Future of Staff Work Survey Report

Committee on the Future of Staff Work

BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

May 2021

Contents

5 Faculty Questions   31

6 Conclusion   34

Introduction

Committee members on the Future of Staff Work:

- **Kenneth Freeman**, cochair, vice president ad interim for human resources, Questrom School of Business dean emeritus and professor of the practice

- **Natalie McKnight**, cochair, dean, College of General Studies

- **Diane Baldwin**, associate vice president, Sponsored Programs

- **Jorge Delva**, dean, School of Social Work, Paul Farmer Professor

- **Mariette DiChristina** (COM'86), dean, College of Communication

- **Ira Lazic**, associate dean for administration and finance, School of Public Health

- **Elise Morgan**, Maysarah K. Sukkar Professor of Engineering, director, Center for Multiscale and Translational Mechanobiology, associate dean for research and faculty development, College of Engineering

- **Janet O'Brien**, senior associate vice president, IS&T

- **Patricia O'Brien**, associate provost for budget and planning

- **Hee-Young Park**, associate dean, faculty affairs, professor and chair, department of medical sciences and education, School of Medicine, Faculty Council representative

- **Silifa Wallace**, associate vice president, internal audit

- **Juliana Walsh Kaiser**, senior associate dean for finance and administration, College of Arts & Sciences

General Questions

Total BU staff (as of May 10, 2021): 6,145
Total number of people (including faculty) completed the survey: 3200
Number of staff members completed the survey: 2,948
Percent of total BU Staff who answered the survey: 48%.

2.1   What is your primary role at BU? Faculty or Staff?

252	2948
7.9%	92.1%

■ Faculty   ■ Staff
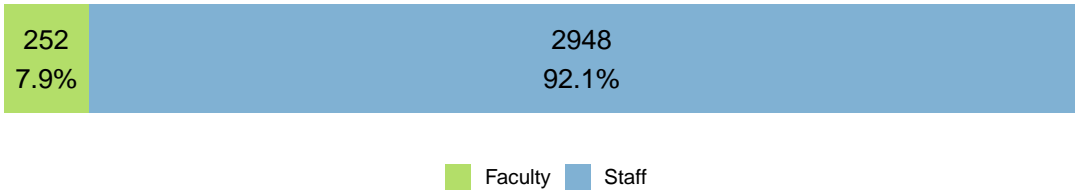
2.2 In what unit is your primary role at the University?

University Unit	Number of the survey reponders
IS&T	332
College of Arts & Sciences	285
School of Medicine	240
Enrollment & Student Affairs	163
Other	149
Research & Research Compliance	134
Financial Affairs Administration	117
Development & Alumni Relations	117
School of Public Health	111
Metropolitan College	111
Questrom School of Business	95
Office of the Provost	91
School of Dental Medicine	89
External Communications and Governmental Affairs	89
School of Law	81
College of Engineering	80
Student Health Services	66
Campus Planning & Operations	66
Auxiliary Services	65
College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences	60
Global Programs	59
BU Libraries	56
Human Resources	52
College of Fine Arts	52
School of Social Work	44
Dean of Students	44
College of Communication	42
Wheelock College of Education & Human Development	36
Budget Planning & Business Affairs	32
Graduate Medical Sciences	24
Athletics	21
Operations	18
Office of the General Counsel	18
College of General Studies	17
School of Theology	16
NEIDL	16
Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies	16
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences	15
BU Academy	14
Development	10
University Libraries	9
Office of the President	9
Investment Office	9
WBUR	7
Division of Military Education	6
School of Hospitality Administration	5
Arvind & Chandan Nandlal Kilachand Honors College	4
School of Global Studies	3
Marsh Chapel	3
ROTC Military Science	1
Office of the Medical Campus Provost	1

If other, please specify:

There were 111 responders who selected "Other" option. Most frequent answers are:

- Healthway: 18
- Danielsen Institute: 10
- Center for Marketing & Communications: 9
- Hariri: 6
- Center for Antiracist Research: 6
- Other choices: 3 times or less

2.3 What campus do you spend the majority of your time on?

94	585	34	2487
2.9%	18.3%	1.1%	77.7%

Other ■ Medical ■ Fenway ■ Charles River
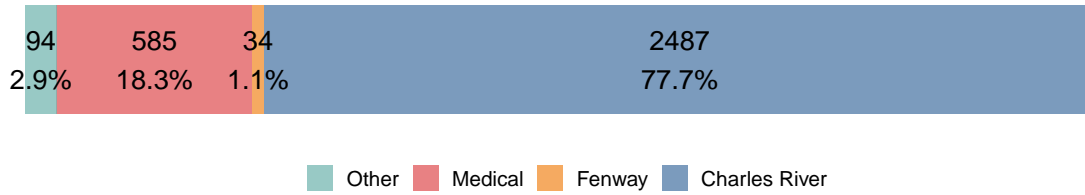
If other, please specify:

There were 89 responders who selected "Other" option. Most frequent answers are:

- Remote: 24
- Framingham Heart Study: 20
- Both Campuses: 7
- Hawes str or Fenway: 5
- Other choices: 2 times or less
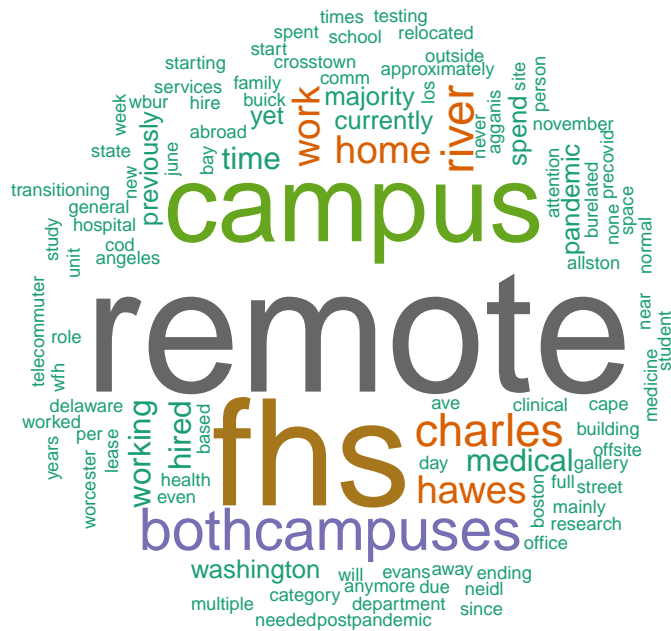
Staff Related Questions

3.1 Do you work full-time or part-time?

2880	67
97.7%	2.3%

■ Full–time ■ Part–time
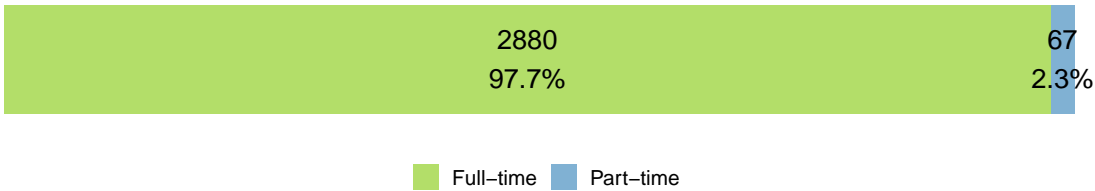
3.2 Are you hourly paid or salaried?

437	2511
14.8%	85.2%

■ Hourly ■ Salaried
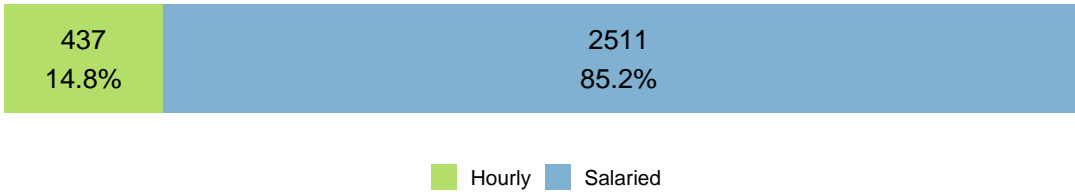
3.3 During COVID, did you work fewer, same, or more hours than pre-COVID?

Only for the population identified as salaried staff

27	1160	1264	60
1.1%	46.2%	50.3%	2.4%

■ NA ■ Same ■ More ■ Fewer
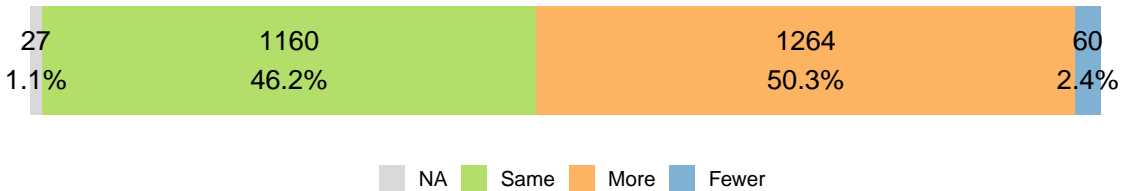
Check if the answer differs for different campuses:

