

## **Coping with the Pandemic Employee Survey 2019 (CoPES-19): Report of Results**

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### **Abstract**

Developed in 2020 and distributed in 2021, the *Coping with the Pandemic Employee Survey 2019* generated insights into the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic among University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's staff and faculty. Survey questions addressed pandemic-related stress and coping, along with pre-pandemic experiences that could influence reactions to the pandemic. Nearly 1000 campus members selected into the study, while 631 provided valid data. Results from quantitative and qualitative data analysis yield implications for campus policies and practices. Recommendations that emerged from the data are intended to promote staff and faculty well-being, satisfaction, and productivity. Some of these have been implemented and could continue, and most are listed below.

- Promote flexible schedules to include remote work and variable schedules.
- Support leaves of absence when appropriate.
- Encourage self-care including time outside, with pets, and with family and friends.
- Facilitate meaningful work, including time for creativity and reflection.
- Create or enhance staff and faculty affinity support groups (e.g., caretaker support group).
- Allow for virtual meetings to mitigate COVID-19 spread.
- Permit cross-departmental collaboration.
- Devote virtual meeting time to check-ins.
- Make available mental health and self-care resources (e.g., EAP, staff well-being seminars).
- Acknowledge the mental health challenges associated with the crisis, including personal losses.
- Communicate frequently and candidly with staff and faculty, about the following topics:
  - COVID-19 campus safety guidelines and policies
  - Furloughs and layoffs
  - Changing expectations during the crisis
  - Available mental health and related resources
  - "Bad" pandemic-related news
  - Insights about long-term future of the university
- Communicate using e-mails and other methods that permit reciprocity (e.g., town halls).
- Be considerate of increased workloads:
  - Reduce busy work and meetings (when other communication pathways would suffice)
  - Reduce unnecessary outputs (e.g., reduce faculty service requirements)
  - Prioritize meeting goals over working hours, consistent with distributed work principles
  - Condense Team or Zoom meetings or replace them altogether via brief communications
  - Allow for performance evaluations to reflect the unique circumstances of the pandemic
  - Reward those who are most productive
  - End the hiring freeze as soon as possible to revitalize various units
- Limit furloughs and layoffs to the extent possible.
- Promote outdoor meetings and campus gatherings.

## Introduction

In 2021, approximately one-year into the pandemic, hundreds of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) employees completed a survey about their pandemic-related experiences. Titled *Coping with the Pandemic: Employee Survey 2019 (CoPES-19)*, the survey was designed to inform campus-level policies and practices. Closed-ended questions generated quantitative data and provided a snapshot into employees' global experiences of stress and coping. An open-ended question, question 26 or Q26, asked respondents how campus leaders could support their well-being during and after the pandemic.

## Procedures and Sample

The survey was assembled in late 2020 and early 2021 by Professor Topitzes, Dean Jussel, and Distinguished Professor Fouad along with a University of Wisconsin-Madison research team. Items included validated scales and pandemic-specific questions from federally sponsored studies. Authors distributed the survey campus-wide with the help of several units. The UWM Student Affairs Office, Dean of Students Office, Social Work Department and Counseling Psychology Program sponsored the project, and a number of additional entities, including the Provost's Office, helped distribute the survey to campus community members. A total of 631 UWM staff and faculty, including student employees, selected into the study and submitted complete and valid data, i.e., at least an 80% item completion rate. All participants completed surveys via the online Qualtrics system between March and May, 2021.

The composition of the study sample was as follows:

- Age: ranging from 18 to 75; mean of 45
- Race/ethnicity: majority identified as white (88%) and/or non-Hispanic (95%)
- Gender: majority identified as women (73%) and 1% identified as non-binary or did not answer
- Employee type: majority were staff (69% staff, 5% student employees), rest were faculty (26%)
- Educational attainment: majority bachelor's degree or higher (93%)

## Quantitative Survey Data

Quantitative results revealed that a good proportion of survey completers, including student employees, experienced the pandemic as stressful or even traumatically stressful. That written, many also reported that the pandemic conferred personal benefit.

## Quantitative Data Results

The following results, taken from the closed-ended survey questions, emerge from simple descriptive statistics and multivariate regression analyses.

