

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: ACADEMIC WORK LIFE SURVEY 2022 RESULTS**

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## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

The Academic Work Life Survey is a survey instrument designed to assess the benefits and challenges that come with being a faculty member at Cornell. Cornell's Office of Institutional Research and Planning administered the Academic Work Life (AWL) Survey to all eligible faculty (i.e., tenured/tenure-track faculty and research, teaching, and extension [RTE] academics) between October 13 and November 19, 2022. Historically, the AWL Survey has been administered every five to six years, with the prior administration of this survey occurring during the fall 2016 semester.

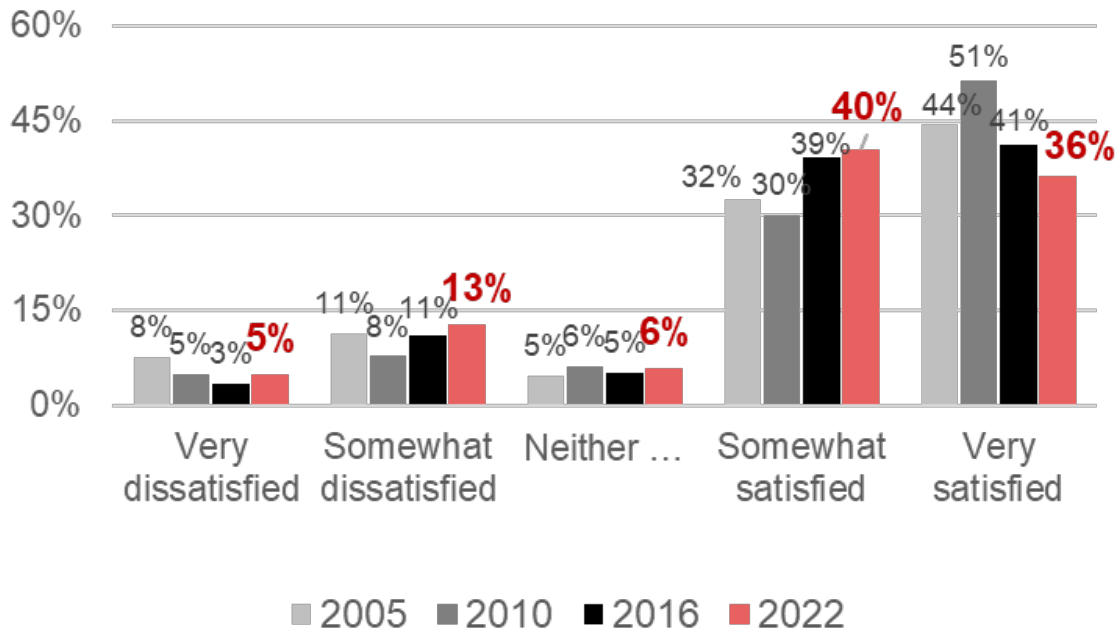
Fifty three percent of faculty invited to participate in the faculty responded, including 56% of tenured/tenure track faculty. Overall, the results discussed in this summary reflect the views of more than 1,600 Cornell faculty. On average, faculty took 25 minutes to complete the survey. This response rate compares closely to the 61% rate at which Cornell staff replied to the Employee Survey, which was administered at the same time as the Academic Work Life Survey.

## **OVERALL SATISFACTION**

Satisfaction with being a faculty member has remained relatively stable considering the major challenges that Cornell has confronted in recent years, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. The AWL Survey opens with a question asking faculty, "overall, how satisfied are you being a faculty member at Cornell?" Beginning with RTE academics, 81% reported being somewhat or very satisfied as an academic at Cornell. During the prior AWL administration in 2016, 80% of academics reported being somewhat or very satisfied, leaving the number of satisfied faculty virtually unchanged between 2016 and 2022.

