



September 16, 2021

Dear President Cauce, Provost Richards, and Vice President Kornberg,

On behalf of the Professional Staff Organization (PSO) and the thousands of UW professional staff we represent, we are writing to share additional analysis and summary of results from our survey of UW professional staff on return to campus-wide in-person/onsite work. Our previous message, on August 12, [focused on the quantitative results](#). This follow-up report examines the open-ended answers we received as part of the survey, and identifies short- and long-term issues that arose from the entirety of the survey data. We are glad for the opportunity to share these results with you.

The [full report](#) was shared with our membership in [this recent blog post](#). While it is impossible to capture every perspective and concern, and we recognize that the survey represented a snapshot in a quickly moving situation, we hope the synthesis proves useful. We are aware that UW professional staff share many of the concerns as those on the recently circulated AAUP petition, the student petition on [change.org](#), and many other conversations in universities across the country. We maintain that UW professional staff have critically relevant perspectives regarding this specific shared time and place.

In particular, based on the full survey results (both quantitative as well as open-ended/qualitative), The PSO Board highlights the following as potential near-term courses of action to improve return-to-in-person-work experiences for professional staff:

- University and unit policies need to center **equity rather than equality**. As should be expected, staff members' pandemic experiences differ widely, and policies should center the needs of those most vulnerable or marginalized.
- **Caregiving**: HR policies, units, and supervisors should continue to provide flexibility for those who care for children, elderly, immunocompromised, and/or other vulnerable people within their homes. HR policies should provide more concrete guidance for how supervisors can support employee caregivers.
- **Disability and Accessibility**: Units should commit to ensure continued digital accessibility of data and other materials provided during the last year and half.
- **Safety**: Units and the university as a whole should continue to provide every available support to ensure that staff, particularly those of marginalized identities, can work in an environment that is physically and psychologically safe. This includes requirements of training not only on COVID-19 protocols, but also on structural safety issues such as implicit bias, microaggressions, and other drivers of hostile workplace environments.
- **Scheduling**: Units should continue to offer scheduling flexibility for staff to support needs and barriers due to caregiving, transportation, disability, safety and general quality of life. HR should continue to work with unit and UW leadership to refine hybrid and remote work policies, including support for managers leading hybrid teams.
- **Indoor Spaces**: Although UW Facilities has shared some information about building ventilation, staff want concrete information about their individual workspaces. Individual staff can contact



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their building coordinator and UW Facilities, but UW should take the lead providing this information.

- **Transportation:** To enable staff to avoid peak travel periods, UW should encourage units to support staggered and flexible scheduling. UW can also continue to share educational resources and tools for staff to help plan commutes and understand safety measures. UW should reassess the UPASS for affordability and equity.
- **Sick leave:** Unit leaders and supervisors should support employees staying home while mildly ill or during COVID related guarantees (including supporting remote work).

Although a start, these near-term solutions only address some of the concerns shared in the survey. In the full report, we provide more detail about professional staff concerns and potential longer-term courses of action to address underlying issues of equity, accessibility, and other structural challenges.

The PSO Board has worked hard for weeks on this effort, in our commitment to lifting up the voices of professional staff, and we ask that you consider and address the concerns that we bring to light from these data. Additionally, the PSO remains interested in improved shared governance. We see our role as being a partner that the UW administration can connect with to find out how professional staff are experiencing and responding to various university issues and contexts, and we would like to be as effective as possible in this role. This is part of why the PSO conducted the survey in the first place. We firmly believe that any decisions that are made with a PSO representative at the table--regardless of the presence of people who are employed as "professional staff" yet whose role in any given group is to represent another campus entity--will be a stronger decision for the whole UW community. We appreciated PSO representation on the 2020 Caregiver Task Force, and would have appreciated being included in the Back to the Workplace Task Force. We respectfully request that any current or future committees or task forces whose purview would directly impact professional staff, whether they're COVID-related or not, include a PSO representative.

As people who are serving the PSO at the same time as--indeed, as a critical aspect of--our work to diligently to uphold the mission of this university in all that we do, we deeply understand that all UW communities are grappling with our uncertain future. We are honored to present the perspectives of the professional staff community to UW leadership, and welcome your thoughts. Thank you for your time; we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Leyla Salmassi, Board President, Professional Staff Organization
Jen Davison, Board Vice President, Professional Staff Organization
On behalf of the PSO Board