

# Summary of Initial Findings: Fall 2020 Survey of Caregiving Impacts

## Background

Concerns about the impact of additional, pandemic-related caregiving responsibilities for faculty, staff, and graduate students at Virginia Tech were expressed through a variety of venues in the summer and early fall of 2020. These venues included conversations with academic leaders, faculty, and representative bodies. While it was agreed that there was an intuitive sense of the impacts, we recognized that data and insights about the impact were limited and the university leadership could benefit from a more complete understanding of the degree to which additional responsibilities are impacting the lives of our employees and graduate students. Through collaboration with faculty and academic leaders as well as colleagues from human resources and the graduate school, a survey was developed to gather both quantitative and qualitative input regarding these impacts.

A survey was designed to gain insight into the degree to which people's lives and work are being impacted by additional responsibilities caring for children (preschool-aged through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) or adults (potentially with a wider range of needs or situations), and was tailored with questions relevant and appropriate to (a) instructional and research faculty, (b) staff, A/P faculty, and wage employees, and (c) graduate students. It should be noted that the survey was not scientifically validated, but rather used as an informal means to gather timely information as to the extent and range of impacts of caregiving responsibilities for our employees. In order to provide the greatest protection for respondent anonymity, the survey was administered via a generic link and distributed through multiple communication channels. Information about the survey and invitations to participate were shared through:

- VTNews as a campus notice
- Communication with senior leaders
- The department heads' listserv
- Human Resources communication lists
- Hokie Wellness distribution list
- Women's Center and VTWomenConnect listservs
- The graduate school
- Caucus and alliance groups
- Governance leadership

The survey remained open to responses for three weeks during the month of October 2020.

## Survey Response

A total of 2,205 responses were received to the survey, broken down by role type as follows:

- Teaching and/or Research Faculty: 599
- Staff, A/P Faculty, and Wage Employees: 1,327
- Graduate Students: 279

Overall, slightly more than 2/3 of respondents who responded to the gender demographic identified as women, just under 1/3 identified as men, and a handful of respondents responded as “non-binary.”

The fact that the survey was distributed broadly for anonymous response makes estimating a response rate difficult. Looking at Fall 2020 Census data, however, these responses correspond to about 20% of teaching and/or research faculty, 25% of staff, A/P faculty, and wage employees, and 8% of graduate students on assistantship. Actual number of responses to any given question varies greatly, as only relevant questions were displayed to each respondent based on their own responses describing their caregiving situation. It is assumed that generally people with caregiving responsibilities would have opted into the survey and those without would not have. It should also be noted that just over 25% of survey respondents noted they do NOT have caregiving responsibilities currently. Therefore, care should be taken when interpreting this data acknowledging that it represents a small proportion of the total respective populations.

Primary work location breakdown, as answered by those who provided a response to the question, is as follows:

- Blacksburg: 86%
- Greater Washington, DC Metro Area: 2%
- Roanoke: 4%
- Virginia Cooperative Extension or AREC: 3%
- Other (varied): 4%

As noted above, though the survey was aimed to gather information from those experiencing additional caregiving responsibilities created by pandemic-related changes, 635 respondents indicated that they do **not** have caregiving responsibilities for others at this time – yet 288 offered comments related to other concerns impacting their work productivity at this time. The most common themes from these comments (from most frequently cited to least) are:

- No concerns; respondents want to be sure it is known that not everyone is struggling with things outside of work right now; for many a distraction-free environment at home that doesn't exist in the office is resulting in very high productivity
- Self-care and work-life balance are suffering due to work/school/lab/research demands always being “on”; many are concerned about their own mental health and overwhelming stress levels
- Isolation-related anxiety, stress, and negative impact to mental health
- Concern about their own existing health issues, potential risk of COVID, or actual infection and recovery