**Negative experiences.** Of all 631 faculty and staff survey respondents:

- 73% had at least one pandemic related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom
- 38% screened positive for PTSD based on pandemic-related experiences
- 44% indicated that the pandemic was very or extremely stressful
- 23% indicated that their mental health had been harmed by the pandemic
- 30% felt a lack of optimism about their career, unsure of their future and frustrated about making future plans

That written, 94% of survey completers felt that they had the tools to be adaptable and flexible in adjusting their career to the demands of the pandemic-altered workplace

We conclude that many staff and faculty faced multiple and/or severe stressors during the pandemic, at least leading up to spring of 2021. We conducted multivariate regression analyses to determine which personal factors might have increased the probability of experiencing the pandemic as highly stressful, traumatically stressful, or harmful to mental health. The following appeared as such risk factors:

- Younger in age
- Caregiving
- Social isolation
- Uncertainty about the future
- Death of loved one due to COVID-19
- Concerns over political or civic strife

**Coping.** Multivariate regression analyses were conducted to explore strategies that protected against PTSD risk or mental health harm during the pandemic. Several processes appeared to confer benefit:

- Spending time outdoors
- Spending time with pets
- Spending time with family or friends
- Finding meaning in work

**Positive Experiences.** Importantly, the survey data also revealed that the pandemic was not highly or traumatically stressful for everyone. In fact, some reported enjoying specific benefits during this time:

- 72% noted working from home during the pandemic represented a life improvement
- 63% reported spending more time with family or friends during the pandemic
- 49% mentioned engaging in self-care or hobbies during the pandemic

One or some combination of these or other benefits led 35% of respondents to report that their lives had improved over the course of the pandemic.

### **Qualitative Survey Data**

Qualitative data emerged from Q26, which read, “How can your campus support your overall well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?” This item reflected investigators’ expectation that study participants would share insights into campus practices and policies that did or could mitigate work stress and promote work satisfaction during the pandemic. Overall, 384 respondents (61% of total) answered Q26.<sup>i</sup>

### **Analysis Strategy**

Relying on a thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2016),<sup>ii</sup> we took a grounded and exploratory approach to data analysis, allowing participant responses to Q26 to speak for themselves. In the initial step of data analysis, Michael Levandoski examined the data for common ideas. Next, he organized the data into approximately 30 codes, with the help of Qualtrics and Excel data filing systems. Subsequently, Mr. Levandoski abstracted codes into approximately 15 themes. From there, Professor Topitzes and Mr. Levandoski pruned the codes and themes, removing duplicative data extracts from codes and even deleting some codes altogether. Finally, Professor Topitzes and Mr. Levandoski, with the help of Dean Jussel and Distinguished Professor Fouad, synthesized the data, including mixing quantitative and qualitative data, into narrative formats. While the work was meant to empower the voices of study participants, we acknowledge that the final results are inevitably influenced by our own biases.

## **Q26 Results**

The qualitative analysis unearthed a number of themes, such as public health crisis, well-being, campus communications, employee compensation and workload, and employee satisfaction. Within each, authors identified multiple codes. Participant responses included both praise and criticism of campus policies and practices along with recommendations for the future. Below we present the participant themes and codes, within the context of a narrative that hues closely to the raw data.

**Public health crisis.** Under the theme of public health crisis, we identified several subthemes or codes, including safety, health, and crisis management.

**Safety:** Thirty-two respondents or just over 5% of study participants alluded to safety issues when responding to the Q26. All articulated concerns pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic, or specifically to the safety threats associated with the pandemic.

Several respondents serving in units that require on-campus presence and/or direct interactions with others expressed concern that the unique dangers they faced during the pandemic went unnoticed and unaddressed at the campus level. For instance, despite the general understanding that the following policies and practices were in place, representatives of campus health clinics, housing services, and custodial services shared a wish that their units would have received personal protective equipment during the first few months of the pandemic along with specific guidelines from the campus to ensure their protection against the COVID-19 infection early in the crisis.

As for opinions about returning to campus, a number of respondents reported understanding that campus leaders needed to balance fiscal and public health concerns when considering re-opening the campus. Many respondents expressed appreciation for campus-located testing and vaccination services along with frequent and open campus communications announcing COVID-19 policy updates. A good number of respondents also shared their appreciation for policies and practices intended to maximize vaccination rates across the campus. Respondents also requested regular announcement about campus vaccination rates (as was done).