Amount of work vs. Campus
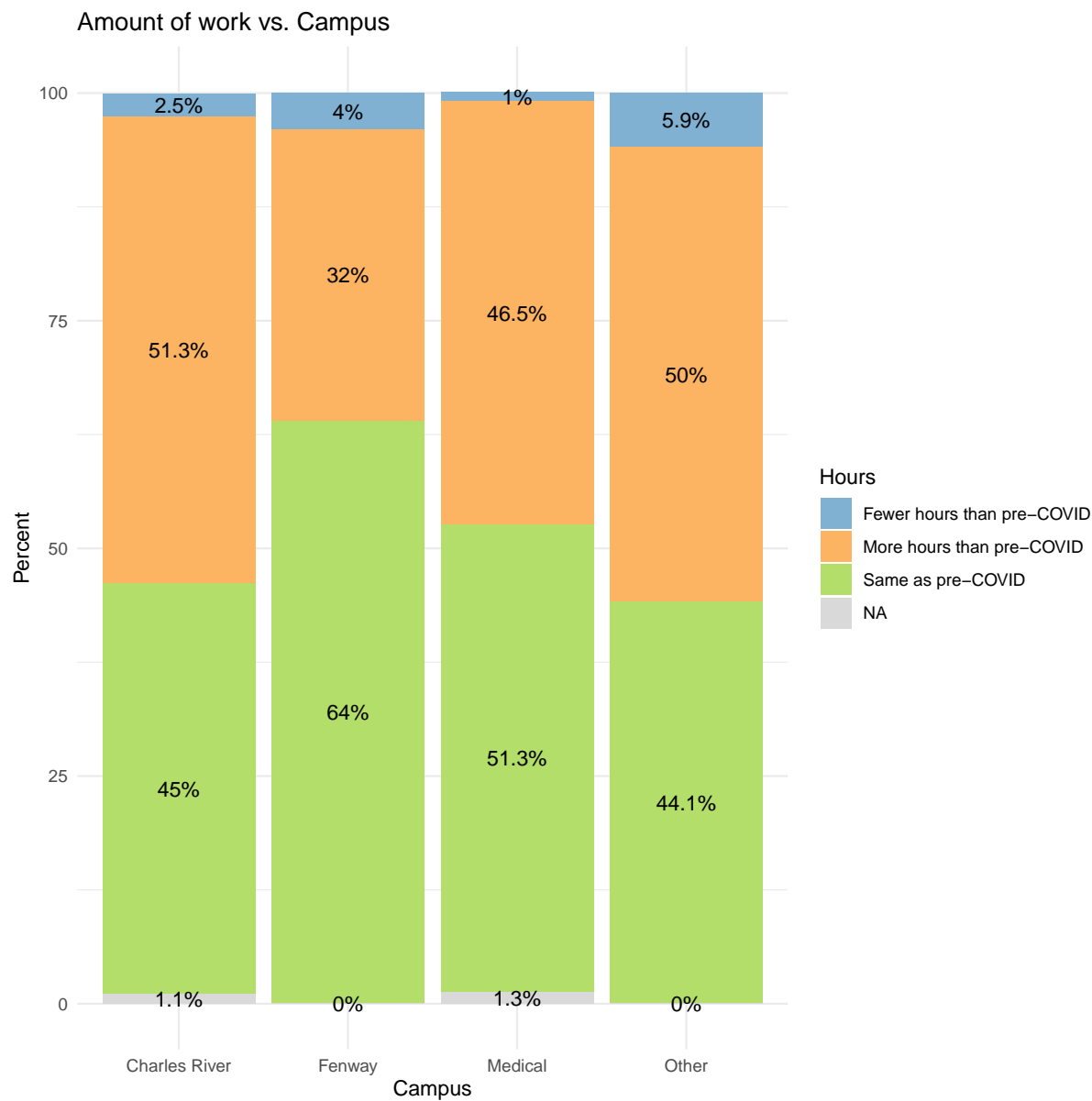
3.4 Is your job one that could be performed remotely, some or all of the time?

| 2741 | 207 |
| 93% | 7% |

Yes   No
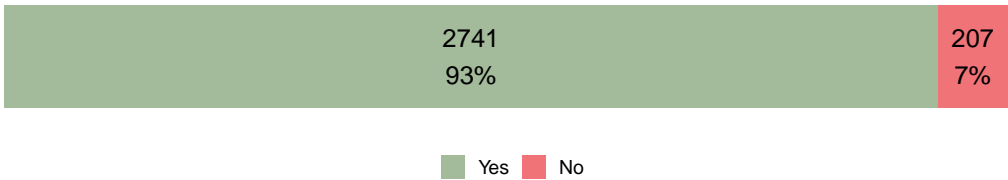
Check how different BU departments answered this question:
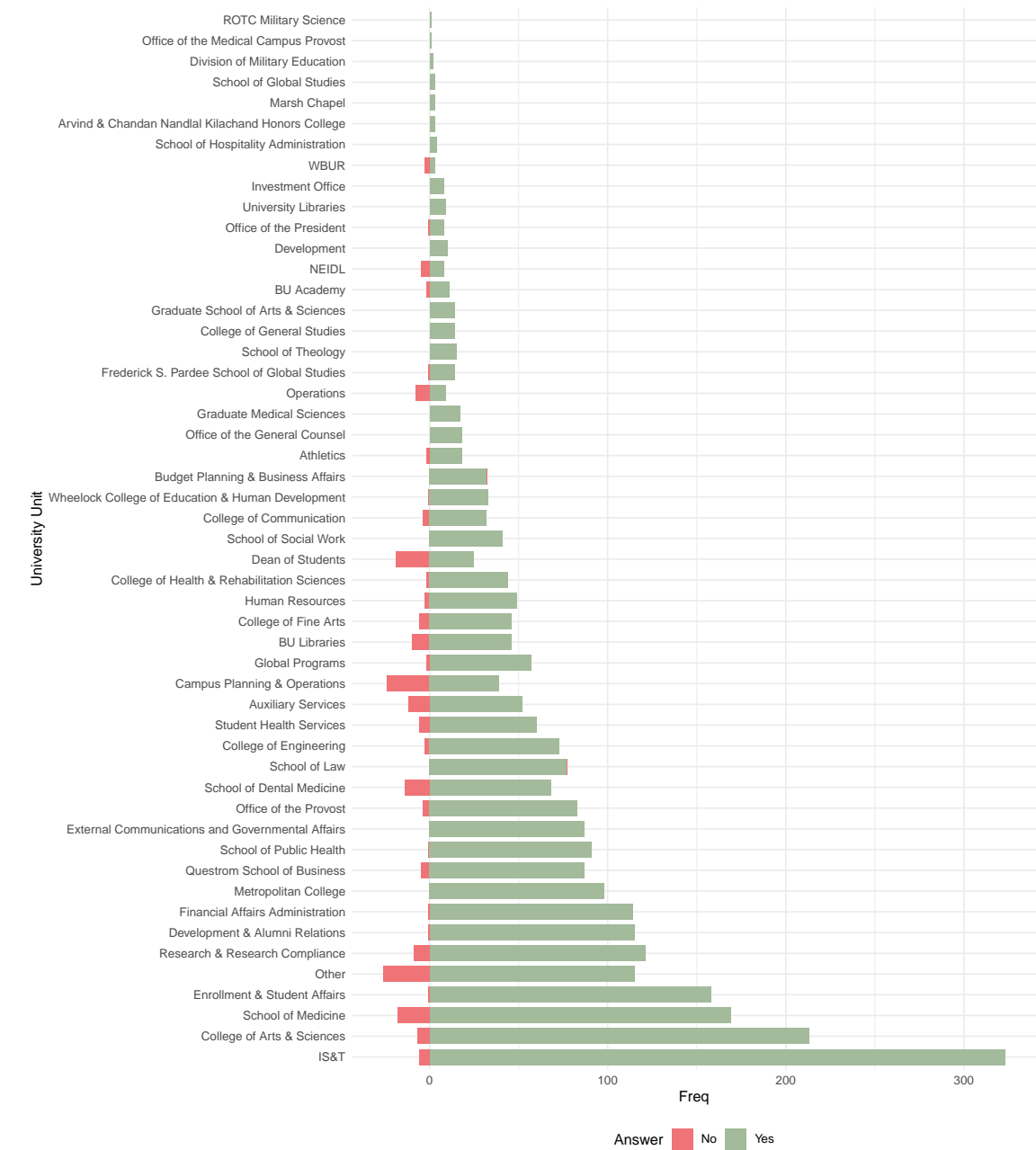
Check how this question was answered by supervisors vs. regular employees:
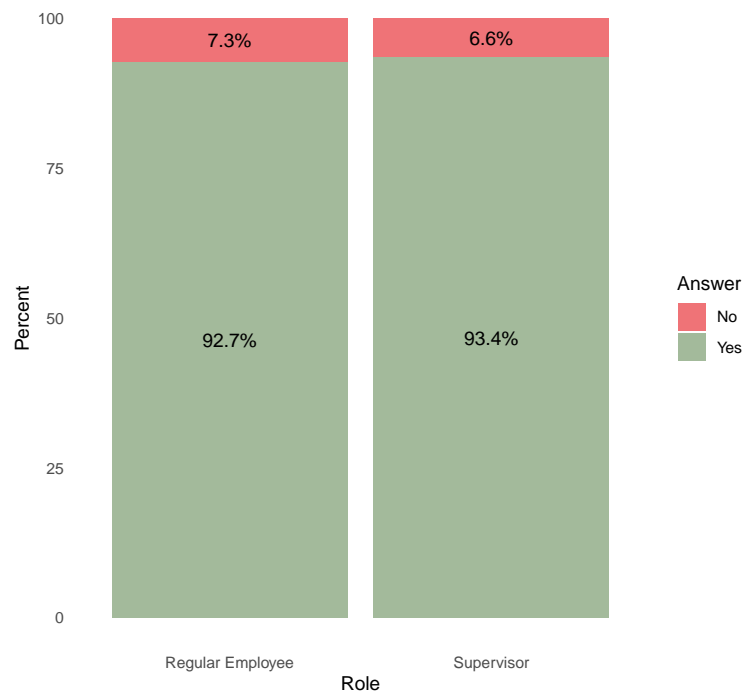
3.5   If yes, Pre-COVID, what individuals or groups did you normally interact with in person in an average day?

