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March 22, 2023

**To: EVC/Provost Camfield
School Deans**

From: Patti LiWang, Chair, Divisional Council (DivCo)

Re: CAPRA's Survey on Staffing in Academic Departments

Dear EVC/Provost Camfield and School Deans,

In November 2022, CAPRA surveyed the Department Chairs to assess their staffing needs. Chair Mitchell presented the CAPRA survey report at the March 6 and 13 DivCo meetings and invited members of DivCo to endorse CAPRA's recommendation (appended).

On behalf of DivCo, I write to convey DivCo's unanimous endorsement of the CAPRA recommendation to use the ACE funds immediately to employ one full-time staff person in all academic departments when they reach a critical size of 8, or possibly fewer (depending on the circumstances), by Fall 2023, with the goal of increasing this to the mean proportion of departmental staff per faculty in the UC system by 2030.

Please refer to the appendix for additional details related to this report.

CC: School EC Chairs and support staff
Department Chairs
Michael Richards, EVC/P Chief of Staff
April Graves, Executive Assistant, EVC/P
Interim CFO Schnier
DivCo Members
CAPRA Members
Senate Office

Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation (CAPRA) Report on Staffing in Academic Departments at UC Merced

February 2023

Recommendation

Given the urgency of department level staffing at UCM reflected in this report, CAPRA recommends using the Accelerating Campus Evolution (ACE) funds immediately to employ one full-time staff person in all academic departments when they reach a critical size of 8, or possibly fewer (depending on the circumstances), by the fall of 2023, with the goal of increasing this to the mean proportion of departmental staff per faculty in the UC system by 2030.

Introduction and Background

Academic departments are the students' primary point of contact at a research university. Academic departments deliver classroom education, research products, grants, departmental events, academic advising, and mentoring. University students' main educational identity derives from their major and department – they go to their departments to seek guidance from staff and faculty, participate in department-level events, and develop a sense of community at the departmental level.

All R1 universities (including the other 9 UC sister campuses) have dedicated full-time staff within their departments. Such staffing is fundamental to the core operation of an academic department at a research university. In contrast, **UC Merced has no full-time staff dedicated to its academic departments**, even though UCM has the second highest student-to-senate faculty ratio in the UC System (32 students per faculty member).¹

At the same time, the UC system as a whole has focused on hiring non-academic administrative staff over the past ten years. A recent report on hiring by the UC-Wide University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB) summarized its findings as, “we find that the most rapid growth over our period of observation [2011-2021] was among the non-academic Management and Senior professionals (MSPs) group which increased by 164 percent.”² The result is a two-tiered UC system, one stratum that has nine campuses with staff at the department level, and a single lower stratum campus without the basic organizational infrastructure to run daily operations at the primary academic department level. When considering that UC Merced is a campus constituted by 91 percent students of color (with MSI, HSI, and AANAPISI status) and nearly two-thirds of the undergraduates on Pell grants, the understaffing of departments becomes a civil rights and economic justice issue, whereby historically excluded populations receive drastically fewer services and benefits compared to students on the other UC campuses (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021).³ UC should strive to be in compliance with equality of opportunity in educational services across campuses and the principles of DEI.

In fall of 2022, CAPRA was authorized by DIVCO to prepare a survey with UC Merced Department Chairs to better understand staffing needs. An email was sent out to the Deans' offices of the three schools at UCM on September 12, 2022 inquiring about the level of staffing at the academic

¹ See the University of California's University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB) Report on Faculty Hiring (2011-2021) at, https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/reports/sc-md-report-on-faculty-hiring.pdf

² Ibid.

³ Similar conditions of high student to faculty ratios and understaffing led to the historic Chicano blowouts/walkouts in high schools in Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Garcia 2014).

department level. All three schools confirmed by September 21, 2022 that none of the 21 academic departments at UC Merced have full time staff dedicated to only one department. After developing a survey instrument and notifying the school Deans, Chairs in all 21 academic departments at UCM were approached via email during the first two weeks of November 2022 (between November 3 and 17) to take a brief online survey about staffing (using Google Forms). On the first day the survey was launched, one department chair immediately responded to the senate office with this email message, “Please tell whoever decided to write this survey that I say thank you very much! This is so important for us to be more effective. I am grateful that CAPRA has identified this.” The complete survey is provided in Table 3 in the Appendix. The results of the survey are presented below.

Findings

Twenty out of the twenty one chairs at UC Merced completed the online survey for a response rate of 95 percent.⁴ 10 Department Chairs from SSHA responded, 4 from SNS, and 6 from SOE. The average number of full-time academic senate faculty across departments is 15 (figure 1), ranging from a low of 8 faculty to a high of 26.