- Hindered collaboration / “disconnect” and the lack of access to usual campus work and research spaces is impacting productivity negatively
- Concern for colleagues who are juggling additional caregiving responsibilities
- Loss of personal productivity due to caregiving responsibilities of other colleagues / others perceived to have more of a “split focus” and the feeling of “picking up the slack” for others
- Many have current or upcoming temporary caregiving responsibilities (e.g., family member having surgery, grieving family death, ER visits, possible illness)
- Concern about the pace and level of demands in the current work environment and burnout
- Though many don’t have caregiving responsibilities, they do live with others who are high-risk for COVID, which adds anxiety and concern
- Limited travel ability or restrictions on travel create stress and strain on family and personal long-distance relationships
- For some, technology issues are impacting productivity negatively (e.g., issues with internet service or bandwidth, issues with online teaching tools)
- Some do have elder parents or grandparents, which results in some added anxiety over possible future caregiving needs
- Concerns about the national climate/situation more broadly
- Desire or need to help extended family members (parents, grand-children, college-aged or other adult children) who do not need regular care, but can use assistance
- Additional burden of trying to meet elevated student needs during this time

## General Findings: Caregiving Balance

Respondents with caregiving responsibilities reported that they are spending on average **15 – 18 more waking hours per week** seeing to caregiving responsibilities than they were before the pandemic. While all respondent groups indicated that caregiving responsibilities are impacting their lives during what would normally be regular working hours, faculty and graduate student impacts are reported as significantly higher than staff impacts, with mean responses indicating impact “to a moderate extent” as compared to “a slight extent” for staff (staff grouping also includes A/P faculty and wage respondents). This pattern followed for the reported degree to which caregiving is impacting work overall as well.

Qualitative analysis of responses to the question “What is the biggest challenge for you right now in balancing caregiving and work responsibilities?” resulted in very clear themes, most commonly:

- Juggling the stress of a no-win situation – pressure to meet increased work/learning demands while not sacrificing the needs of children at home and their education; managing household responsibilities; increased stress and concern for burnout, ongoing sense of overwhelm

- Not having any set amount of uninterrupted work time, or separate work space; odd and shifting schedules and lack of ability to plan a consistent daily routine results in longer work hours overall
- Limited hours per day in school for Montgomery County Public Schools, children are spending more time learning and doing schoolwork at home; managing synchronous conflicts between children’s school and meetings for work; “children learning remotely need immediate assistance if they have an issue – regardless of what I’m working on”
- It is hard to find workable childcare for times when the kids are not in school, many with two parents working; other help with kids is less available now
- Self-care is suffering greatly... work/personal balance, adequate sleep, emotional health, overall well-being; people are experiencing cumulative and ongoing fatigue, which is taking a serious toll
- Outside-the-home childcare related schedule impacts/challenges

### Caring for infant/toddler/preschool children

While child care arrangements for infant, toddler, and preschool aged children vary, fewer than 5% of respondents indicated that they do not have sufficient options available to meet these needs. However, it is notable that 36% of faculty respondents, 35% of staff respondents, and 68% of graduate student respondents note that children in this category are being cared for at home by them during the day or that their arrangements vary day-to-day – both situations that require notable time and energy to manage, and can create additional stress.

### Caring for school-aged children

Of parents or guardians with children in grades K-3, roughly 88-90% indicated these children are engaging in some level of remote learning. Across categories of respondents, 70-75% indicate that these children require guidance and oversight for their remote learning period, and in many cases hands-on instruction throughout the day.

For those with children in grades 4-5 (split apart from K-3 due to different remote/in-person options offered for these grades in Montgomery County, Virginia), only 20-28% of respondents indicate these children are able to work fairly independently, with 41-50% reporting these children still needing guidance and oversight for their remote learning.

For those with children in grades 6-12, a wider range of needs is expressed with 20-51% indicating these children are old enough to work fairly independently during their remote learning, and 29-47% indicating there is still some guidance and oversight required.

### Caring for adults

With regard to caregiving for adults, there is a wider range of situations and experiences than child-related caregiving. A range of 30-50% of respondents indicate regular daily responsibilities for an adult who needs care – some with assistance from others, and some without. Likely owing to the range of different circumstances and needs for adult care, there

are larger percentages of respondents who don't feel they have good options to manage these responsibilities (25-45%), which can also create a significant level of stress.

