



2020 Staff Climate Survey, Pre-Print Research Brief

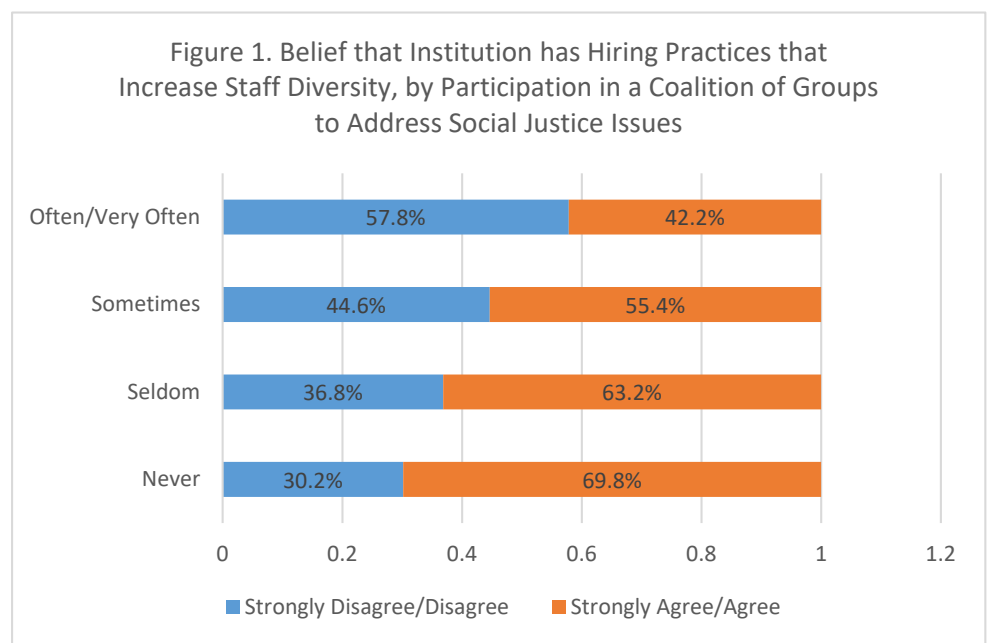
By: Victoria Couch

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program began administering the Staff Climate Survey in 2017 to explore and understand staff perspectives and experiences related to the campus climate for diversity. Thus, survey items within the SCS overlap with the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey and the HERI Faculty Survey (FAC), enabling institutions to compare perceptions of the campus climate for diversity among students, faculty, and staff. The sample for the 2020 Staff Climate Survey includes a total of 4,402 staff members from 16 institutions: five public four-year colleges, three private/nonsectarian four-year colleges, two private universities, two Catholic four-year colleges, two other religious four-year colleges, one community college, and one public university.

Diversity-Related Hiring Practices

Opinions are fairly split on diversity-related hiring practices, with 60.7% of staff reporting that their institution has effective hiring practices that increase staff diversity. Figure 1 details how staff participation in diversity-related campus events is related to perceptions of hiring practices.

More generally, frequent participation in such events differs across racial groups. When examining participation in a coalition of different groups to address social justice issues, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (n=12) staff attend such events often or very often at the highest rates (33.3%). Meanwhile, one-quarter of Black staff (25.8%) and one in five Latinx staff (19.9%) attend events with this level of frequency. This is followed by Multiracial staff (18.6%). Finally,



Asian staff (14.8%) and White staff (13.7%) attend such events at the lowest rates. Native American/Alaska Native respondents were omitted from the analysis due to a low sample size (n=6).

