



Report on Working Conditions of Ontario University Staff

Prepared for the United Steelworkers of
America by
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This report is based on responses to an online survey distributed by the United Steelworkers of America. The survey was posted online in late October. A total of 553 individuals responded to the survey. The bulk of the responses came from the University of Toronto and the University of Guelph where the union represents staff. A smaller number of responses were received from 12 other universities in Ontario.

Overall the survey suggests that for many university staff working conditions have deteriorated in the last five years, many have heavy workloads which prevent them from adequately supporting the teaching and research mandates of the universities, and many experience frustration and tension at work.

Characteristics of the Sample

Table 1 reports the characteristics of the sample.

- Most of those who responded to the survey were in permanent full-time positions working at least 35 hours per week.
- Most of the sample was between the ages of 25 and 45. Just over one percent were younger than 25 and 18 percent were over 45.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample (%)

Employed in a permanent full-time position	90
Working 35 hours or more per week	91
Work in an administrative position	67
Work in teaching/research support or library	27
Work in support services	6
Between the ages of 25 and 45	81
Union member	98
Employed UofT	58
Employed U of Guelph	26

Working Conditions

The assessment of working conditions was broken down into three categories: control at work, workload, and respect at work.

A majority of the sample reported they had some influence over decisions that affected their quality of life at work, but only one-quarter felt they had any influence over decisions that affected university operations.

Table 2: Control at Work (%)

Have at least some influence over decisions affecting the quality of life at work	63
Have at least some influence over decisions affecting university operations	27

A substantial proportion of the sample reported heavy workloads.

- Just under half reported their workload was too heavy or too fast.
- Over half felt there were too few people in their area to do the assigned tasks.
- Over one in three respondents reported they were asked to do things unrelated to their job such as unpaid work and personal favours.
- Sixteen percent reported working unpaid overtime.
- The work was surprisingly repetitive with three-quarters of the sample reporting they did repetitive work at least half of each day.
- Most of those who responded to the survey felt their workload had increased in the last five years.

The overall workload is reflected in two key questions regarding university support staff's ability to perform the roles they are assigned at the university.

- Forty percent felt that as a result of their workload, they were unable to adequately support the teaching and research mandate of the university.
- Nearly sixty percent felt they did not have access to the resources and staff needed to adequately support the teaching and research mandate of the university.

Table 3: Workload (%)

Sometimes asked to do things unrelated to job	38
Work unpaid overtime at least half the time	16
Workload too heavy	47
Work pace too fast	43
Too few people in area to do the work	57
Do repetitive work half the time or more	76
Rarely face conflicting demands at work	32
Workload increase in last 5 years	80
Workload prevents you from adequately supporting teaching/research mandate of university	40
Insufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university	58

An important component of the experience of work is how one is treated at work.

- Almost one-third of the sample reported having been harassed at work.
- Sixty percent reported that management policies were fair, they were satisfied with their supervisors and that they were treated with respect at work. Forty percent felt the opposite. This would appear to be an area where universities may need to re-evaluate some of their policies.

Table 4: Respect at Work (%)

Harassed at work	29
Management polices fair	62
Satisfied with supervisor	60
Treated with respect at work	59

Working conditions by type of work

The sample was divided into three types of jobs: administration, teaching/research support including library support, and support services which included food services, custodial positions and tradespersons. For the most part, the three classes of jobs reported similar working conditions. The exceptions are reported in Table 5. Those in administrative positions were more likely to report their work was repetitive than the other two classifications. Those in support

services positions were less likely to report having some influence over decisions affecting the quality of life at work, were more likely to face conflicting demands at work, and were more likely to be harassed at work.

Table 5: Working Conditions by Job Classification (%)

	Admin.	Teaching & research support	Support services
Have at least some influence over decisions affecting the quality of life at work	64	67	44
Do repetitive work half the time or more	82	65	65
Rarely face conflicting demands at work	29	35	50
Harassed at work	29	27	47

All results statistically significant at the 5% level on a chi2 test.

Working Conditions by Employment Relationship

The survey asked respondents to indicate if their position was a full-time permanent position or some other form including contract position or part-time position. There were some interesting differences between the permanent full-time and other university staff.

- The full-time permanent employees were more likely to work 35 hours or more per week and were marginally less likely to be between the ages of 25 and 45.
- About one in five full-time permanent employees was over the age of 45 while less than one in ten of the non-permanent non-full-time employees was over the age of 45.
- The full-time permanent employees were in general more pessimistic regarding changes in their workload in the last five years and their ability to adequately support the mandates of the universities they work for.
- Over eighty percent reported their workload had increased in the last five years.
- Almost half felt their workload prevented them from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of university and only thirty-nine percent reported having

sufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university.

Table 6: Working Conditions by Employment Relationship (%)

	Full-time permanent positions	Other type of positions
Working 35 hours or more per week	94	66
Between the ages of 25 and 45	80	86
Too few people in area to do the work	59	41
Workload increase in last 5 years	81	68
Workload prevents you from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of university	57	84
Insufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university	39	64

All results statistically significant at the 1% level on a chi2 test.

Health Status

The survey also examined the health status of university staff.

- A substantial portion reported experiencing pain at work at least half the time.
- Just under half of the sample reported being frustrated with work half the time or being tense at work half the time.
- Over half were exhausted after work at least half the time.

The relatively high frequency of frustration at work and tension at work may be something university polices need to address.

Table 6: Health Status (%)

Experience pain at work at least half the time	27
Frustrated at work at least half the time	41
Exhausted after work at least half the time	57
Tense at work at least half the time	49

Relationship Between Working Conditions and Health Status

The survey asked respondents to report on the frequency of frustration at work and tension at work. These are both indicators of potential stress which can have long-term effects on health status. The table below explores the correlation between working conditions and health outcomes. Respondents were more likely to report being frustrated at work at least half the time or being tense at work at least half the time when their workload prevented them from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of university, when they felt there were insufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university, and when their workload was too heavy. They were less likely to report being frustrated at work or tense at work when they felt they were treated with respect and dignity at work.

Table 7: Correlation Between Working Conditions and Frequency of Frustration at Work (%)

	Frustrated at work half the time or more	Frustrated at work less than half the time
Workload prevents you from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of university	61	39
Insufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university	53	47
Workload too heavy	58	42
Treated with respect at work	24	76

All results statistically significant at the 1% level on a chi2 test.

Table 8: Correlation Between Working Conditions and Frequency of Tension at Work

	Tense at work half the time or more	Tense at work less than half the time
Workload prevents you from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of university	67	33
Insufficient resources and staff to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of university	60	40
Workload too heavy	72	28
Treated with respect at work	36	64

All results statistically significant at the 1% level on a chi2 test.

Summary

The survey conducted by the USWA provides a window into the world of work of university staff.

It suggests that workloads have increased in the last five years, that many staff feel unable to adequately support the teaching and research mandates of their university and that many report they are frequently frustrated and tense at work.

Further analysis suggested that there was a link between frustration and tension at work and inability to adequately support the teaching and research mandates of the university. Respondents who felt their workload was too heavy, that their workload prevented them from adequately supporting the teaching/research mandate of the university, or who felt there were insufficient resources and staff in their area to adequately support the teaching/research mandate of the university were more likely to report they were frustrated at work and tense at work.