

# 2020 Student Affairs Staff Survey: Results Summary

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## Executive Summary

The Student Affairs Staff Survey was administered during December 2020 and January 2021. A total of 322 staff members responded to the survey representing a range of job roles. More than half (68%) of the respondents were working remotely. While the majority of staff (90%) indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their ability to perform their work in their current locations, challenges to effective work were identified. Key findings fell into two primary theme areas: 1) challenges of current work situations and 2) concerns with leadership and communication.

### ***Challenges and Support:***

- The top challenge was screen fatigue (reported by 54% of respondents), followed by more intangible stressors, such as the political climate (43%) and worry about job security (41%).
- Effective communication and ergonomic needs topped the supports desired, including providing consistent information about the current budget, HR and campus operational plans (50%).
- In open-ended comments, lack of ergonomic equipment, concerns about overall workload pressure, and requests for financial support (particularly for equipment to support work from home) emerged as common themes.
- Flexible scheduling, including desiring longer term remote work options, was also a frequent request.

### ***Leadership and Communication:***

- The majority of SA staff agreed that they felt supported by their direct supervisors (84%), and the SA leadership team more broadly (75%). In addition, more than three quarters of all respondents expressed confidence in “SA leadership’s ability to make decisions that positively manage us through this crisis.”
- Several themes emerged across all the open-ended comment questions, including concern about poor communication, perceived lack of leadership, and the need for more effective organizational planning.

## Introduction

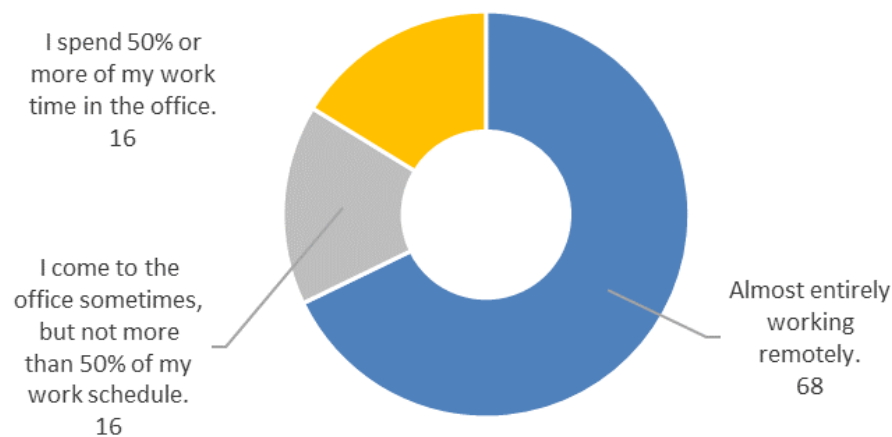
The 2020 Student Affairs (SA) Staff Survey was administered in December 2020 through mid-January 2021 to gather a snapshot of how staff were faring with the changes placed on work roles due to the COVID-19 “Safer at Home” orders. Staff were invited to participate in the survey through an email message from VCSA Monroe Gorden (and a reminder email in the week before the survey closed). A total of 322 staff members responded to the survey, representing a range of job roles. More than half (68%) of the respondents were working remotely, while the remainder were equally split between majority on-campus roles and those who come to campus occasionally for their work duties.

### What best represents your work role in Student Affairs?

	N	%
Primarily direct student service	104	32.3
Primarily administrative/technical/support service (e.g. IT, finance, analytical roles)	60	18.6
A mix of student-facing and administrative roles	93	28.9
Primarily leadership/management/supervision	56	17.4
Other	8	2.5
Did not respond	1	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### The majority of respondents are fully remote workers

% reporting "what best represents your current workplace location"



The survey focused on three primary question areas:

- How well staff are managing their roles in the new environments
- What SA might do to support staff work during this time
- Perceptions of leadership support

## Managing the Changed Work Environment

The majority of staff (90%) indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their ability to perform their work in their current locations. In fact, through open-ended responses, many remote workers indicated a desire for more telecommuting options to remain after the COVID crisis (see detail in later section).

### The majority of respondents are satisfied with their ability to get work done in their current circumstances

% reporting "Overall how satisfied are you with your ability to effectively perform your work duties in your current workplace location?"