Five respondents also expressed support for campus policies that provided clear public health safety guidelines for a physical return to campus in general and to the classroom in particular. These guidelines included social distancing requirements, mask mandates, and proof of vaccination. A large number of respondents also gave their strong support to flexible work schedules that enhanced employees' safety against COVID-19 infection. Practices identified as popular included working from home or combining work from home and from campus in a hybrid distributed work model. Other strategies recognized as helpful safety measures included staggering campus work times to limit the number of employees on campus at any one point, ensuring air flow within campus buildings, and holding events outside such as group lunches. Finally, one respondent requested that campus provide free on-campus parking during the return to campus for safety considerations. We can only guess at what dangers this respondent was considering; but crime rates have notoriously risen in the city at this time; and campus community members may be more at-risk for victimization when parking on city streets rather than in campus lots.

**Health.** Twenty-seven study participants (4.3% of the total) alluded to health-related topics when responding to Q26. The content of these responses focused both on physical and mental health. A number of respondents mentioned that they are working more intensely and/or longer hours during the pandemic with less resources. They are, in turn, registering the pressures of their work in their mental and physical health. Some respondents reported that they are experiencing burnout at work at present.

Members of certain units, such as housing or maintenance or university health care, mentioned that the in-person nature of their work put them at high risk for COVID-19 infection, as mentioned above. In addition, members of these units indicated that the nature of their work during the pandemic was physically straining. These respondents requested some special consideration for the enhanced infection risk or increased physical demands associated with their work during the pandemic.

In contrast, over 20 respondents indicated that working remotely from home improved their work-life balance and supported their mental health. Many also mentioned that open communications from campus leadership regarding pandemic-related policies helped to mitigate stress. Some reported that campus communications directly addressing employee mental health provided morale support.

A number of respondents offered policy recommendations for limiting employee physical or mental stress. These included the following:

- Continue with hybrid distributed or remote work model even after the pandemic.
- Enhance visibility of EAP programming and increase available sessions from 6 to 12.
- Conduct campus-wide or EAP-led seminars on mindfulness.
- Provide virtual seminars for employees on health, wellness, and coping with stress.
- Continue to require that students follow strict health and safety protocols on campus.
- Reduce unnecessary email messages.
- Limit mandatory online trainings, as these have overburdened some employees.
- Encourage supervisors to pay particular attention to employees facing excess risk:
  - Employees with pre-existing health conditions
  - Employees from groups that are discriminated against or marginalized

***Crisis management.*** Just over 11% of participants (n=74) alluded to pandemic-related crisis responses on the part of the campus when answering Q26. As the COVID-19 public health crisis hit campus, several problems emerged, according to participant responses. For instance, faculty transformed courses to online formats, which required a large investment of time. Many campus employees faced caregiving responsibilities or personal health challenges, which required leaves of absence. Campus clinical staff, according to one respondent, encountered safety concerns early in the pandemic when required to meet face-to-face with patients. Workloads increased for many, due to skyrocketing student needs according to some, or to unnecessary busywork according to others. At the same time, some employees reported working without pay when working “after hours” and/or during furlough days.

From a crisis management perspective, respondents identified a number of helpful campus policies and practices that campus officials implemented in the early days and throughout the pandemic. These included clear communications that took the form of general campus news updates, policy updates, and information about available resources. Most widely cited, however, was flexibility on the part of supervisors. Respondents praised supervisors for: allowing them to work from home, approving paid leaves of absence, and scheduling online meetings to ensure safety and enhance efficiency.

Recommendations to continue to successfully manage the public health crisis included the following (some of which have been done):

- Reduce unnecessary meetings and busy work
- Eliminate furloughs as soon as possible

- Vaccinate everyone and make widescale testing available
- Continue to follow scientific evidence regarding COVID-related policies and practices
- Communicate openly with the campus community about COVID-related policies and practices
- Alter performance reviews to reflect the current crisis
- Create a new normal that honors the opportunities inherent in this crisis, e.g., remote work,

**Well-being.** Under the theme of well-being, we identified several codes, including mental health, self-care, and connection.