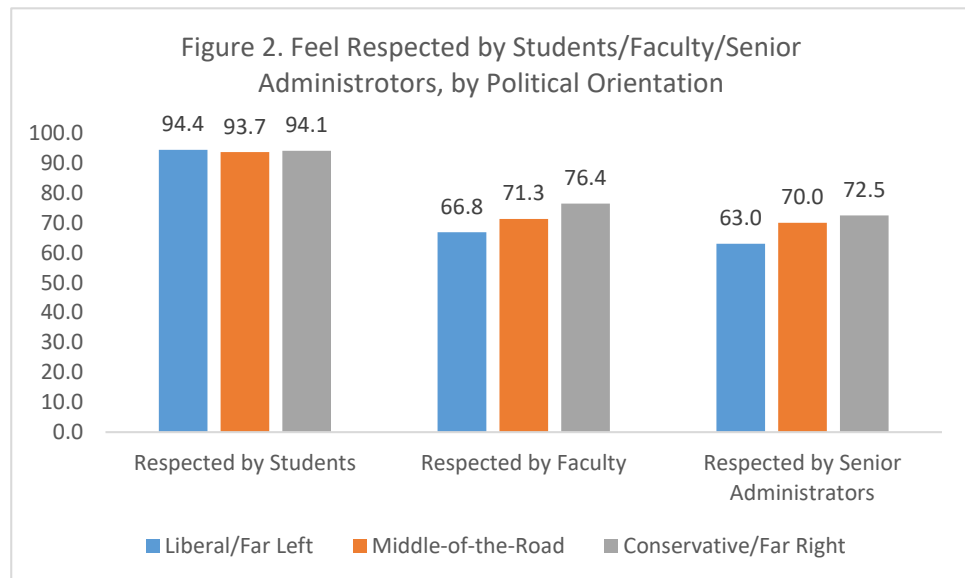


Increased participation in a campus coalition of different groups to address social justice issues is associated with a lower likelihood of believing that their campus has effective hiring policies related to diversity. The majority of those who have never participated in such a group (69.8%) strongly agree or agree that their institution has effective diversity-related hiring practices. This figure steadily decreases down to those who attend such events very often or often, of whom only 42.2% believe this to be true.

Respect

Staff report differing levels of respect from various groups on campus. Nearly all (94.0%) feel respected by students, while just under three-quarters (71.1%) feel respected by faculty. Slightly fewer (68.3%) feel respected by senior administrators. These findings segment in notable ways when examining perceptions of respect by staff political orientation, as detailed in

Figure 2. Overall, staff identify as middle-of-the-road (42.6%) and liberal/far left (40.7%) at similar rates, while 16.7% identify as conservative/far right. Nearly all staff across every political orientation feel



respected by students though differences emerge when examining respect from faculty and senior administrators. Conservative staff report the highest perceptions of respect from faculty (76.4%) followed closely by staff with a middle-of-the-road orientation (71.3%). Liberal/far left staff have the lowest levels of feeling respected by faculty (66.8%). Respect from senior administrators follows a similar pattern. Conservative/far right staff are most likely to report feeling respect from this group (72.5%) followed closely by middle-of-the-road staff (70.0%). Liberal/far left staff once again lag behind their peers, with 63.0% feeling respected by senior administrators.

These findings are somewhat surprising, given that political discourse on higher education in recent years has raised concerns that conservatives on college campuses perceive a hostile climate. A Gallup report found that Republicans have lower levels of confidence in US higher education than their Democrat peers (Newport & Busteed, 2017). Amongst Republicans that cite low confidence in higher education, one-third believe that colleges and universities are



“too liberal/political” (Newport & Busted). HERI’s analysis demonstrates that at least amongst this year’s staff respondents, these concerns do not appear to bear out given that conservative/far right staff actually report the highest levels of feeling respected by both faculty and senior administrators.