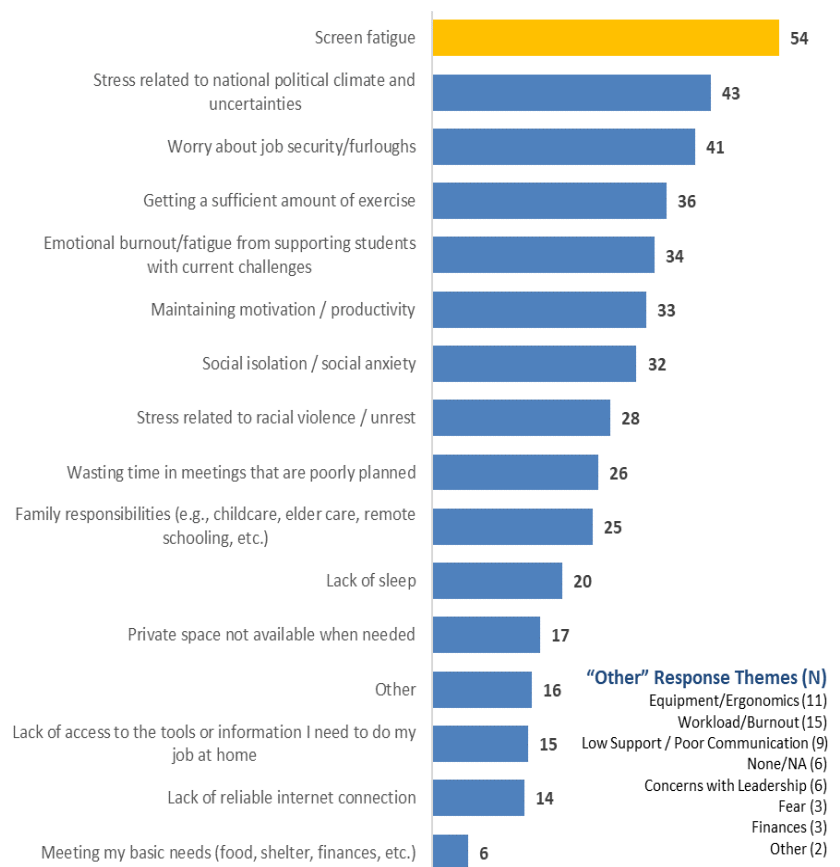


When asked about the “challenges to performing your work duties” that staff members were experiencing, not surprisingly, the top challenge was screen fatigue (reported by 54% of respondents), followed by more intangible stressors, such as the political climate and worry about job security. Forty-nine respondents (16%) indicated something “other” than the options provided, and their comments included such topics as lack of ergonomic equipment, and concerns about overall workload pressure. In addition, several themes that emerged in stronger ways in later questions also emerged here, including concern about poor communication and perceived lack of leadership.

Staff who indicated that they lacked “access to the tools or information I need to do my job at home,” were specifically prompted to elaborate on those needs. A total of 42 responses were provided, with concerns about monitors, access to physical files, and ergonomic equipment appearing as the most frequent.

### Screen fatigue is a top challenge--experienced by more than 50% of staff

% reporting challenges to effectively performing work duties



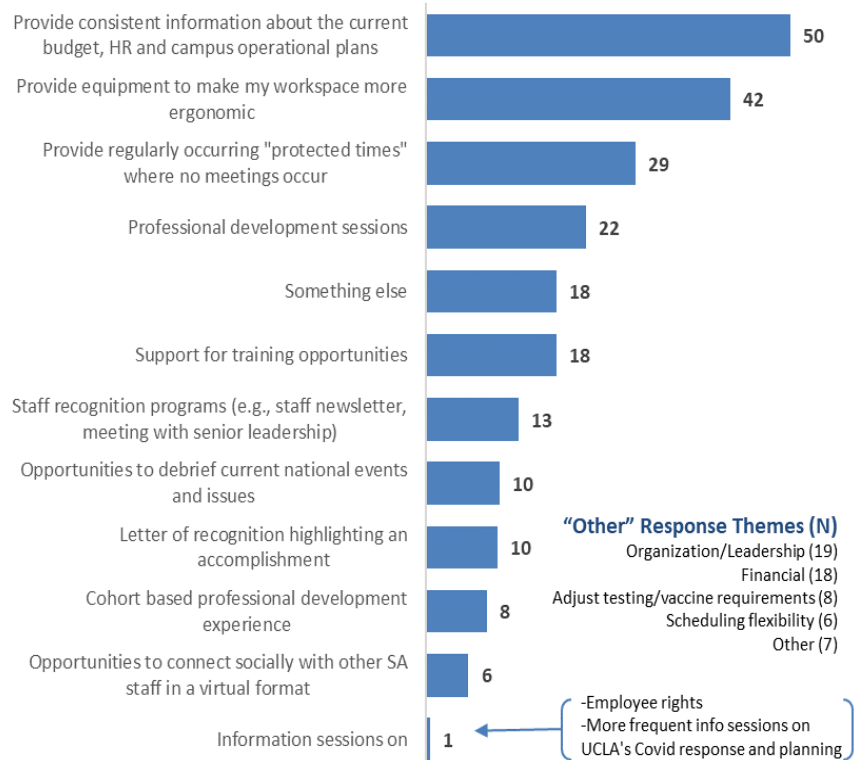
## Supporting Staff Needs

Respondents were asked to select the top three things that SA could do to support their work. Again, communication and ergonomic needs topped the results, with 50% indicating that consistent budget, HR and operational information would be helpful, and 42% indicating that more support to access ergonomic equipment would be appreciated.