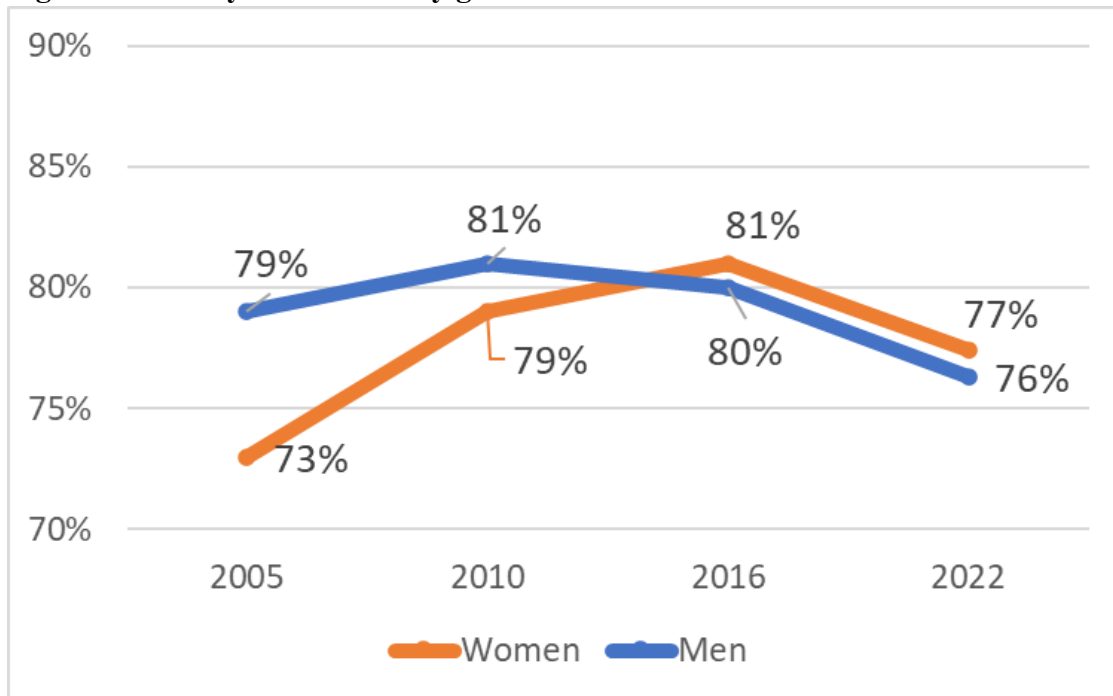
For tenured/tenure-track faculty, the percent of faculty who were at least somewhat satisfied with their position declined slightly from 80% in 2016 to 76% in 2022. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, this decline was driven by a 5% drop (41% in 2016 to 36% in 2022) in faculty responding that they are very satisfied.

**Figure 1: Overall, how satisfied are you being a faculty member at Cornell?**



Digging deeper into this decline in satisfaction amongst tenured/tenure-track faculty, we observe this decline for both women and men, as is shown below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Faculty satisfaction by gender since 2005**



Between 2016 and 2022, the number of women who reported being “somewhat” or “very” satisfied declined from 81% to 77%, while men followed closely in declining from 80% to 76%.

These comparable declines in satisfaction for men and women reflect a gender gap in job satisfaction amongst tenured/tenure-track faculty that has closed over time.

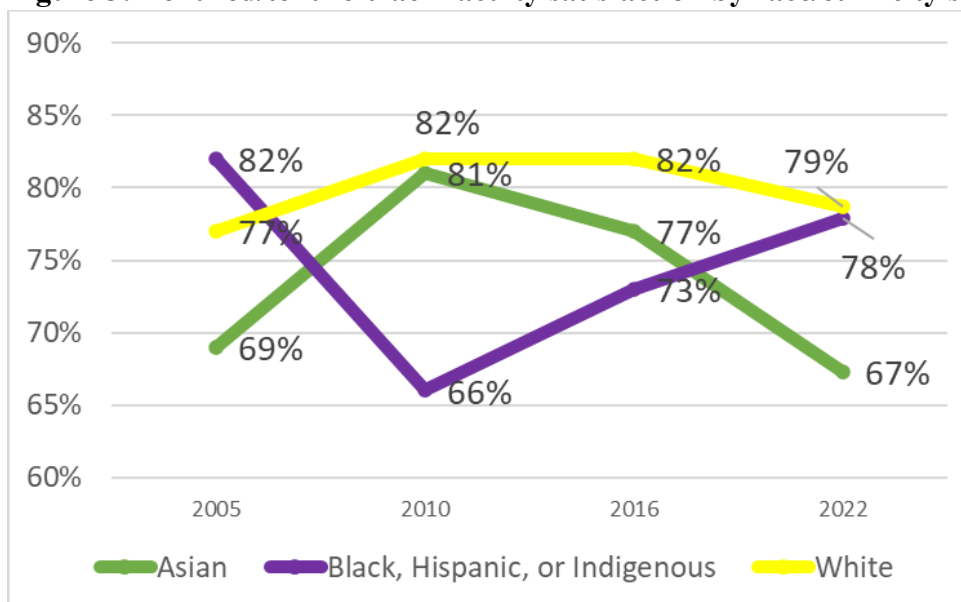
The first administration of the AWL survey in 2005 revealed a difference in job satisfaction between men and women faculty of nearly 7% (79% for men and 73% for women). However, over the past three administrations of the AWL, this discrepancy has never exceeded 2%, and over the past two, women have reported slightly higher levels of satisfaction than men.