Students	Faculty	Alumni	External contacts
37.8%	42.9%	8.1%	30.4%

Supervisor	Colleagues	Staff in other Dept.	No one
77.9%	90.3%	57.9%	2.4%
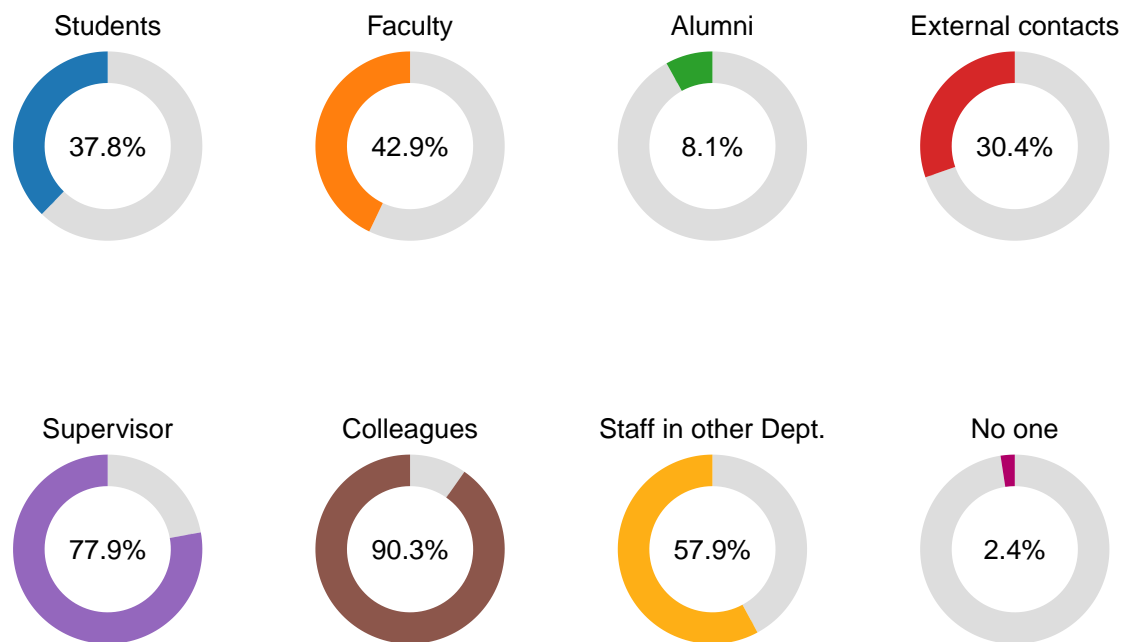
3.6   During the 2020-2021 academic year, what was your typical working arrangement?

Remotely	On Campus	Hybrid
1552 / 56.6%	375 / 13.7%	814 / 29.7%

Remotely   On Campus   Hybrid
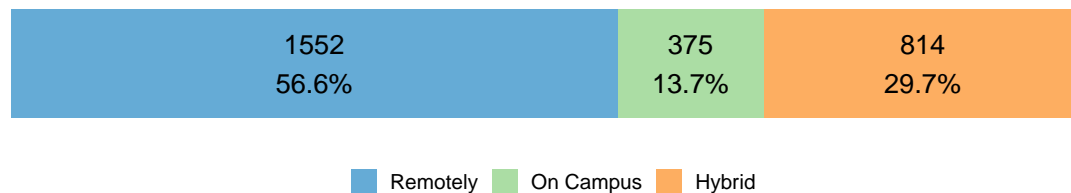
3.7 How productive are you in your work from home setup compared to being in the office?

This question allowed to select a non-whole value, i.e. 4.3. The first graph and the table below, shows the distribution of values rounded to a whole value, while the "violin" plot shows the distribution of non-rounded answers.
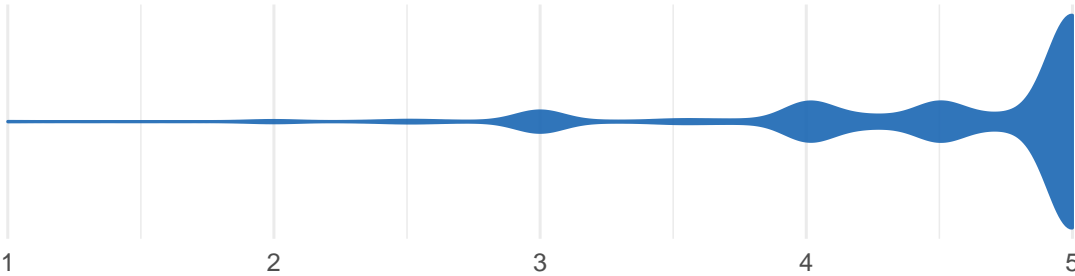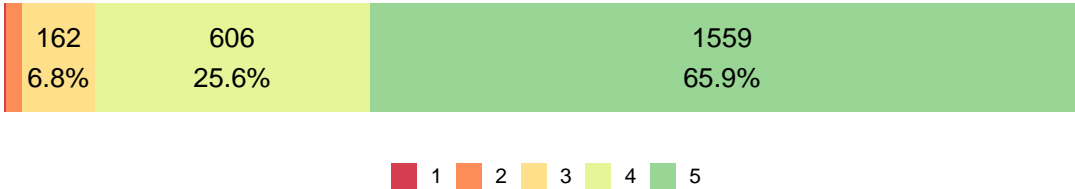
Productivity	Count	Percentage
Not productive	4	0.2%
2	35	1.5%
3	162	6.8%
4	606	25.6%
Very productive	1559	65.9%

3.8 How effective is remote communication?

This question allowed to select a non-whole value, i.e. 4.3. The first graph and the table below, shows the distribution of values rounded to a whole value, while the "violin" plot shows the distribution of non-rounded answers.

62	226	795	1281
2.6%	9.6%	33.6%	54.1%

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
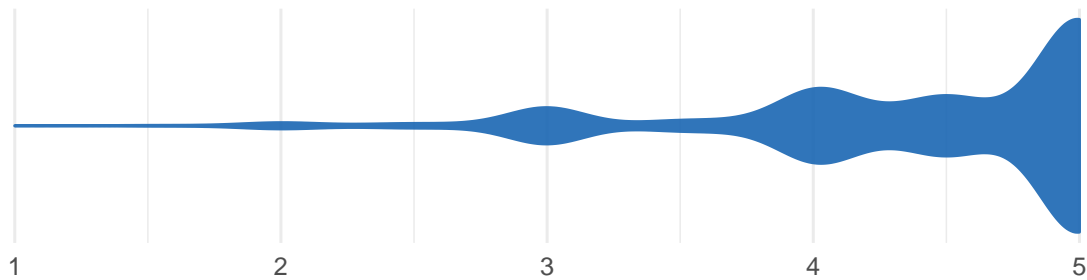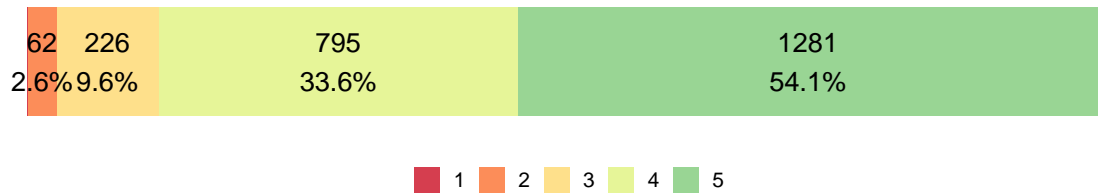
Communication	Count	Percentage
Not effective	2	0.1%
2	62	2.6%
3	226	9.6%
4	795	33.6%
Very effective	1281	54.1%

**3.9   From a job perspective, what has been most difficult for you when work-
     ing from home?**
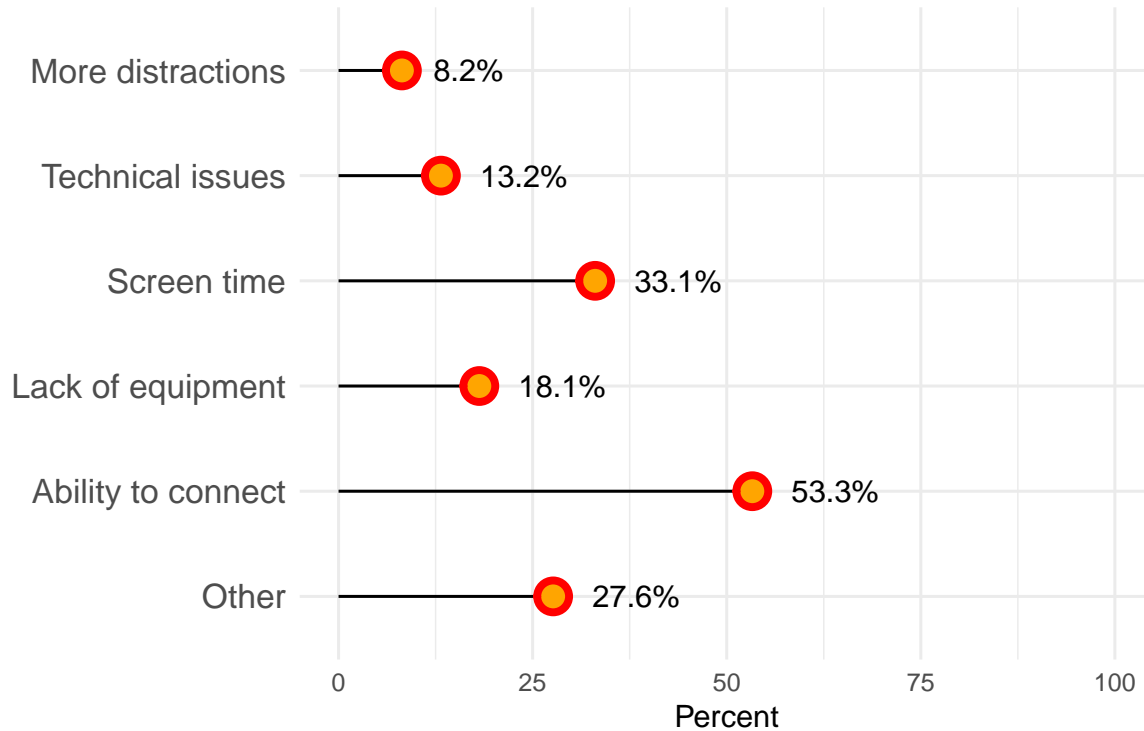
Other includes:

- long hours
- separation between work and personal space
- no or missing equipment
- management/supervision
- technical issues
- caring for (or distraction from) kids/family/pets
- difficulties with mailing services
- increased amount of meetings
- isolation
- mental health
- lack of physical movement
- lack of understanding by the Leadership