There were 56 total “something else” responses which fell into a variety of theme areas, including financial supports and more effective organizational planning and leadership. Flexible scheduling, including more specific comments about desiring longer term remote work options also reappeared as a theme in these comments.

## More consistent operational information and ergonomic support top the reported staff needs

% reporting “top 3 things SA can do to support your work during this time.”

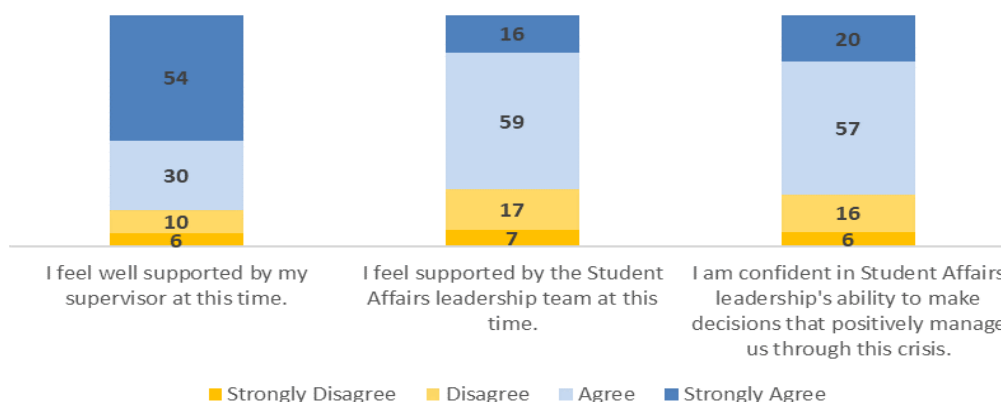


## Perspectives on Leadership

A final set of questions asked staff to indicate their level of agreement with three statements about the level of support being provided by SA leadership during this time. The majority of SA staff agreed that they felt supported by both their direct supervisors and the SA leadership team more broadly, with slightly more agreement at the direct supervisor level. Over three quarters of all staff respondents expressed confidence in “SA leadership’s ability to make decisions that positively manage us through this crisis.”

## Staff are more likely to feel supported at their local leadership level (by supervisors) than at the larger SA level

% reporting agreement or disagreement



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Respondents who marked “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to any of the three leadership questions were prompted to provide additional context for their rating, specifically, “what could help you feel supported, and/or confident in leadership's decisions during this time?” Of the 99 individuals (31% of the total respondents) who were offered the option to provide a response, 66 chose to do so. Themes that emerged from these comments are summarized below.

**Poor Communication/ Lack of Transparency (N=36; 55% of responses)**

Comments in this area often described a desire for more open, consistent and frequent communication about the overall state of affairs and decision-making. This theme often co-occurred with the next one (on leadership) as staff asked specifically for clearer communication of a vision and goals for the organization.

*“Regular meetings with my supervisor that includes relevant information to my job. More transparent information about what the plan is / what’s being considered as decisions are made could help me feel more confident in leadership’s decisions.”*

*“I currently feel like there is a gap in communication and/or transparency. I’m not sure if that gap is from senior leadership or in how the directors communicate at the lower level. But it feels like different staffs get different sets of information. That makes me question the information that I’m getting - and impacts my ability to use the information provided in my work.”*

**Lack of Vision/ Direction/ Leadership (N=18; 27% of responses)**

In this theme, staff were concerned about a lack of vision and goals for the organization (which some noted was an issue prior to COVID). Some expressed concern that lack of planning leads to too frequent changing of direction and inefficient work overall.

*“SLT doesn’t appear to be thinking and planning proactively or innovatively - it appears to be reactive and risks maintaining the current structures and silos. It’s understandable in the current climate and everyone can feel exhausted much of the time. But I don’t have confidence in our collective ability to create something better for our students.”*

*“I am unaware of any decision made by leadership. We have had no communication about plans other than periodic re-opening plans (when it was kind of obvious re-opening was not going to happen this year). No discussion of how to move forward effectively in a virtual world. No coordinated plans for what programs will be running as a department.”*

**Lack of Workload Support (N=14; 21% of responses)**

Workload support concerns centered on additional burdens placed on staff to use their “protected time” on nights and weekends as well as to use their own equipment and funds to support their effective work from home. On-campus staff also noted concerns about perceived lack of concern about their overall safety.