**Mental health.** Fifty-one respondents (about 8% of study participants) addressed mental health within the context of well-being when answering Q26. A number expressed concerns about feelings of depression, languishing, or anxiety during the pandemic. However, a number of respondents addressed ways in which the campus can minimize mental health problems among employees during the pandemic while also promoting well-being. These included the following.

First, recognize the mental health impacts of the pandemic, as the campus has, through various means such as announcements. Second, provide public opportunities for campus community members to acknowledge the loss of campus members and loved ones during the pandemic, e.g., public mourning sessions.

Third, study participants again highlighted working from home as a practice to prevent mental health problems during the pandemic and to promote well-being. Respondents mentioned that working from home limits interactions with “difficult colleagues” or increases time with family members, both of which prevent stress. Virtual work also enables flexible scheduling, which can for instance help prevent “Zoom fatigue” or excessive screen time. Several respondents simply mentioned that working from home decreases stress, in part, by reducing commute times and enhancing work efficiency.

Fourth, a number of participants recommended that the campus increase the number of mental health resources on campus. These could include, for instance, mental health professionals devoted solely to staff and faculty, support groups, and trainings on mental health and well-being.

Fifth, respondents also identified specific trainings as potentially useful for mitigating mental health concerns during the pandemic. These included trainings on self-care and on working from home wisely, for instance, consciously separating work and personal life. Finally, a few respondents recommended that the campus sponsor outdoor gatherings for employees.

**Self-care.** The term self-care was mentioned by fourteen respondents, who identified university policies and practices that would enhance their self-care. For instance, several survey respondents indicated that following a remote and flexible work schedule promoted self-care practices. One respondent, for instance, reported engaging in a physical exercise routine at home after the children went to school and before starting work; consequently, although the respondent started working later than most colleagues, notable benefits accrued from the morning exercise routine, and the respondent hoped to retain it after the pandemic. Distributed work models suggest that flexible, home-based work schedules can contribute to employee self-care, job satisfaction, AND work productivity. Several respondents also recommended that the university make information and programming available on the topic of self-care. One also requested that supervisors support self-care and promote it through various means.

**Connection.** Eighteen respondents referenced the importance of connection to other campus members, in one way or another, when answering survey Q26. Two respondents extolled the virtues of Teams meetings for reasons related to connection to others. For instance, one respondent mentioned that such meetings facilitated conversations with external units with which the respondent rarely if ever interfaced previously. This was a very welcome development, according to the respondent. Another respondent reported that virtual meetings enabled several units to collaboratively complete the Racial Justice and Equity training, adding much value to the training experience according to the respondent.

Conversely, a number of respondents expressed concern over lost connections during the pandemic, and recommended ways in which campus supervisors and administrators can compensate for these relational disruptions. For example, one respondent bemoaned the loss of spontaneous office visits by colleagues. Another expressed concern over the loss of creative and reflective conversations during Teams meetings; instead, instrumental conversations dominated this respondent's experience of virtual gatherings. Recommended remedies to these and related situations included the following:

- Devote time in Teams meetings to check-ins and creative/reflective conversations
- Schedule non-work-related Team meetings if appropriate
- Schedule outdoor meet ups that could include a mass campus gathering

One last recommendation warrants individual attention. Several respondents requested that campus convene support groups for employees. Specifically, these respondents identified a need for support groups for caregivers as particularly pressing. Support group participants could exchange information and provide moral support to one another, as caregivers are facing multiple stressors during this pandemic, an assertion that our quantitative survey data support.

**Communications.** Under the theme of communications, we identified two subthemes or codes, i.e., check-in and general communications.