3.10   From a job perspective, what has been better when working from home?

Chart showing percentages by category:
- Work life balance/flexibility — 89.2%
- More time to dedicate to work — 64.9%
- Emphasis on more purposeful interaction — 52.6%
- Better commute — 90.3%
- Less distractions/ability to focus — 61.8%
- Other — 21.3%

X-axis: Percent (0, 25, 50, 75, 100, 125)
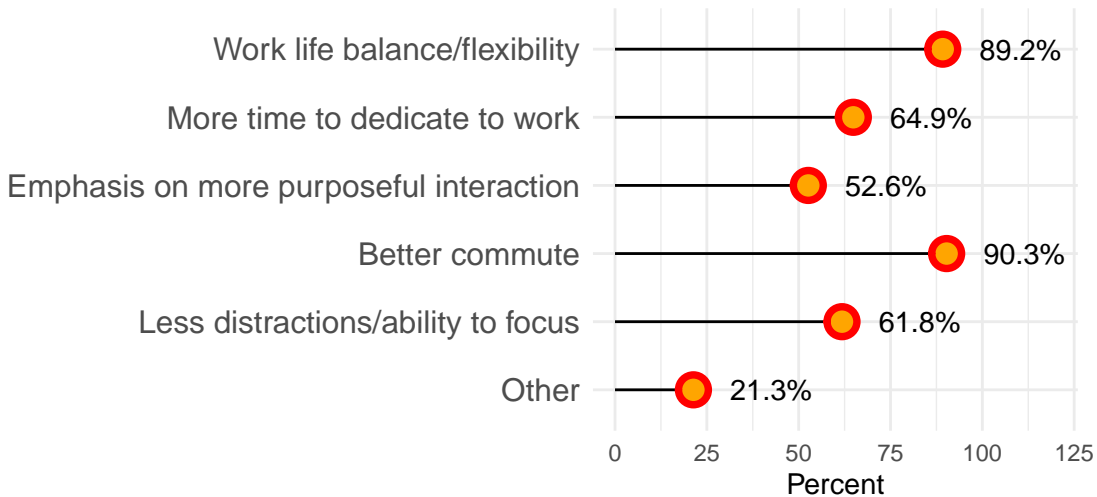
Other includes:

- mental and/or physical health improved
- more time for physical activity/outdoor time
- quality of life improved
- be able to care for dependents (elderly parents)
- better meals
- less commute
- time flexibility
- ability to work from various locations
- more (quality) work done
- emotional support from pets
- money saved on gas and parking
- less distraction
- be more available to students during non-standard hours
- comfortability
- more (intimate, deeper) connections with colleagues
- literally everything

3.11   Ideally, how many days per week would you like to work from home?

zero: 1.1%

one: 8.2%

two: 24.4%

three: 31.9%

four: 13.2%

five: 21.2%
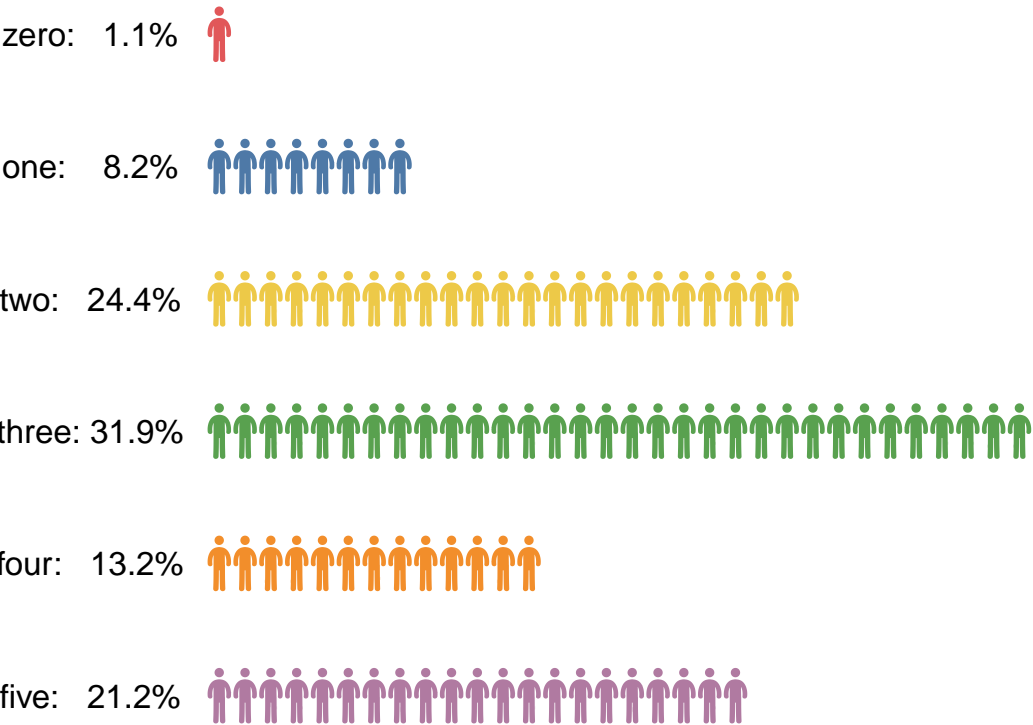
3.12   If you do not have an opportunity to work remotely one or more days per week, how likely will that influence your decision to remain at BU?

Very unlikely: 14.8%

Unlikely: 16.9%

Neutral: 7.1%

Likely: 23%

Very Likely: 38.1%

3.13 If you return to campus at some level, will you have any issues to overcome (professional or personal)?

988 41.8%	138 5.8%	654 27.6%	586 24.8%

Yes ◼ Not applicable ◼ No ◼ Maybe
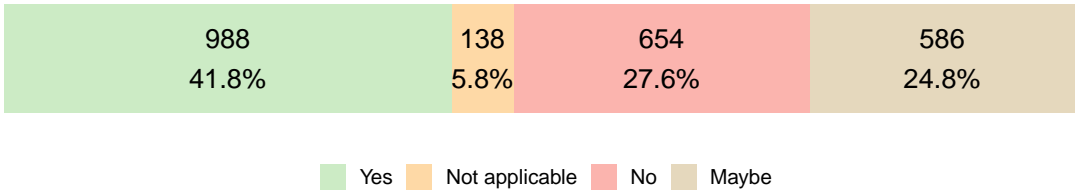
3.14 Please specify the issues you will need to overcome.

Long commute

75.1%

Family care

40%

Concern about health/safety

60.8%

Other

28%
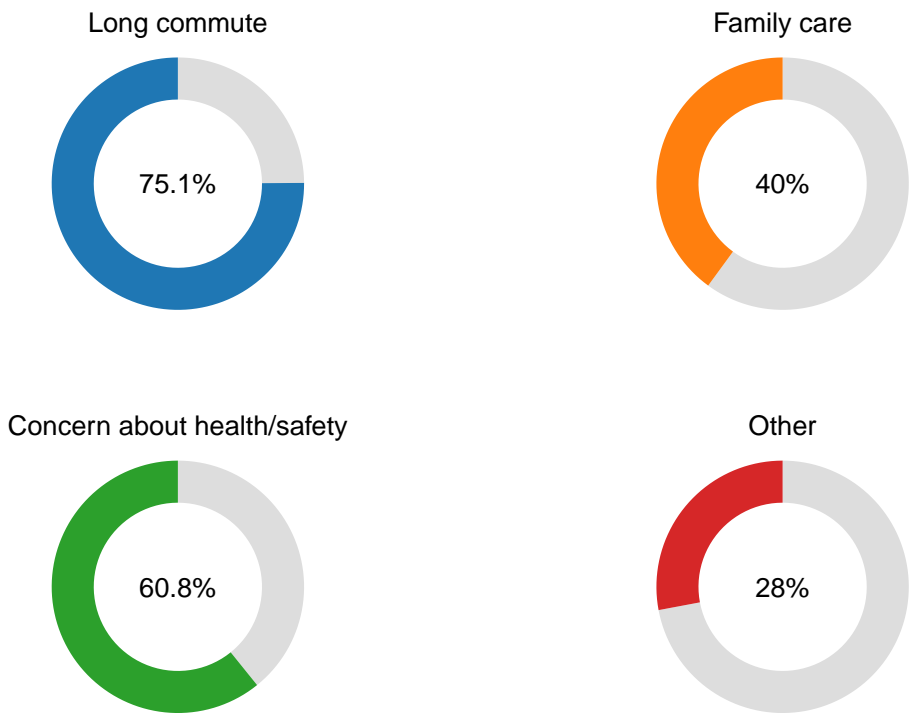
Other includes:

3.15 Do you feel like your supervisor is supportive of a work from home arrangement?

14	2311	416
0.5%	84.3%	15.2%

NA   Yes   No
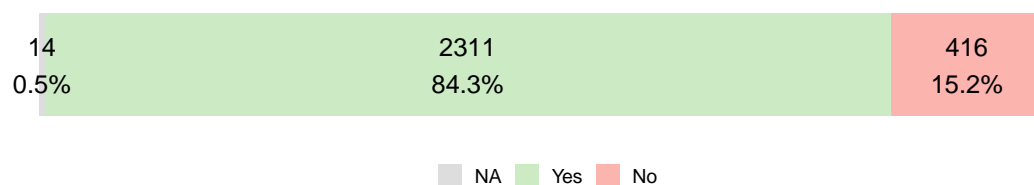
If no, please explain:

There are total 393 responses. Below are some representative answers:

- My supervisor is not a fan of work-from-home.
- CAS emailed all of us saying that we are expected to work on campus again.
- Not approved for IS&T Client Technology Analysts
- My immediate supervisor is. Our dean is not.
- In the past, when discussed, the supervisor was not open.
- There is a hesitancy in my unit to acknowledge that our job can be done remotely.

- She is a very difficult person to communicate with and does not feel that my work can be done remotely all the time when in fact, I believe that I have been very productive.

- Very old school

- My direct supervisor is supportive, however indirect supervisors is wholly focused on ensuring that all individuals are present on campus regardless of need because they believe it betters the culture.

- I think my supervisor thinks I don't perform my work while working remotely.

- Not very accommodating/flexible. They encourage FMLA instead.