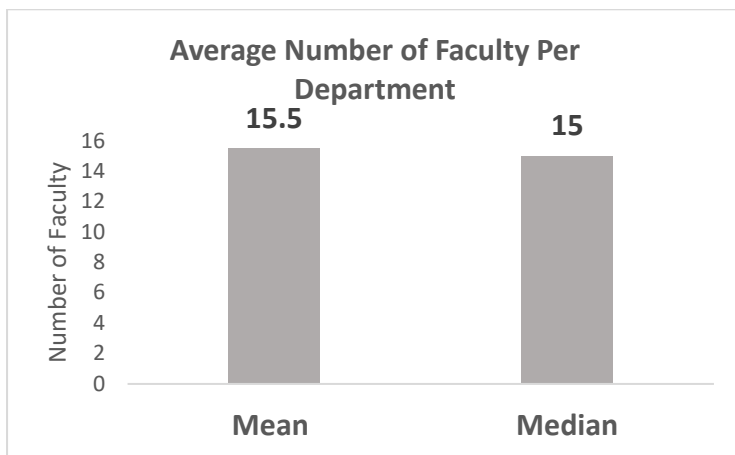


Figure 1. (N=20 Departments)

The survey also directly asked chairs to state how many full-time staff they have dedicated only to their department. All respondents stated they had no full-time staff at the departmental level, consistent with the reporting of the Deans offices of the three schools (see Figure 2). This finding positions UC Merced as an extreme outlier in the UC System, whereby the other nine UC campuses have multiple full-time staff dedicated to their academic departments.

⁴ The non-responding department was in the School of Natural Science (SNS)

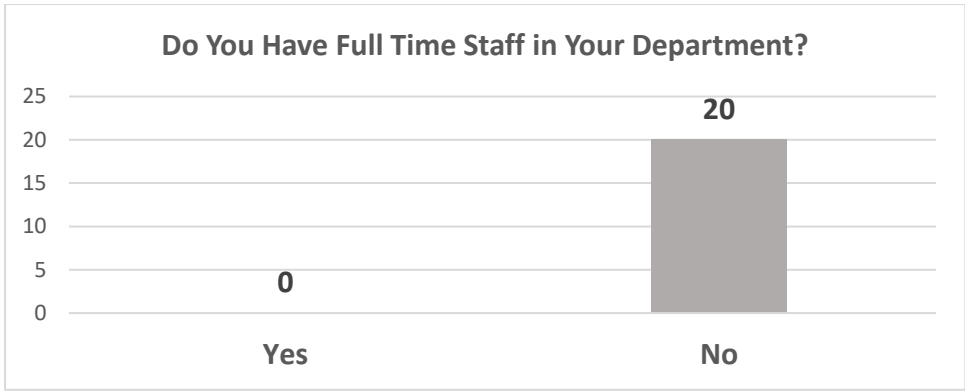


Figure 2. (N=20 Departments)

In recent years, UCM has attempted to address the understaffing issue through the use of “bylaw specialists.” Bylaw specialists are FTE staff that are housed in the Dean’s Unit of each school and under the authority of the school Deans. The bylaw specialists are split between the departments of each school. This same model is used to support graduate programs as well, in-place of having a full-time staff member to support graduate studies within a PhD program. Department chairs were asked how many departments they share a bylaw specialist for staff support (Figure 3)⁵. On average, chairs share a single staff person with at least three departments. Hence, at UC Merced the Department Chair has only .33 of a staff position to manage departments ranging from 8 to 26 faculty members (along with undergraduate majors). Because the bylaw specialist does not report to the Department Chair, the Chair is restricted to the availability of the bylaw specialist for support and the priorities of the school Dean. Because of frequent staff turnover of the bylaw specialist, there are times when they are divided into five departments until a replacement hire is made. We believe these issues could be remedied with support staff housed within departments and under the guidance of department chairs, improving communication while also reducing burnout and turnover.