**Check-ins.** Eleven respondents addressed the topic of communication check-ins. Several mentioned appreciating the Chancellor's Town Hall meetings, as these gatherings provided clear insight into the rationale for various pandemic-related policy decisions according to the respondents. Respondents also praised the regular updates from campus leadership during the pandemic, while a number of respondents left the following suggestions for improving brief communications from campus:

- Schedule brief in-person meetings between campus leaders and university employees when safe
- Include a range of employee voices in electronic campus updates and check-ins
- Facilitate brief dialogues between campus leaders and university employees

**General communications.** Over 20% of study participants (133) discussed general communications in their responses to Q26. Nearly half expressed appreciation for the nature of campus communications during the pandemic, mentioning that communications have been "clear," "open," "transparent," "regular," "consistent," "compassionate", and/or "caring." Many of these respondents implored campus leadership to continue sharing such communications through different means such as email announcements, town hall meetings, and unit supervisors. Several respondents specifically requested that the campus leaders continue to level with the campus community through clear and direct communications, even when "the news is bad." These responses appear to reflect the public health ethic of sharing critical information with the public in clear and direct ways during times of crisis.

A number of respondents requested that campus leaders distribute messages to the campus community with specific content. Several people, for instance, requested that campus leadership continue to convey information about ever-changing university policy pertaining to COVID-19. One respondent reminded campus leadership to be sure to communicate about summer semester plans, not just COVID-19 plans for the academic semesters. Another respondent requested information about a larger, more general topic: the changing landscape of higher education and its potential effects on UWM.

Concerns about job security and professional development also emerged in participant responses. Two respondents requested that campus leadership reassure employees that their jobs are secure. A few other respondents requested transparency about furloughs and layoffs. Several other respondents recommended that officials publicize opportunities pertaining to professional growth, development, and advancement during this unique time of change, crisis and potential opportunity.

Multiple respondents urged campus leaders to clarify goals for the university and expectations for employees during this time of crisis. For instance, several respondents recommended changes for tenure guidelines during this time along with clear communications that articulate revised guidelines. Several respondents also suggested changes in performance review criteria, across units and roles, during this time. All changes, in turn, should be clearly communicated to involved parties according to respondents. Finally, approximately ten respondents articulated a need for flexibility in employee expectations and evaluations during this time. Most of these respondents also urged campus leaders to promote flexibility not only for students but for campus employees via clear, widespread communiques.

Regarding flexibility, respondents again praised work from home options, but a number (five) requested clearer guidelines around remote work policies. For instance, two respondents recommended that the campus publish remote work accountability policies. A number of respondents also requested information about work from home policies that will persist beyond the pandemic. Along those lines, several respondents also expressed a desire to learn more about the general plans for the university beyond the pandemic. In other words, uncertainty, as we saw in our quantitative findings, was to a great extent a hallmark of the pandemic and a stressor for many employees. Respondents therefore invited communications that mitigated, to the extent possible, uncertainty during this time. A few respondents also requested that communications about the university's future invite feedback from employees. In other words, future visions should be co-created or at least subject to feedback and discussion. The request for increased bidirectional communication arose vis a vis other topics as well.

Finally, five respondents addressed unit level communications in their responses to Q26. One requested that unit staff meet less frequently via Teams or Zoom and communicate more often via email or phone. Another respondent complained about unit administrators ignoring important email messages, which bogged down workflows. Conversely, another criticized the vast number of email messages circulating throughout a unit during this time. Finally, one respondent suggested that communication between colleagues during the pandemic should be free and open, that is, protected against "cancel culture."

To summarize, employees provided the following recommendations pertaining to communications.

- Eliminate or reduce uncertainty intra and post pandemic
- Encourage flexibility and changed expectations during the crisis
- Offer transparency about any furloughs or layoffs
- Offer frequent, clear communications, even when news isn't positive
- Create communication pathways that are bidirectional and create reciprocity

**Compensation and workload.** Under the theme of compensation and workload, we identified two subthemes or codes, i.e., funding and workload.

**Funding.** Over 10% of survey respondents (n=70) mentioned the topic of funding in one way or another when answering Q26. A majority of these study participants shared the message that they have been working harder with fewer resources during the pandemic. By harder, they meant that they are working overloads or overtime. By fewer resources, some meant that there may be fewer staff in their units to share the workload. For some, fewer resources referred to salary stagnation or cuts. Several respondents, for instance, mentioned that they have not received cost of living increases over the past ten or so years. Many also reported that they had, during the pandemic, faced job insecurity. Many respondents also reported that they had in fact incurred significant salary cuts via mandatory furloughs. As such, over 20 respondents mentioned that morale is low (by spring of 2021) due to fiscal realities.