- I feel like because my supervisor feels like he has to be in the office, the same expectation is passed down to me even though my job can be done remotely.

- My supervisor and administration has previously rejected any remote or flexible work options, even for a single day.

- You should have an "I don't know" option because I haven't spoken to my boss about this yet.

- They are placing a strong emphasis on returning to campus and "fairness" compared with colleagues whose job requires they work on-site.

- They don't seem to care and want to maintain the image of us being present on campus, even though most of our department will not be interacting with students on a daily basis, so no one would even know if we're physically in the office.

- They are only supportive of a hybrid work from home arrangement

- Probably no, because the head manager above my supervisor is against it. Lack of communication and transparency is not helping.

Supervisors Questions

4.1 Do you supervise staff?

252	1078	1870
7.9%	33.7%	58.4%

NA   Yes   No
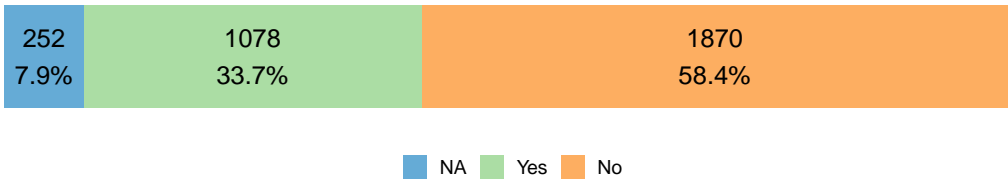
4.2 To what degree do you feel that staff can be equally productive working remotely as in person?

| 59 5.7% | 142 13.7% | 295 28.4% | 505 48.7% |

Legend: ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
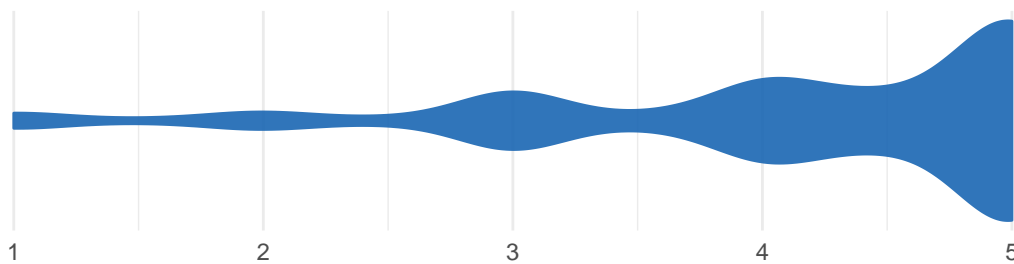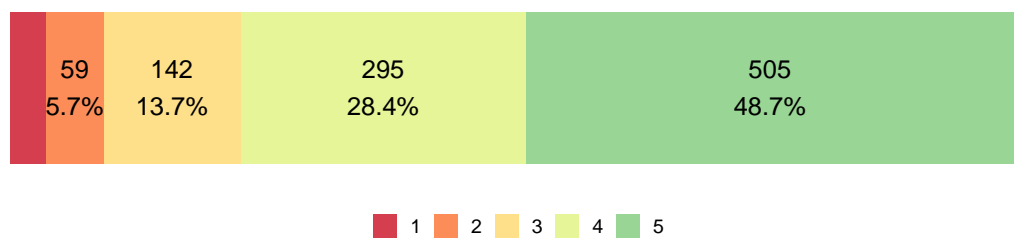
Productivity	Count	Percentage
Not productive	37	3.6%
2	59	5.7%
3	142	13.7%
4	295	28.4%
Very productive	505	48.7%

4.3 Are your direct reports able to accomplish all tasks remotely?

| 706 68% | 332 32% |

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No
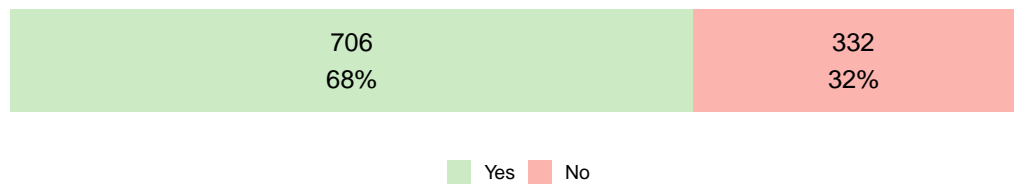
4.4 Could you arrange work responsibilities so that some work could be performed remotely to allow one or more days of remote work?

This question was only asked to those people who answered "No" on the previous question.

249 75.2%	82 24.8%

Yes ■ No
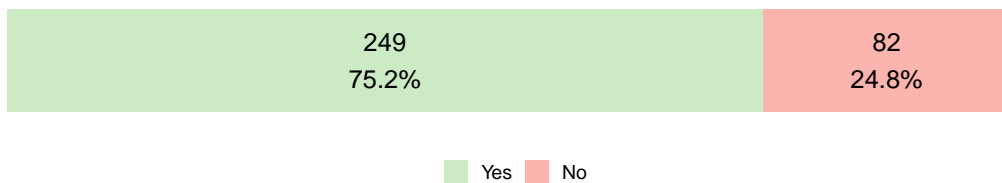
If "No", please explain:

There are total 78 entries. There are 3 major groups of replies:

Will place burden (or will be unfair) to other members of the team who need to be present on sight: 7

Public facing work, but some hybrid work (1–2 days) might be possible: 14

Most tasks would benefit from in–person interactions: 1

Public facing work: 56
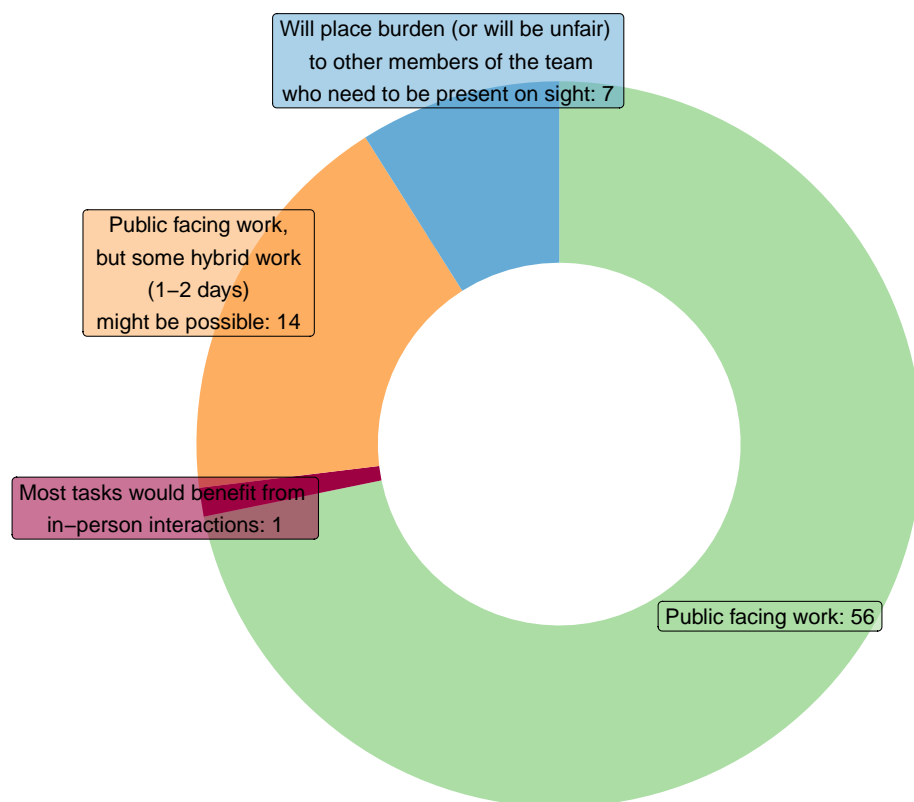
4.5 How many days per week on average would you be willing to allow staff to work from home (excluding those whose positions are 100% public-facing)?

The chart below shows the choices of those managers who answered positive on the previous question.

zero: 0.4%

one: 4.7%

two: 21.5%

three: 27.9%

four: 15.4%

five: 30.1%
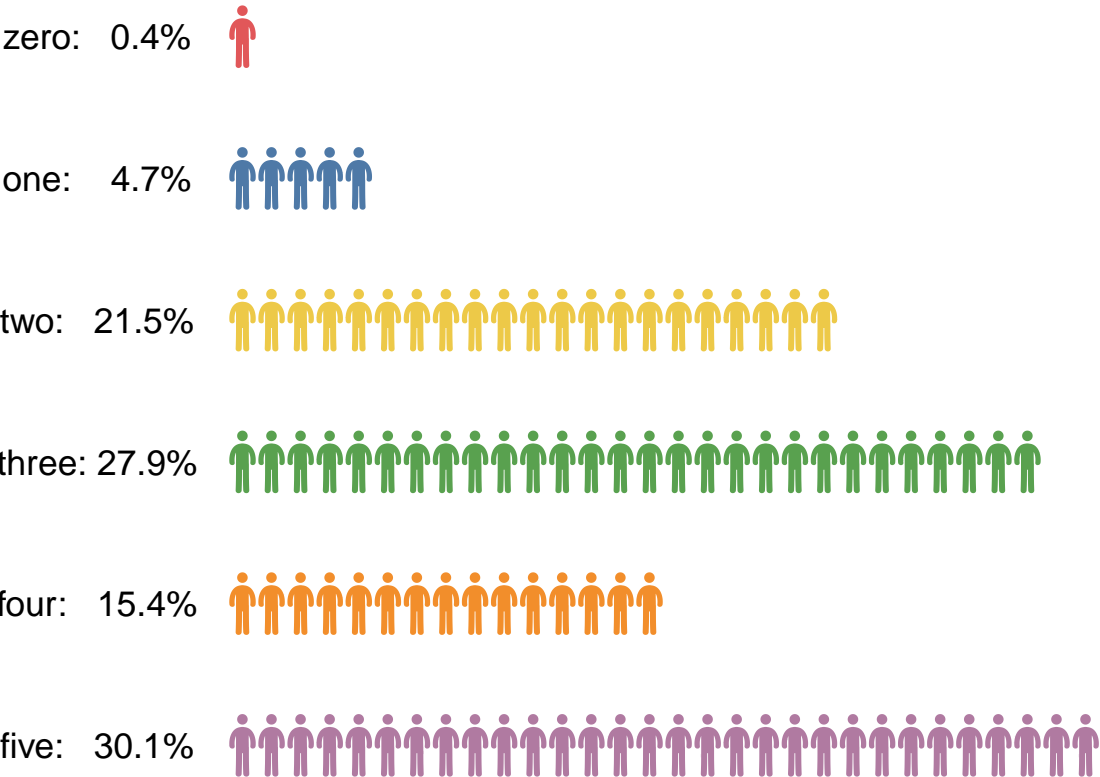
4.6 How effective is the communication with your staff when working remotely?