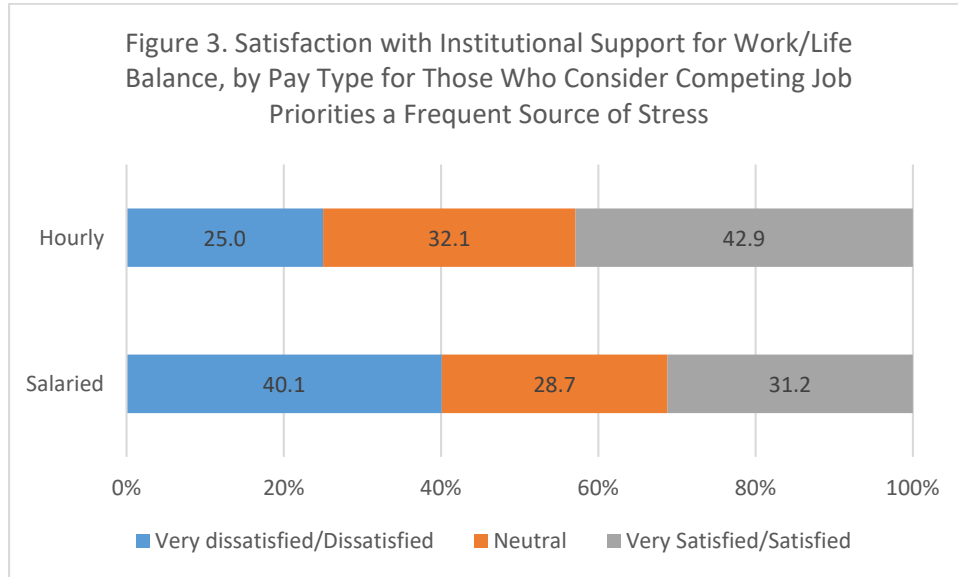
Work Capacity

Staff also share concerns related to work capacity. While over one-quarter (28.0%) say that their workload is not manageable given the hours they are scheduled to work, more than half (52.6%) say that competing job priorities/deadlines have been a source of stress in the past year.

In some cases, these stressors are amplified by staff pay type. Hourly staff are more likely to say that their workload is manageable given the hours they are scheduled to work. One-quarter (24.2%) of hourly staff strongly agree that this is the case, compared to 17.1% of salaried employees. Meanwhile, 6.1% of hourly staff strongly disagree that their workload is manageable compared to 10.5% of salaried staff.

Hourly staff also feel lower levels of stress compared to salaried staff regarding competing job priorities/deadlines. Over half (58.0) of hourly staff say this has not been a source of stress at all in the past year. This is 16 percentage points higher than the share of salaried staff who have never felt stress in this area (41.7%). Similarly, only one-third (32.5%) of hourly staff feel that competing job priorities/deadlines is somewhat a source of stress compared to 46.1% of salaried staff. The difference is less pronounced for those who feel competing deadlines are an extensive form of stress, with 9.5% of hourly staff and 12.1% of salaried staff feeling this way.

Staff satisfaction with institutional support for work-life balance further enhances our understanding in this area, as demonstrated in Figure 3. When looking only at staff who indicated that competing job priorities/deadlines were a frequent source of stress, salaried staff had lower levels of satisfaction than their hourly counterparts. Slightly under one-third (31.2%) of salaried staff are very satisfied/satisfied, a figure that is roughly ten percentage points lower than satisfaction for hourly staff (42.9%). The gap is even wider when examining those who indicated they are very dissatisfied/dissatisfied. A substantial proportion of salaried staff (40.1%) are very dissatisfied/dissatisfied compared to only one-quarter (25.0%) of hourly staff. Though salaried and hourly staff alike express concern with institutional support for work/life balance, salaried staff once again have more urgent opinions related to capacity not only in their day-to-day workloads but also in relation to the greater institutional culture.



Climate for Disability

When examining individual disability types, nearly one in five staff (18.1%) indicated they have a psychological disorder (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.) while 13.7% said they have a chronic illness. A smaller proportion of staff have a physical or sensory disability (5.3%), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (4.2%), learning disability (3.0%), autism spectrum disorder (0.5%), or some other kind of disability (4.2%). Aggregating all staff respondents who indicated they have at least one of these disability types shows that over one-quarter (28.3%) of staff have some kind of disability.