However, as a point of emphasis, the fiscal policy most commonly identified among respondents (n=30) as inimical to motivation and morale was mandatory furloughs. Although we already identified this sub-code above, it bears repeating as a data point that emerged often. One respondent referred to the policy as a “kick in the teeth.” Nearly all who invoked the term urged campus leaders to end the policy or refrain from instituting again.

Five respondents raised concerns about pay equity. Pertaining to furloughs, several respondents questioned why the campus’s administrators could not endure higher pay cuts to reduce the impact of campus-wide furloughs. Others expressed concern for the financial well-being of frontline workers, e.g., custodial staff, who shouldered pay cuts and faced job insecurity when they already endured significant economic hardship. One respondent recommended that employees on semester-by-semester contracts receive permanent employment status to ease their burdens at this time.

Several respondents referenced leave policies (paid or unpaid) when answering Q26. A few offered praise for supervisors’ liberal application of leave policies, enabling respondents to tend to childcare needs during the pandemic. Other respondents recommended that leave policies more widely implemented during this time to accommodate pressing personal needs of employees, for instance, healthcare or childcare.

In addition, a number of respondents (n=6) requested unique financial support from the university to ease the pain of increased workloads coupled with decreased salary. Several respondents, for instance, suggested that the university reimburse them for use of home internet services to conduct university business. Several other respondents requested that the university provide the following services:

- Free access to the Klotsche Center (University recreation center)
- Free use of public transportation
- Free on-campus parking

**Workload.** Of the full study sample, 53 or more than 8% expressed concerns about workload during the pandemic. As discussed, many respondents mentioned that they and their colleagues are “doing more with less” at work. One mentioned that the workload has increased apparently “three-fold” and is not only demoralizing but unsustainable. Respondents attributed increased workloads to various sources:

- Additional administrative or busy work
- Additional email exchanges

- Additional required trainings
- Additional virtual meetings
- Fewer staff across various units

These extra work responsibilities dilute attention, according to a few respondents, and pile up over time. Aside from increases in work stress, the accumulated work tasks prevent deep thinking or creative project work. Respondents recommended several solutions to the workload problem:

- Condense Team or Zoom meetings or replace them altogether with brief communications
- Prioritize meeting goals over working hours, consistent with distributed work principles
- Reduce unnecessary outputs to avoid “piling on,” e.g., reduce faculty service requirements
- Revitalize various units through robust hiring practices when possible
- Reward productive workers to mitigate demoralization accompanying workload increases

**Employee satisfaction.** Under the theme of employee satisfaction, we subsumed two subtopics or codes, i.e., praise and criticism. Much of this information is duplicative of previously reported findings, so we will present it in summative or bullet point form.

**Employee praise.** Nearly 15% of the survey respondents praised COVID-19-related campus policies and practices. Over half of these respondents commended flexibility on the part of campus leaders and supervisors. By flexibility, most respondents were referring to their ability to work from home, create variable work schedules, and/or join meetings remotely. A few respondents used the term flexible to reflect supervisors’ willingness to grant leaves of absence, primarily due to caregiving responsibilities. Other university policies and practices that drew praise from respondents included the following:

- Expert IT support for general remote work practices
- Expert support for online teaching from the [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#)
- Ongoing library and e-library access
- Support for a free exchange of ideas, safe from the threat of cancel culture
- Transparent communications from campus leaders
- Campus leaders’ and supervisors’ expressions of gratitude for employee efforts
- Town hall meetings
- Mental health resource lists from campus leaders via various communications
- Available webinar on stress management
- Immediate supervisory support
- COVID-19 safety guidelines and enforcements
- Emphasis on caring and compassionate approach to students during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Employee criticism.** Seventy respondents (11%) shared criticism in clear, direct language when answering Q26. Over half of these respondents identified excessive workloads during the pandemic as a primary concern. Respondents for instance mentioned that they “are doing more with less,” “doing the work of three employees,” or facing “unmanageable workloads.” Adding furloughs to this equation, according to some, contributed to burnout or demoralization. Some respondents also disclosed that they perceived some departments or units being treated differently and less favorably than others, for instance, the members of University Housing complained about excess work hours and unsafe work conditions relative to academic units. Five respondents expressed distrust in leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Results from Q26 indicate that university employees appreciated various campus responses to the pandemic. Chief among them was flexibility, i.e., allowing employees to follow variable schedules, to work from home, and to take leaves of absence when needed for childcare or healthcare. Providing clear communications about changing pandemic-related policies and circulating mental health resources during this time of crisis also earned respondents' praise. Respondents also identified additional supports as useful during the pandemic. For instance, a few highlighted the utility of CETL (Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) for helping to transform face-to-face courses to online formats. Others commended campus IT (information technology) for their expert support of remote work.