*“There’s a lot of discussion about how to support our staff and students, but I’m not seeing actions. Our schedules are jam-packed and we have so many meetings. And they give us a lot of projects at the last minute, which requires us to use ‘protected time’ as well as evenings and weekends.”*

*“I believe that those with direct student support roles have experienced the most emotional labor and on top of all the uncertainties... it would be nice to be given both protected time once in a while and some sort of bonus (if annual raise is still not on the table).”*

**Show More Care (N=11; 17% of responses)**

Comments in this theme indicated that staff often felt their work above and beyond was not seen or acknowledged by leadership and that in some cases unreasonable expectations were placed on staff in a manner that showed a lack of concern for their welfare.

*“It’s hard to feel seen or supported when it feels like the people in leadership making decisions don’t consider you - because how can you consider how it affects someone or something if you don’t know what that someone does, or what function that something serves...it feels like*

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*my work can only be seen or felt when I'm not doing it or when I mess up, with no understanding of what it means to actively do that work every day."*

*"I feel as if some of the leadership has been insensitive of the fear of job security and campus and department initiatives."*

### **Concerns about Forced Testing/Vaccines (N=4; 6% of responses)**

This theme showed up at a low level across several of the open response questions, and appears to be more prevalent among staff working on campus. These respondents saw requirements for testing and vaccination as being too extreme a response to the pandemic.

## Overall Feedback

The final survey question prompted staff to provide any additional feedback they had about their experience working during the Safer at Home period. One hundred respondents provided comments in this area. Themes of these comments are summarized below.

### **Positive Aspects (N=39)**

Responses in this theme discussed the positive aspects of current situations (primarily among those working remotely) including reduced commute, flexibility, and lower distractions.

*"I happen to like working from home because I have time to eat lunch with my family and walk out dog, and the lack of a commute makes a real difference in "found time."*

*"Given the challenges of commuting from far distances, while it has been difficult to constantly work from home, it has also been beneficial to have more time to focus on work and not having to deal with city traffic."*

### **Future State Suggestions (N=38)**

Comments in this area centered around what could be learned from the current circumstances and applied to the future, while a few comments were around service delivery options, the vast majority of these comments co-occurred with the positive aspects theme above, as staff requested full consideration of expanded remote work options after the return to campus.

*"I have surprisingly been able to adjust my work to remote environment easier than expected and would like options to continue this type of work throughout the week even when we return to normal operations. More options in the future for remote/virtual meetings."*

*"I appreciate the additional time it has allowed for personal reflection, growth and time for myself. However, I do think going into work physically helps keep me motivated and connected, so post-pandemic, I would envision some sort of hybrid working conditions, with more leniency with the possibility of working from home in the regular school year."*

### **Burnout/workload/stress (N=23)**

Echoing comments made in earlier questions, this theme again reinforced the overall burden felt by staff in terms of overall workload, but also the related stressors of inactivity, too much screen time, and other factors related to ongoing remote work (including managing the stress and concerns of students and other stakeholders).

*"In my department, there are more meetings now than ever before. Those of us who are student facing still need to meet the students' needs while also balancing busy meeting schedules leaving no room for the recommended times away from the screen, movement, balance, etc. Those who don't have student facing roles don't understand the difference in workload and fatigue when you're on Zoom all day long and struggle to find admin time for other duties."*

*"I don't know the background or particulars but how it 'feels' is that our department has been working 150% while other units remain closed (or significantly reduced operation) but the staff in those units seem to have the option to decline to be re-deployed to help us... it doesn't feel like Student Affairs is able to leverage staff resources to help us."*

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### **Leadership (N=14)**

Similar to the leadership and communication themes that emerged in previous questions, many comments in this section called for clearer leadership and more support across the organization. However, some comments also praised leaders and supervisors for the support that the staff felt has been provided.

*"There was a distinct lack of leadership prior to covid, now it's as if no one exists in a leadership position, we do our jobs per irregular supervisory communication and have no idea what else is happening."*

*"I'm mostly good with this, but I'm also mostly in the office. I'm not thrilled with the timeliness and completeness of the information that I get, but I'm satisfied--and there's something to be said for that."*

*"As a staff member, though supported by direct supervisors, there's been no real attempt to address how staff has struggled during this transition."*

### **Family Support (N=6)**

This theme focused on the challenges of having to care for family members (often children) while also managing remote work responsibilities.

*"Most staff is clueless to the challenges working parents are facing 24 hours a day while managing their work. it's not the same thing as taking care of a dog at home."*

*"Being a working parent at this time is very tough. My child needs a lot of support at home to be able to successfully complete remote schooling through LAUSD, and we spend 6 hours a day every weekday on school between live classes and homework activities on Seesaw. We do not have relatives close by or any childcare assistance, and we wouldn't take any childcare assistance at this time even if it was available, because my child is in a high-risk group for possible complications from COVID. I only have 1 child and a partner--it must be much tougher for single parents and/or for parents of multiple children."*