52	138	334	537
4.8%	12.8%	31%	49.8%

1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 ■
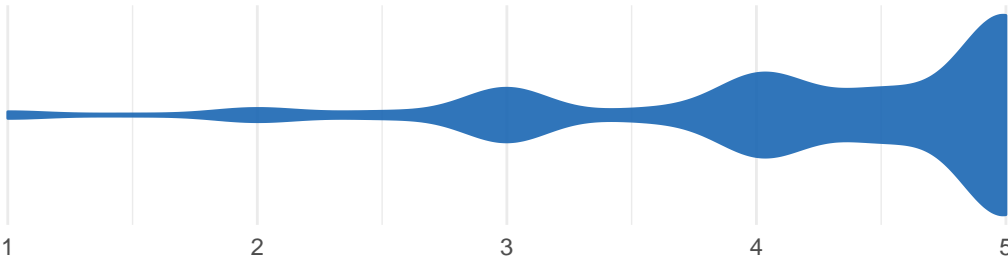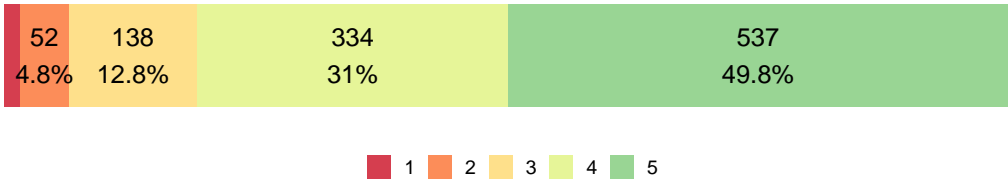
Effectiveness	Count	Percentage
Least effective	17	1.6%
2	52	4.8%
3	138	12.8%
4	334	31.0%
Very effective	537	49.8%

4.7   What have you found to be the most difficult as a supervisor while staff have been working from remotely?

Ability to connect with staff ———————● 26.5%

Ability to monitor work progress ———● 18.3%

Difficulty with team communication ——● 13.5%

None ——————————————● 44.8%

Other ——————————————● 24.8%

0   25   50   75   100
Percent
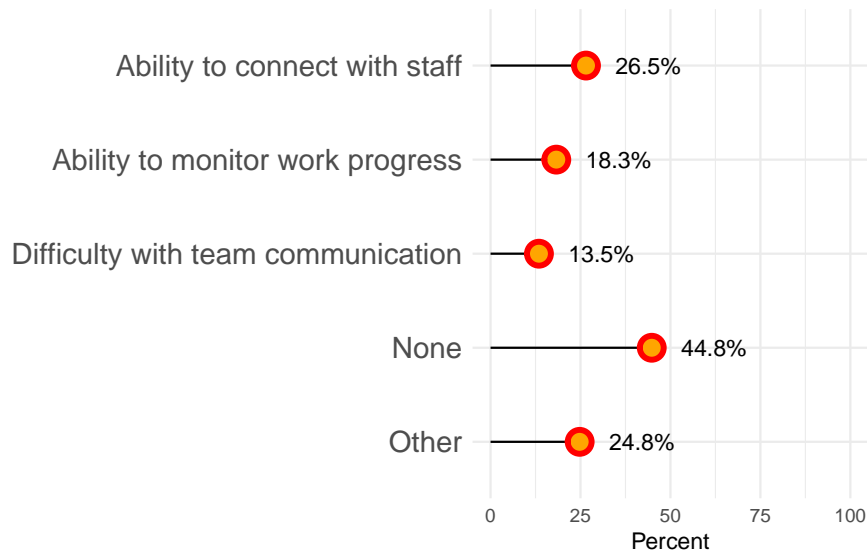
If "Other", please specify:

There are 266 entries in "Other" field:

1. *(96 people)* Lack of informal personal interactions

2. *(28 people)* Hard to monitor/manage staff work

3. *(25 people)* Hard to on-board or train remotely

4. *(14 people)* Hard to support staff / keep morale

5. *(14 people)* Long hours / hard to separate personal and work time

6. *(12 people)* Many additional meetings / zoom fatigue

7. *(6 people)* Problems with communications, project coordination, increased response time

8. *(5 people)* Various problems with technology / hard to troubleshoot
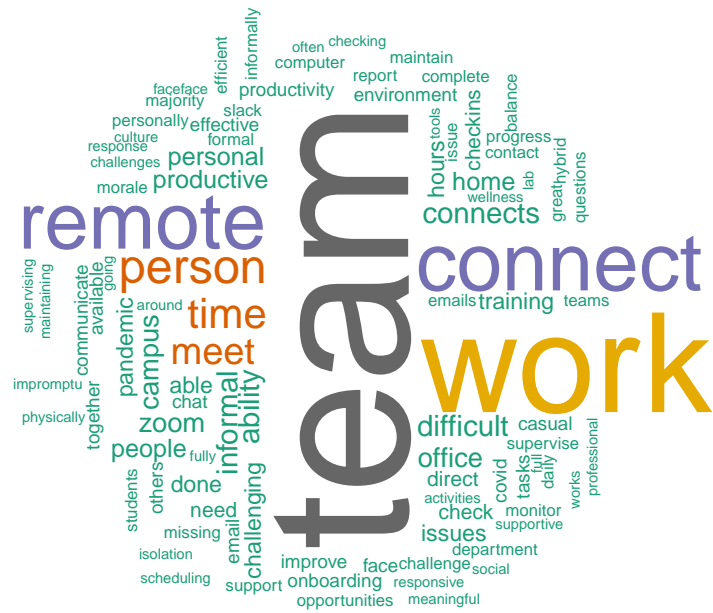
4.8 How have you evaluated productivity and performance for staff working remotely?

Periodic work check — 76%

Rate of progress on assigned tasks — 69.6%

Number of tasks/projects completed — 62%

Other — 26.8%

Percent
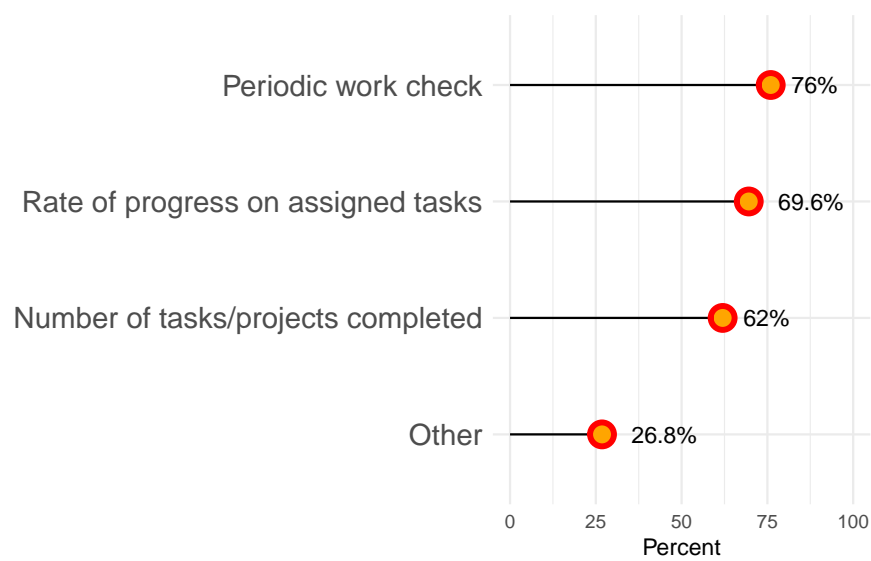
## If "Other", please specify

There are 287 entries in "Other" field:

1. *(162 people)* Regular check-ins (daily, weekly, bi-weekly)

2. *(47 people)* Quality of work, accomplishments, or feedback from clients

3. *(24 people)* Project management tools (Teams/trello/spreadsheets/reports)

4. *(9 people)* Time spent on the tasks, keeping deadlines

5. *(3 people)* Time to respond to emails/texts time

4.9 How likely do you expect to have challenges recruiting staff without offering remote working options?

Scale of 1-5 with 1 being not likely and 5 being very likely.

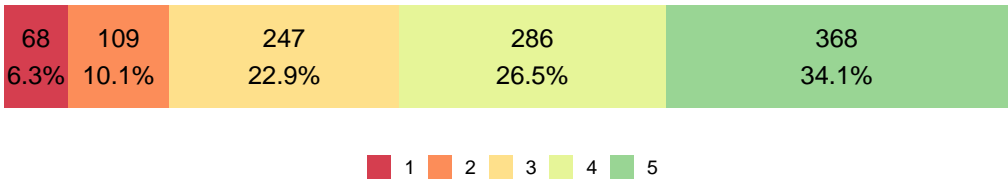| 77	117	221	286	377
7.1%	10.9%	20.5%	26.5%	35%

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
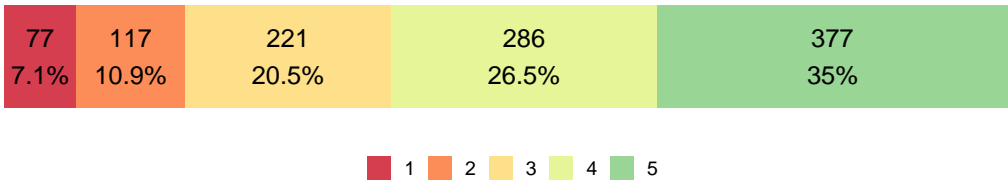
4.10 How likely do you expect to have challenges retaining staff without offering remote working options?