On this most recent administration of the survey, faculty were given the option to self-identify their gender, with approximately 1.5% of faculty identifying as a gender other than a cisgender woman or man. Seventy eight percent of these non-binary faculty reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their job. This satisfaction figure, which compares favorably with that of men and women faculty, obscures that just 17% of non-binary faculty are *very* satisfied with their job at Cornell (compared to 36% of women and 37% of men).

While satisfaction amongst women and men tenured/tenure-track faculty declined similarly between 2016 and 2022, the correlates for women and men differed according to rank. Specifically, amongst women faculty, the decline in satisfaction was most pronounced for associate professors. In 2016, 77% of women associate professors at Cornell were satisfied or very satisfied with their job; in 2022, this number dropped to 67%. Conversely, for men, satisfaction dropped most sharply amongst assistant professors, whose satisfaction decreased from 82% to 71% over the past six years.

Race and ethnicity are also related to underlying changes in faculty job satisfaction from past AWL administrations. Figure 3 below demonstrates shifting patterns of job satisfaction reported by Asian, Black, Hispanic, or Indigenous (BHI), and White faculty.

**Figure 3: Tenured/tenure-track faculty satisfaction by race/ethnicity since 2005**



Since 2010, satisfaction amongst BHI faculty has increased from approximately 66% to 78%, while satisfaction amongst Asian faculty has fallen from 81% to 67% during that same period. In addition, 28% of Asian faculty reported being somewhat or very *dissatisfied* on this most recent iteration of the AWL survey, an elevated number relative to the 22% of tenured/tenure-track faculty overall who report being somewhat or very dissatisfied. Job satisfaction for White faculty also fell far less dramatically between 2010 and 2022 (82% in 2010 to 79% in 2022).

Academic discipline proved to be a further factor shaping differences in job satisfaction across Cornell tenured/tenure-track faculty (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Percent of tenured/tenure-track faculty somewhat or very satisfied with their position by academic discipline**

| <b>DISCIPLINE</b>                     | <b>% SOMEWHAT OR VERY SATISFIED</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Humanities, Arts & Design             | 69%                                 |
| Physical Sciences, Engineering & Math | 84%                                 |
| Plant, Animal & Life Sciences         | 83%                                 |
| Social & Behavioral Sciences          | 76%                                 |

While satisfaction was virtually identical for faculty in the Physical Sciences, Engineering & Math and Plant, Animal & Life Sciences (84% and 83% somewhat or very satisfied, respectively), faculty in the Social & Behavioral Sciences (76%) and Humanities, Arts & Design (69%) lagged behind in terms of their satisfaction with their positions at Cornell. These figures remain largely unchanged from the 2016 administration of the AWL Survey. Tenured/tenure-track faculty in the social and behavioral sciences had the largest percentage decline in those stating that they are somewhat or very satisfied between 2016 and 2022. In 2016, 81% of faculty in the social and behavioral sciences were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied, compared to 76% in 2022 as evidenced above in Table 1. Overall, analysis of faculty satisfaction by discipline reflects very little change over the past six years.

## **COVID IMPACT ON CORNELL FACULTY**

A central focus of this iteration of the AWL survey was to better understand faculty experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequent impact on faculty careers. Faculty were asked “to what extent do you agree or disagree that COVID had a negative impact on my career (e.g., teaching, research, clinical, etc.)?” Twenty six percent of tenured/tenure-track faculty and 15% of RTE academics “strongly agree” that COVID had a negative impact on their career.