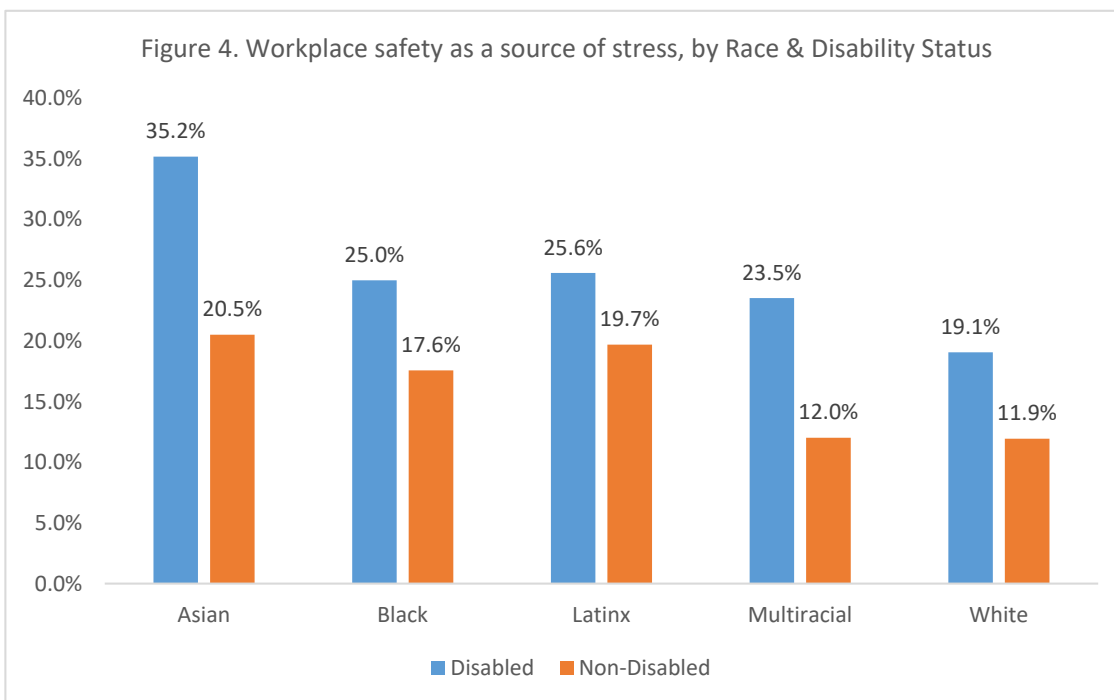
The climate for disability is often overlooked even as staff share pressing concerns and experiences in this area. Roughly one in fourteen staff (7.0%) reported that they have been discriminated against or excluded from activities at their institution due to their ability/disability status. Nearly three times the proportion of disabled staff ¹(12.5%) report experiencing discrimination in this area relative to their non-disabled peers (4.4%). Even so, the majority of staff (57.0%) are very satisfied or satisfied with the atmosphere for individuals with disabilities at their institution. Meanwhile, one-quarter of staff (25.9%) are neutral and 17.1% are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the climate in this area. Non-disabled staff report higher levels of satisfaction in this area than disabled staff (59.4% and 51.8% respectively), though the satisfaction gap is not as pronounced as might be expected given the substantial divide between these groups when examining their experiences with discrimination. Approximately one-quarter of disabled staff (24.4%) and non-disabled staff (26.5%) are neutral.

¹ We use identity-first language (“disabled staff”) rather than person-first language (“staff with disabilities”) in accordance with disability activists and scholars who pose that this framing, “...construes disability as a function of social and political experiences occurring within a world designed largely for nondisabled people” (Dunn & Andrews, 2015)

As expected, disabled staff report slightly higher levels of being dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the climate for individuals with disabilities (23.7%) compared to non-disabled staff (14.1%).

Overall, one-quarter (25.1%) of staff cite the physical work environment as a source of stress while 16.7% say that workplace safety is a source of stress. When disaggregating by disability status, responses show that disabled staff have heightened concerns in this area compared to their non-disabled peers. Slightly under one-third (31.8%) of disabled staff say the physical work environment is a source of stress for them. This figure is ten percentage points higher than the share of non-disabled staff who say the same (21.6%). Similarly, 21.6% of disabled staff experience stress related to workplace safety compared to 14.2% of non-disabled staff.

These dynamics are further complicated when examining workplace safety concerns by disability status and race, as shown in Figure 4. Disabled staff outpace their non-disabled peers in citing workplace safety as a source of stress across all racial groups. Disabled Asian staff report the greatest levels of concern in this area at 35.2%. This figure is ten percentage points



higher than the groups with the next highest levels of workplace safety stress: disabled Latinx staff (25.6%) and disabled

Black staff (25.0%). Comparing workplace safety as a source of stress within racial groups, the difference between disabled and non-disabled staff is greatest for Asian staff (14.7 percentage point difference) and Multiracial staff (11.5 percentage point difference). Native American/Alaska Native (n=1) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (n=4) staff were omitted from the analysis due to small sample sizes across disaggregated categories. These findings align with the scholarly understanding that ableism and racism coalesce in distinct ways for disabled Students of Color in higher education (Annamma et al, 2018).



Conclusion

Staff provide perspectives on a range of campus climate matters that can translate to actionable takeaways for colleges and universities. Institutions that are examining diversity-related hiring practices may consider including staff who attend social justice-oriented events into strategic planning, since staff who attend such events are more likely to be critical of hiring practices in this area. Findings also demonstrate that demands on staff members' time can vary based on pay type, highlighting the need for equitable workload distribution. Finally, disabled staff have elevated concerns related to workplace safety, and the severity of these concerns can vary by racial group. Such concerns are especially pressing to address in the current pandemic and the immediate aftermath.

References

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