Scale of 1-5 with 1 being not likely and 5 being very likely.

68	109	247	286	368
6.3%	10.1%	22.9%	26.5%	34.1%

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

4.11 Do you have any recommendations regarding how to promote engagement among staff working remotely or partially remote (i.e. Monthly remote community meetings around shared interests, community events such as a volunteer project, develop staff affinity groups, etc.)?

Representative answers:

- regular community conversations
- Periodic remote social hours
- Use in-person days intensively for team meetings, team building, networking.
- A volunteer project is a great idea!
- Regular in-person rituals such as team lunches, etc
- DAR has done an exceptional job building community. I recommend talking to Amy Bronson about how she has implemented across the unit.
- There's no one-size fits all answer to this question. It's very much dependent on the people you work with.
- This will just add another overhead, which I am not sure will be a productive use of everybody's time.
- My staff have been in their jobs for years and are very efficient. I don't want to waste their time on these unnecessary meetings.
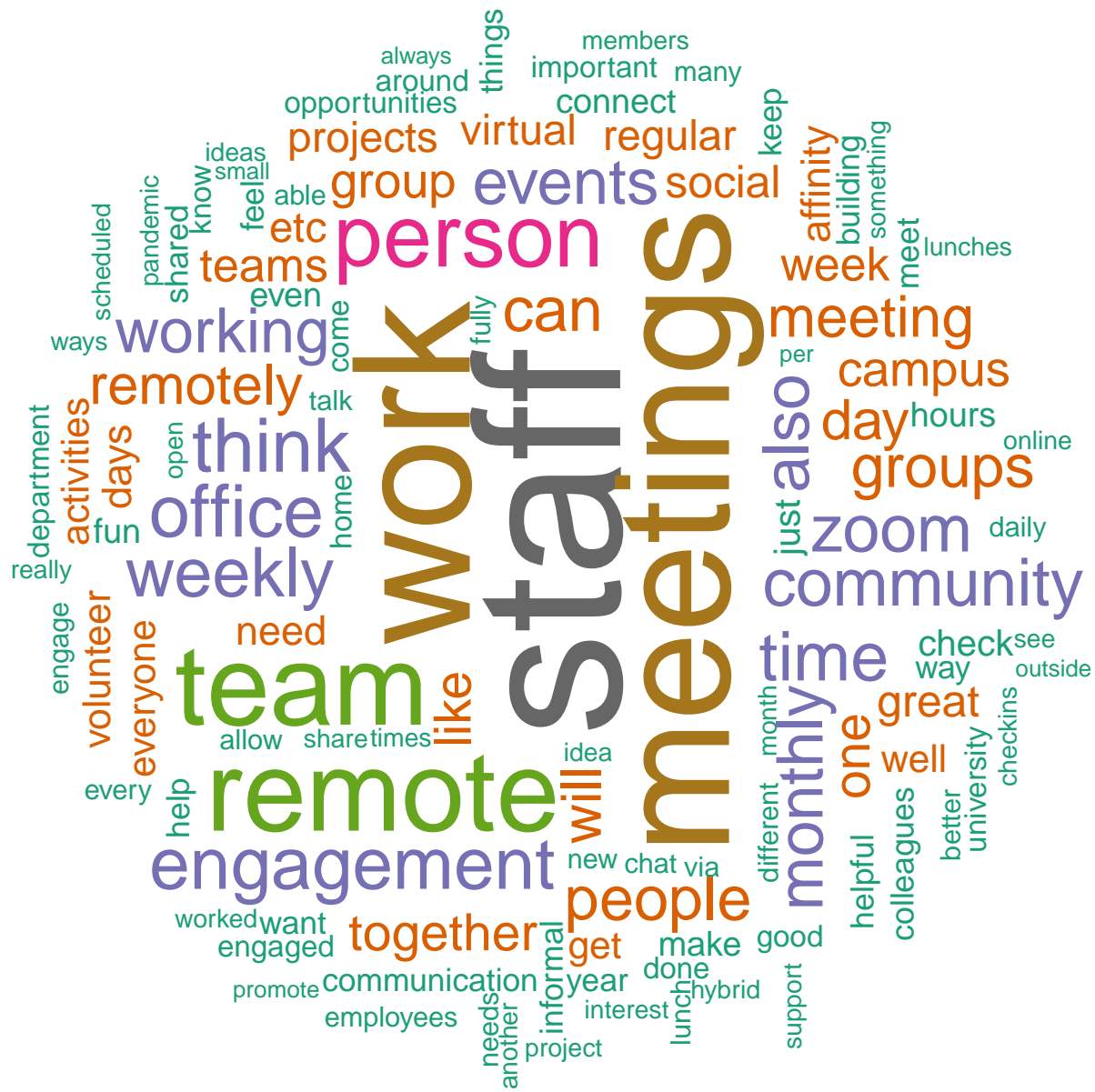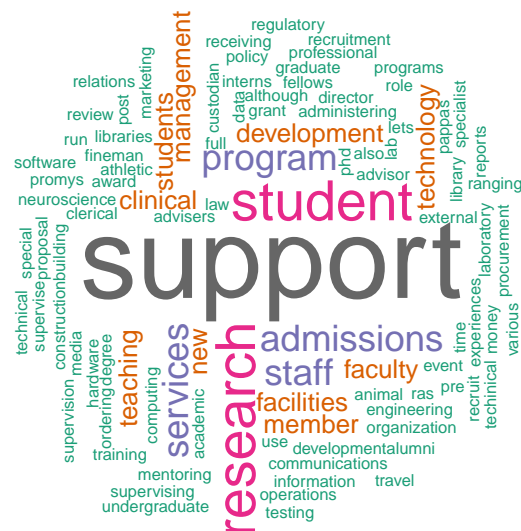
Faculty Questions

There are 203 faculty members answered this survey.

5.1 In what areas do you receive support from staff?
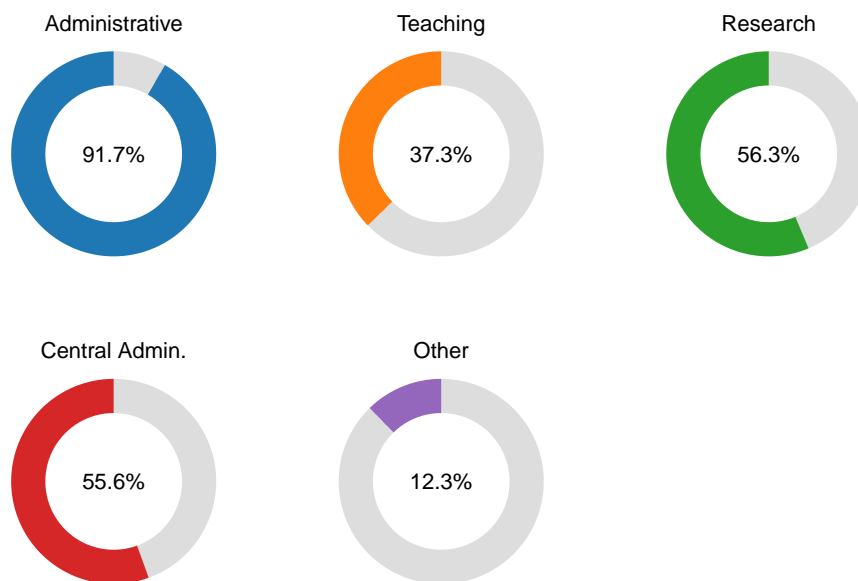
If other, please specify:

5.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic, how has staff working remotely affected the level and quality of support you receive from staff? (Quality)

Scale of 1-5, with one being significant negative impact and 5 being positive impact.

4	36	139	32	30
1.7%	14.9%	57.7%	13.3%	12.4%

1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
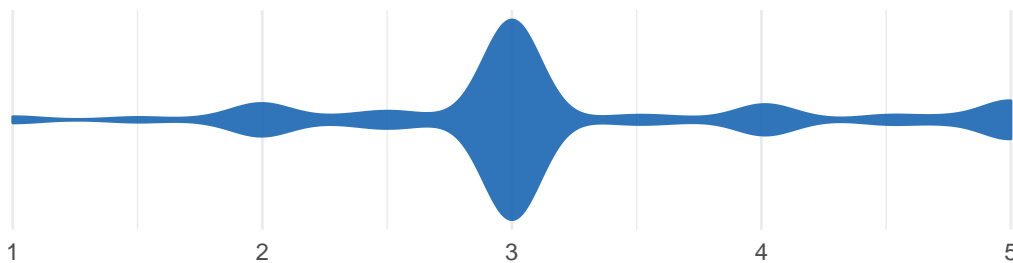
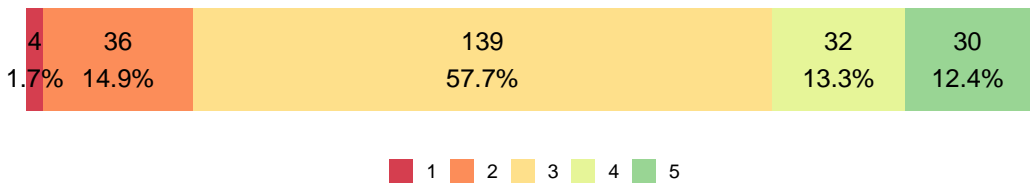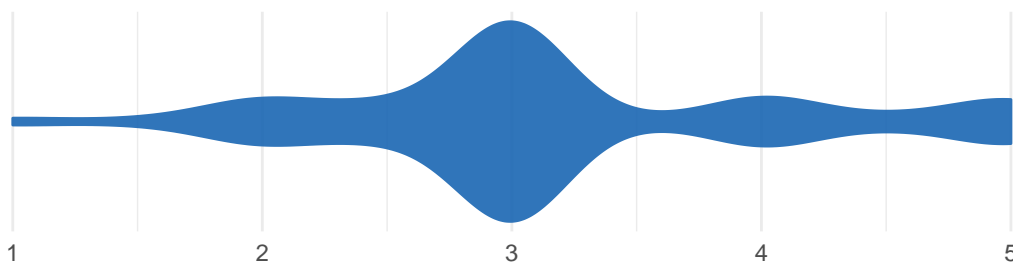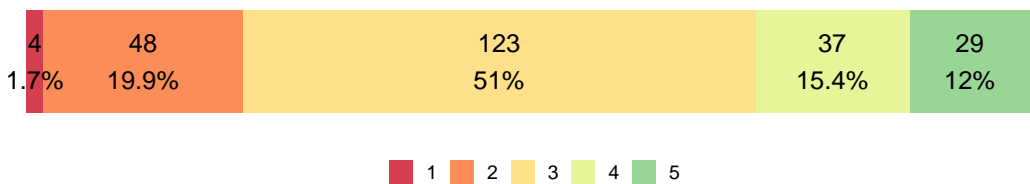## 5.3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, how has staff working remotely affected the level and quality of support you receive from staff? (Level)

Scale of 1-5, with one being significant negative impact and 5 being positive impact.