Numerous respondents also recognized the conundrum campus leaders faced, when weighing public health and financial pressures. Many lauded the scientifically informed COVID-19 return-to-campus policies, appreciating their rational nature. A number also reported feeling safe to return to campus due to campus policies and practices, e.g., requiring testing or vaccination. Many also extolled the on-campus vaccination and testing capacity.

**Concerns.** In contrast, fiscal policy appeared much less popular among respondents. Hiring freezes, mandatory furloughs, and stagnant wages all attracted criticism from survey respondents. Within this fiscal context, respondents also reported workload increases. Together, these conditions resulted in demoralization or burnout for some during the first year of the pandemic.

**Future recommendations.** Without question, the most popular recommendation among respondents was to continue flexible work schedules and flexible work site options. Many also requested a review of workloads to help reduce busywork. Manageable workloads would lead not only to improved staff retention, according to some, but also to deeper reflection and greater creativity in the workplace according to others. To the extent possible, many respondents also urged a review of employee salaries to result in pay rates that are commensurate with the local cost of living and/or market values.

Interestingly, employees also requested that university leaders share insights about the long-term future of the university. A few respondents requested that such conversation take the form of two-way bidirectional exchanges, so university employees have a chance to shape the future identity of the university. These recommendations reflect respondents' desire not only to gain insight into job security but also to engage in higher order long-term future planning.

## **Mixed Results**

When considering both the qualitative results from Q26 and the quantitative results from other survey questions, a few general insights emerge. First, study participants appear both to appreciate and benefit from enhanced self-care. Remote or distributed work trends at the university spawned by the exigencies of the pandemic encouraged work-life balance for some study participants. Certain coping skills appeared to protect study participants against the stress of the pandemic, e.g., spending time outdoors or with family, while prompts and resources made available through the university also appeared to help study participants engage in self-care.

Second, finding solace in work also appeared to help protect against the stress of the pandemic, according to quantitative findings. Qualitative results suggested that study participants valued their work for several reasons, for instance, because it provided: a) service to students, b) creative outlets, and c) opportunities to connect meaningfully with others. To the extent that campus policies and practices can limit tedious work, promote "deep" work, and facilitate person-to-person connections

among campus community members, especially outside their unit or department, university employees may avoid burnout or pandemic-related mental health harm while simultaneously enjoying job satisfaction and work commitment.

A third and final note follows. Both quantitative and qualitative results suggest that many study participants suffered during the pandemic. Over 70% reported experiencing at least one PTSD symptom due to the pandemic, and around half of the Q26 respondents disclosed pandemic-related concerns. Led by the Dean of Students and supported by many units and professionals on campus, a "[Campus Cares Initiative](#)" launched in the summer of 2021 in recognition that the pandemic significantly disrupted campus life. Not all survey respondents or campus community members experienced the pandemic as highly or traumatically stressful, but many did. For instance, caregivers, young employees, students, and community members from marginalized groups are more likely than others to experience the pandemic as harmful. Therefore, the Campus Cares Initiative follows a compassionate and informed crisis response model open to all campus community members and simultaneously tailored for specific subgroups. Messages delivered through along with resources available from the Campus Cares Initiative not so coincidentally reflect data from Q26. That is, the Initiative circulates information on mental health and well-being, offers forums for dialogue with campus leaders, highlights the power of individual and collective coping and resilience, and creates shared spaces for individual and collective storytelling. Results from the COPES-19 survey have been and will continue to be used to inform the Initiative.

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<sup>i</sup> Into our qualitative analysis, we also incorporated responses to item number 27, which invited participants to share additional comments.

<sup>ii</sup> Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2016) (Mis)conceptualizing themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts' (2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19 (6), 739-743. DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2016.1195588