## Teaching and/or Research Faculty Impacts

Teaching and research faculty indicate a significant shift in their time allocation across activities as compared to before the pandemic. Faculty self-report, reflecting on the time before the pandemic, on average 38% of their time on research, nearly 34% of their time on teaching, 14.5% of time on service activities, and 7.5% of time on leadership. Post-pandemic, the self-reported time spent on research has fallen to 28% while teaching has risen to 40%. Time spent on service and leadership has remained fairly steady. There were no significant differences between pre-tenure and tenured faculty.

The most-used resources for faculty are flexible scheduling (28% cited), Virtual Professional Development Resources (8%), leaves other than FFCRA and PHEL leaves (4%), Hokie Wellness Resources (3%), and the Employee Assistance Program (1%). It is worth noting, however, that pre-tenure faculty are taking advantage of available resources to a lesser degree than tenured faculty (55%, as compared to 46%). Additionally, far fewer non-tenure-track faculty are taking advantage of available resources, highlighting an important opportunity to be sure these faculty are finding the support they may need, and are aware of all of the resources available to them.

When asked what additional supports or accommodations would be most helpful for the university to consider,

- Pre-tenure faculty most frequently cited “decreased research expectations for 1-2 years” and “teaching release”
- Tenured faculty most frequently cited “teaching release,” “decreased research expectations for 1-2 years,” “service sabbatical,” and “GTA support”
- Other teaching and research faculty most frequently cited “University wide policy about being granted additional sick/unpaid leave,” “decreased research expectations for 1-2 years,” and “teaching release”

The vast majority of teaching and research faculty respondents indicate that their direct supervisor or leader has been “highly” or “mostly” supportive in acknowledging and supporting the family caregiving needs that have arisen for them (92%).

When asked what may stop faculty from taking advantage of available resources or accommodations, a number of themes clearly emerged:

- Uncertainty or anxiety related to the tenure and promotion process and concerns about ability to achieve tenure or promotion to full professor - Decreased productivity negatively impacting h-index; lower expectations now means higher expectations later; using resources would be viewed negatively for P&T or not reflected accurately in the dossier

- Some have already taken an extension on tenure clock and do not want to add to it
- Concern about negative evaluations attached to using these resources/needing more support, especially from leadership
- Perceived pressure in the department to continue as normal (even if unspoken)
- Known discrimination in the past for matters of parental leave and caregiving duties
- Lack of support from Director/Department Head and Dean, no communication about how pandemic has impacted life and productivity
- Concerns about increasing the gender wage gap/exacerbating inequalities
- Still wanting to be able to teach or have the unique expertise needed to teach; there is no one else to help out teaching as all others qualified also have caregiving needs
- Teaching releases not offered by all units, or able to be offered to all who want it
- Level of work has increased since COVID, and many are not wanting to overburden other colleagues
- Grant expectations from external funds don't change
- Concern that accommodations will not be taken seriously
- Unsure of what is available and effectiveness of these options and subsequent impact on department - this requires research, time and effort that people cannot expend

### Impacts for Staff, A/P Faculty, and Wage Employees

On average, respondents in this group report spending about 13.5 hours per week at work in person currently, and 25.8 hours per week teleworking. The vast majority (84.6%) report no concerns about the degree of choice they have had in their method of working, and 79% say they have the necessary workplace supports to meet work responsibilities while balancing caregiving responsibilities.

Respondents in this group are taking advantage of available resources to a good degree:

	<b>Count</b>
Flexible scheduling	<b>461</b>
Families First Coronavirus Response Act Leave	<b>23</b>
Public Health and Emergency Leave	<b>16</b>
Other Leave	<b>164</b>
ADA and Accessibility Services	<b>9</b>
Employee Assistance Program	<b>25</b>
Hokie Wellness Resources	<b>86</b>
Virtual Professional Development Resources	<b>125</b>

## Graduate Student Impacts

The majority of graduate students reported no concerns with the degree of choice they had in determining their work method this semester (70%), and similarly report that their faculty advisors have been “highly supportive” in both acknowledging and supporting balance for caregiving responsibilities and providing accommodating schedules or hours to help balance these needs.