**Figure 4: COVID-19 impact on faculty careers**

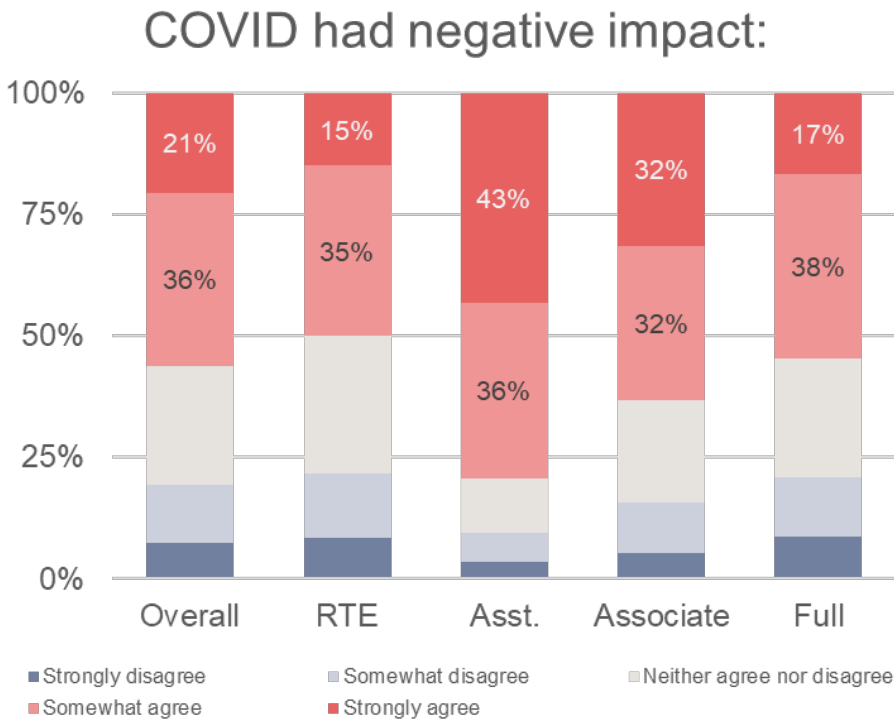


Figure 4 illustrates that early-stage faculty were the most likely to strongly agree that COVID had negatively impacted their career; 43% of assistant professors and 32% of associate professors strongly agree that this is the case (see Figure 4). By way of comparison, just 17% of (full) professors and 15% of RTE academics strongly agreed that COVID had negatively impacted their careers.

Still, regardless of rank, the majority of Cornell faculty agreed (strongly or somewhat: 57%) that the pandemic had negatively impacted their career in some way. This ranged from 50% of RTE academics, to 79% of assistant professors.

Discipline also played a role in shaping how COVID affected faculty careers. Notably, amongst tenured/tenure-track faculty, faculty from the Physical Sciences, Engineering & Math, Plant, Animal & Life Sciences, and the Social & Behavioral Sciences all had approximately 60% of their faculty somewhat or strongly agree that COVID had a negative impact on their career<sup>1</sup>. However, for faculty in the Humanities, Arts & Design, 70% somewhat or strongly agreed, with 30% strongly agreeing, more than any other disciplinary group. One possible explanation for this is that research in some disciplines requires collaborative, in-person interactions, while research in other disciplines can often be done alone. To the extent that research in the humanities, arts,

<sup>1</sup> Of this group, faculty from Physical Sciences, Engineering & Math were least likely to strongly agree that COVID had a negative impact on their career (19% vs. 28% for faculty in Plant, Animal & Life Sciences, and 26% for faculty in the Social & Behavioral Sciences).

and design can be a solitary enterprise, this isolation was particularly debilitating during the pandemic, which is a theme that emerged in the COVID impact commentaries<sup>2</sup> submitted by faculty.

## FACULTY STRESSORS

To identify top stressors for faculty, faculty were asked to “please indicate the extent to which each of the following aspects of work has been a source of stress for you over the past twelve months.” Respondents are able to select “not at all”, “somewhat”, or “extensive” to each item. Top faculty stressors changed relatively little between 2016 and 2022. However, for most of the top stressors, faculty responses reflected higher levels of stress associated with each of those items. Table 2 organizes the top faculty stressors by year, and lists them according to the percentage of faculty who responded that the particular item caused them “extensive” stress over the past twelve months.

**Table 2: Top faculty stressors in 2016 and 2022**

| <b>2016 top stressors</b>                            | <b>% responding “extensive”</b> | <b>2022 top stressors</b>                            | <b>% responding “extensive”</b> |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Managing competing demands on your time at work   | 46%                             | 1. Managing competing demands on your time at work   | 56%                             |
| 2. Tenure review (junior faculty)                    | 45%                             | 2. Tenure review (junior faculty)                    | 48%                             |
| 3. Securing funding for research or creative work    | 30%                             | 3. Securing funding for research or creative work    | 35%                             |
| 4. Finding time for personal or family relationships | 27%                             | 4. Scholarly or creative productivity                | 35%                             |
| 5. Scholarly or creative productivity                | 26%                             | 5. Finding time for personal or family relationships | 33%                             |

32% of assistant professors also reported struggling with extensive feelings of loneliness or social isolation. This figure has more than doubled since 2016, when just 15% of assistant professors expressed that they had struggled with loneliness. Finally, a new survey item asked faculty about stress that they have experienced over the past twelve months with respect to the “cost and availability of housing.” Responses to this new item were strongly related to the age of the faculty member responding. While 29% of faculty under the age of 45 reported extensive stress over the cost and availability of housing, only 9% of faculty aged 45 and over expressed similar concern.

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<sup>2</sup> The commentaries were “open-text” response to the following prompt on how COVID impacted faculties self-evaluations’ of their careers: “What would you like university administrators to know about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your work as a faculty member?”

## **ADDITIONAL REPORTS**

This overview of responses provides a preliminary look at the data from the fall 2022 administration of the Academic Work Life Survey. Additional analyses of the AWL Survey data may provide more nuanced analyses of responses that shed light on trends in certain indicators over time; these topical reports will be shared on the Institutional Research and Planning website when available and appropriate.