4	48	123	37	29
1.7%	19.9%	51%	15.4%	12%

1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

5.4 Assuming pandemic trends allow for BU employees to return to pre-pandemic arrangements, would you support staff working on a hybrid basis, partially on campus and off?

168	54	19
69.7%	22.4%	7.9%

Yes Maybe (depends on the role) No
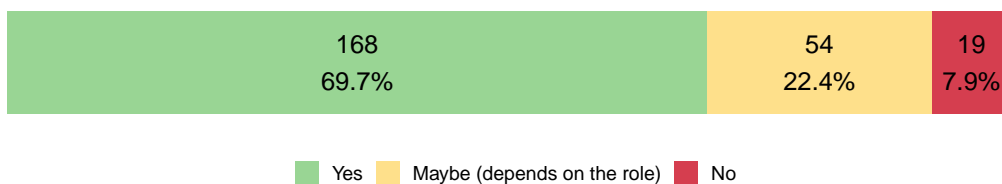
5.5 Please elaborate:

There are 67 entries in this section:

- (36 people) For some positions it might work. Front facing positions should be on campus.
- (16 people) The support quality, efficiency, etc. went significantly down. We should all go back to campus.
- (15 people) We all need to go back to campus and work as a team.
- (1 person) Hybrid work is the worst.

Conclusion

6.1 In conclusion, please provide any additional comments or suggestions you may have regarding the future of remote work. Selecting the submit button below will complete the survey.

There are 1814 replies for this question.

Survey sentiments
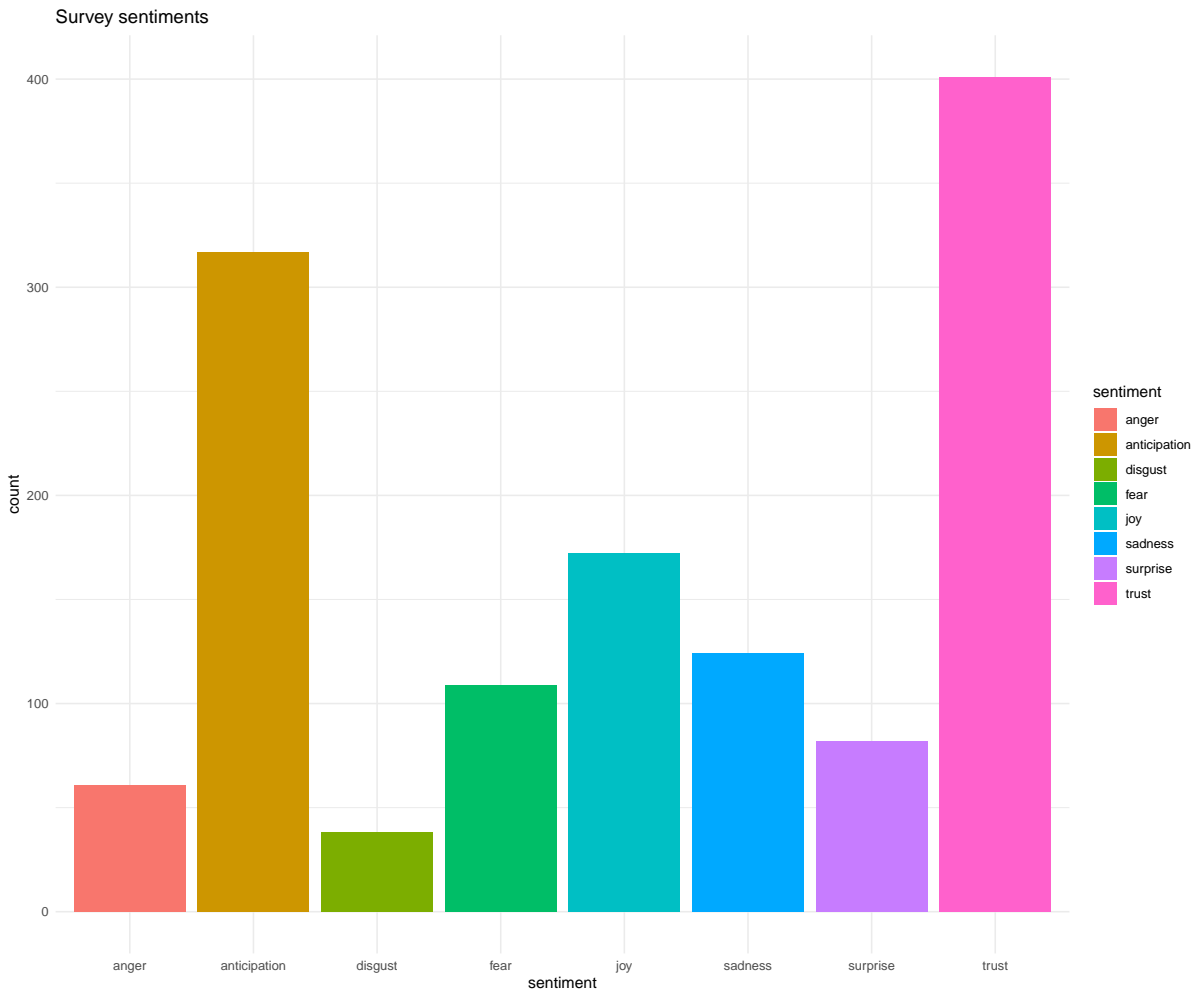
In addition to overwhelmingly many replies with a very strong support of remote work option ("Being able to work remotely N days/week would change my life..."), below are some challenges raised or feedback provided:

- I'm glad we are thinking about this systematically. Thank you.

- I do not know: 1) how to foster and maintain a strong team culture when people are in multiple places; 2) how to ensure that productivity continues 3) how do I evaluate work that is not numerical, etc.

- We don't yet know how we will conduct meetings with combinations of remote and in-person attendees. Probably we will need to continue to use Zoom.

- Meetings with faculty have been INFINITELY easier to schedule and far more productive.

- That's it???? You are going to make decisions that have incredible impact on a workforce that has just gone through collective trauma and that's all you want to know from us? This year has been the hardest of my life. The support systems I rely on as a mother/partner/daughter/friend/human vanished, and my mental health has suffered. We are all going to need time to process the trauma of this past year, and I get the sense that the University thinks we all just had a 15 month long vacation. Yes, I got my work done and was still there to support the students and faculty I work with. Yes, it was often at the expense of my children and my own mental health. NO, I did not work optimally–we were in a global pandemic! Your workforce needs some space and grace after this year. Please allow us to have that.

- I don't think BU should implement a blanket "in office" requirement. It should be determined by department or office and staff should have the ability to express their interests on a department or staff level without repercussion.

- My fear is that BU will allow some employees to work from home at least some of the time, but will not allow it for employees who work regularly with students. I am an academic advisor, and our jobs are perfectly doable from home at least some, if not all, of the time.

- One challenge is who gets a permanent work station in the office and who shares. Would you get an assigned space if you are in at least three days per week? What about technology. Does BU provide two workstations; one in the office and one from home? Or only provide a laptop and monitors, keyboards, etc at home needs to be supplied by the individual. During the pandemic we have not hired anyone new so the challenge of on boarding someone new while working remote has not been discussed. I think it will be a real challenge integrating someone new in a team.

- I believe that there is a trust issue with supervisors allowing staff to work remotely. Essentially, I am professional and want to give responsibility for knowing how to do my job well from wherever and whenever. I give so much of my free time in the past year to get the job done and meet student and faculty needs without dropping the ball. However, at no point has my supervisor acknowledged that the job required any additional effort in the last 12 months and thinks I have to be in front of her to be productive.

- I would suggest that the university draft work from home minimum guidelines that departments can then add to in ultimately drafting and implementing their remote work policy. Should not be a matter if if at this point but rather how.

- No clear boundary between work and personal life. Emails from co-workers throughout the day, night and weekends

- I think providing home office equipment, and reimbursements/benefits for internet, electricity, and heating will have to be considered.

- Maybe charge both remote and in-person employees the same for parking? Unfair pay penalty for those working in person.

- THE SCHOOL DOES NOT FUNCTION CORRECTLY WITH PEOPLE WORKING FROM HOME

- There was not enough focus in this survey how to show appreciation for staff who must be on campus. Many staff have been coming in throughout the pandemic and feel that their efforts have gone unnoticed. For some reason, they still have to pay for parking, they had a commute, they had potentially additional exposure to COVID-19, and they still all put in extra hours, often working before they came to campus and resuming work when they returned home, but no one is asking what we can do for those staff. The assumption I hear that only remote workers put in more hours because they did not have a commute during the pandemic is completely incorrect. We have an issue at BU with potentially losing candidates and current employees who want to be remote and could be. We also have an issue at BU with candidates and current employees who are in roles that legitimately need to be on campus, but comparable roles at corporations do not always have this requirement. We need to spend some time ensuring those folks are heard and acknowledged and that we don't lose experienced staff in roles that require an on-campus presence. Might want to consider equity adjustments and a recruitment premium for on-campus roles.