as “something outside of gender binary” include: “agender”, “gender fluid,” “gender queer,” “nonbinary/fluid”, and “it’s complicated”, among other responses. This grouping should not be taken to conflate these identities, but rather to place them outside of a binary understanding of gender as simply male or female. Other responses included things like “yes” and “awesome”.

This overwhelmingly white, non-Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x or Spanish, and female-identified group of participants may reflect Pitt staff demographics more broadly. The University of Pittsburgh Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Staff Diversity Dashboard shows non-union eligible staff in Fall 2020 was 79.7% white and 65.3% female (University of Pittsburgh, 2021). The relatively homogenous sample also reflects those with the ability or desire to speak about their job satisfaction.

A few participants included responses expressing that the University’s lack of diversity was an issue for their working conditions or the University more broadly. Others attributed Pitt’s pay scales to the University staff’s lack of diversity explaining, advocating for Pitt to do more to retain Black employees:

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