Graduate students are the least likely group to have dedicated and consistent child care arrangements, for infant/toddler/preschool aged children in particular. This is perhaps not surprising, due to the varied schedules of graduate studies and work as well as the expense of regular childcare, but nonetheless highlights an ongoing challenge for graduate students that is also not tied only to the circumstance of the pandemic. Significant proportions of graduate student respondents also report adult caregiving responsibilities (40-50%), so it is important not to leave this group out of consideration for the full range of caregiving responsibilities.

## Next Steps

Further analysis of qualitative responses to survey items is needed to dig deeper into specific ideas for supporting faculty, staff, and graduate students in managing their added caregiving burdens, as well as supporting and providing some relief to those who are not personally responsible for caregiving, but are experiencing workplace impacts due to the pandemic.

Additional analysis of each individual population of respondents by the provost’s office, human resources, and the graduate school will help explore the feasibility of additional ways to respond to needs, concerns, and ideas specific to these groups. The data will also be analyzed by primary work location as well as senior management area to determine whether there are significant differences in needs and concerns as well as to see how information about resources, policies, and support is reaching faculty, staff, and graduate students. While a number of resources and supports are already in place to support pandemic-related needs and work impacts, university leaders will continue conversations with faculty, staff, and graduate students to determine what more can be done to ensure fair and equitable performance assessment, and to work toward the development and communication of additional needed information and resources.

This report will be shared throughout the university, as will further analysis as it is completed.

# Key Data Tables

## Caregiving Balance

**1. About how many waking hours did/do you generally spend, personally, on caregiving during a typical Monday-Friday workweek**

Grouping	Before	After	Difference
Faculty	19.75	36.39	+16.64
Staff	21.93	37.27	+15.34
Graduate Students	21.14	39.33	+18.10

- No significant difference between breakout groups for caregiving hours before or after COVID

**2. To what degree are your current care-giving responsibilities impacting your life during what would normally be your regular working hours?**

- a. Scored on a scale of 1: Not at all, 2: To a little extent, 3: To a moderate extent, 4: To a great extent**

Grouping	Mean	N
Faculty	3.05	425
Staff	2.63	793
Graduate Students	3.15	81

- Difference between groups:
  - Staff significantly lower than graduate students and faculty

**3. To what degree are your current care-giving responsibilities impacting your work overall?**

Grouping	Mean	N
Faculty	2.88	426
Staff	2.29	793
Graduate Students	2.94	81

- Difference between groups:
  - Staff significantly lower than graduate students and faculty

**4. For your infant/toddler/preschool children (%):**

	Faculty (N=142)	Staff/Wage/AP (N=239)	Graduate Students (N=32)
At home but taken care of someone other than myself	16.2	14.6	12.5
At a child care center during my work day	32.4	37.7	15.6
At home and I am caring for them during my workday	19.7	12.6	34.4
Child care arrangements vary from day to day	16.2	22.6	34.4
Sufficient child care options but have not finalized plans	1.4	0.4	0
Have not finalized plans because I do not have sufficient options	1.4	0.8	0

**5. School-aged, grades K-3 (%):**

	Faculty (N=148)	Staff/Wage/AP (N=216)	Graduate Students (N=16)
Do not have remote learning	10.8	13.4	12.5
Old enough to work fairly independently	2.7	7.9	6.3
Need to provide guidance and oversight throughout their remote learning period	44.6	38.4	50.0
Often need to provide hands-on instruction throughout the day	25.0	23.1	25.0
Working with my child(ren)'s school to meet their special support needs	1.4	3.7	0

**6. School-aged, grades 4-5(%):**

	Faculty (N=70)	Staff/Wage/AP (N=118)	Graduate Students (N=10)
Old enough to work fairly independently	28.6	23.7	20
Need to provide guidance and oversight throughout their remote learning period	41.4	47.5	50
Often need to provide hands-on instruction throughout the day	11.4	9.3	30
Working with my child(ren)'s school to meet their special support needs	0	2.5	0

7. School-aged, grades 6-12 (%):

	Faculty (N=154)	Staff/Wage/AP (N=311)	Graduate Students (N=15)
Old enough to work fairly independently	51.3	54.3	20
Need to provide guidance and oversight throughout their remote learning period	28.6	32.2	46.7
Often need to provide hands-on instruction throughout the day	7.8	4.8	13.3
Working with my child(ren)'s school to meet their special support needs	1.9	1.6	6.7

8. Care for adults

		Yes		Sometimes		No	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Regular daily responsibilities, with some assistance	Faculty (N=77)	24	31.2	22	28.6	31	40.3
	Staff/Wage/AP (N=189)	58	30.7	61	32.3	70	37.0
	Graduate Students (N=23)	9	39.1	6	26.1	8	34.8
Regular daily responsibilities, with no assistance	Faculty (N=76)	24	31.6	20	26.3	32	42.1
	Staff/Wage/AP (N=172)	61	35.5	49	28.5	62	36.0
	Graduate Students (N=22)	11	50	4	18.2	7	31.8
Good options to manage these responsibilities	Faculty (N=83)	36	43.4	26	31.3	21	25.3
	Staff/Wage/AP (N=187)	82	43.9	65	34.8	40	21.4
	Graduate Students (N=24)	8	33.3	5	20.8	11	45.8
Do not have sufficient options to manage these responsibilities well	Faculty (N=71)	15	21.1	25	35.2	31	43.7
	Staff/Wage/AP (N=162)	30	18.5	52	32.1	80	49.4
	Graduate Students (N=22)	7	31.8	8	36.4	7	31.8

## Work Responsibilities

### Faculty Branching

#### 1. Percentage time spent on each area before and after COVID-19

	BEFORE		AFTER	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
Research	38.06	405	28.07	405
Teaching	33.65	405	40.14	405
Service	14.5	405	14.43	405
Leadership	7.5	405	8.66	405

##### a. Breakout by Pre-Tenure and Tenure-Track Faculty (mean hours)

	Pre-Tenured (N=77)			Tenured (N=150)		
	Before	After	Diff	Before	After	Diff
Research	47.94	33.08	-14.86	41.81	26.28	-15.53
Teaching	31.04	38.60	+7.55	30.25	39.84	+9.59
Service	12.38	12.95	+0.57	15.75	16.54	+0.79
Leadership	5.06	6.29	+1.22	8.77	10.86	+2.09

- For pre-tenured faculty, there was a significant difference in research and teaching
- For tenured faculty, there was a significant difference in research, teaching and leadership

#### 2. Have you taken advantage of any of the following to help balance your responsibilities?

	Pre-Tenure (N=94)	Tenured (N=173)	Other (N=455)
	N	N	N
Flexible scheduling	37	72	90
Families First Coronavirus Response Act Leave	0	1	0
Public Health and Emergency Leave	0	1	0
Other Leave	0	3	23
ADA and Accessibility Services	0	1	0
Employee Assistance Program	4	2	2
Hokie Wellness Resources	3	11	11
Virtual Professional Development Resources	8	20	33

\*Other faculty include Instructional (N=91), Research (N=60) and A/P Faculty (N=304)

Staff/Wage/AP Branching

1. **Hours currently spent during the average week:**

	Mean	SD	N
At work in person	13.47	16.02	745
Teleworking	25.79	16.47	742
On leave	0.46	2.50	743

2. **Concerns about degree of choice in method of working?**

- 84.6% said no

3. **Necessary workplace supports to meet both work responsibilities while balancing caregiving responsibilities?**

- 79.4% said yes

4. **Have you taken advantage of any of the following to help balance your responsibilities?**

	Count
Flexible scheduling	<b>461</b>
Families First Coronavirus Response Act Leave	<b>23</b>
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Other Leave	<b>164</b>
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