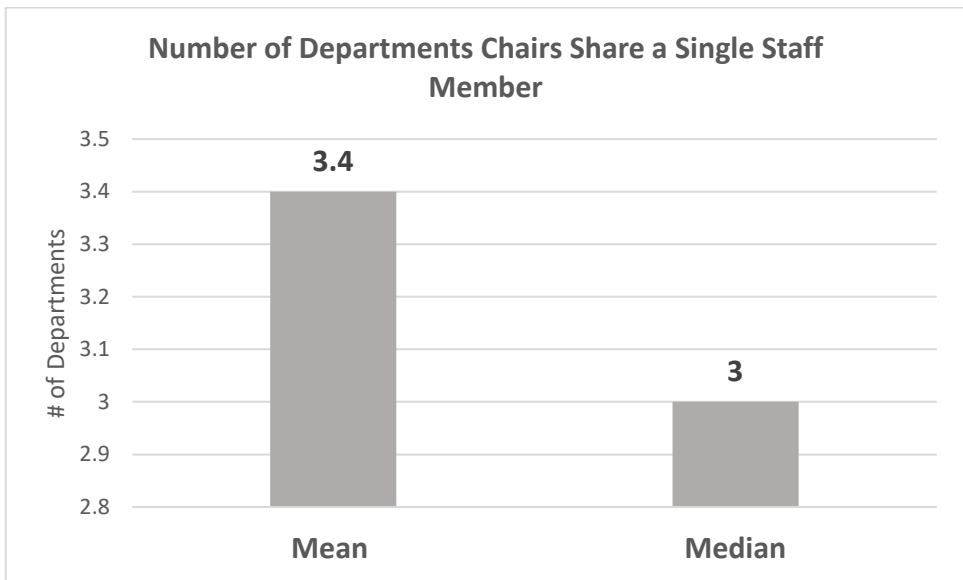


Figure 3. (N=20)

⁵ When responses were ambiguous, they were coded at the midpoint, such as “two to three departments” registered as 2.5.

Department Chairs were asked specifically if having full-time staff would assist them in running their units (Figure 4). The response on this issue was unanimous, with all 20 responding chairs indicating affirmatively that they would benefit from full-time staff dedicated only to their department.

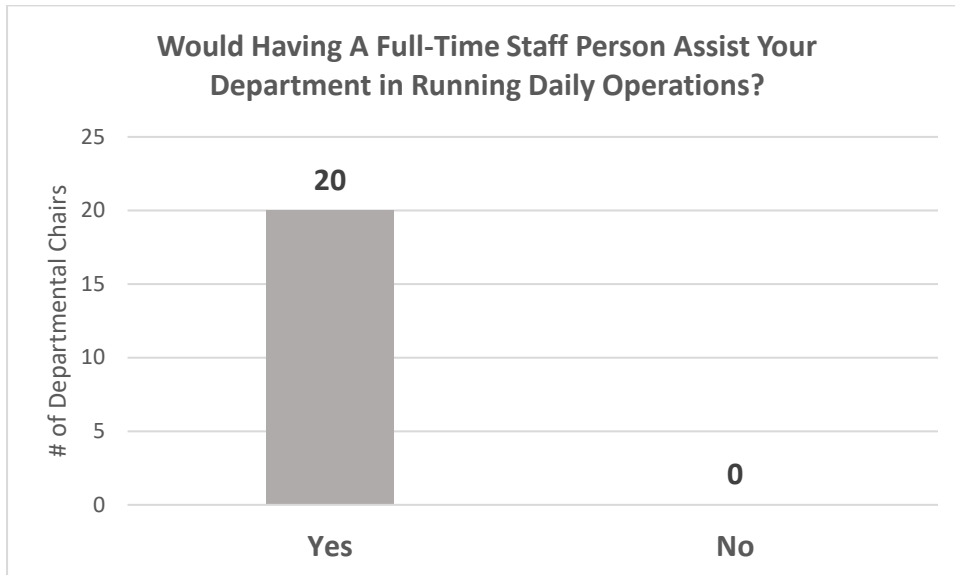


Figure 4. (N=20)

In order to provide more substantive content to the responses in Figure 4, an additional open-ended question was asked to specify ways a full-time staff person would assist a department. These responses appear in a word cloud in Figure 5 below. Table 1 in the Appendix lists the number of mentions of each phrase used to construct the word cloud. 64 items were stated by chairs that could assist them in managing their respective departments. Many of the comments were consistent with this succinct statement from one respondent on how internal staff could assist chairs and the department, "There are a great many things that faculty and chairs at UC Merced are required to do that would be handled by staff at other universities." The most often stated issues where a staff person could assist included: event coordination (10 mentions), followed by agendas, organize meetings, scheduling, and communication (all with 5 mentions).



Figure 5. Word Cloud of Chair Responses on How Full-Time Staff would Assist Department (N=20)

Department Chairs were also asked if they had been negatively impacted in their duties by lack of staff. The responses are reported in Figure 6. 90 percent of Chairs (18/20) reported being negatively impacted by not having one full-time dedicated staff person. Even one of the two chairs who responded that they had not been negatively impacted stated in a follow-up question, “I said no, because I haven’t had those expectations. But having full time staff would help me focus more on building things and not just keep the trains running on time.” This last point is crucial if we aim to generate new programs and increase enrollment.

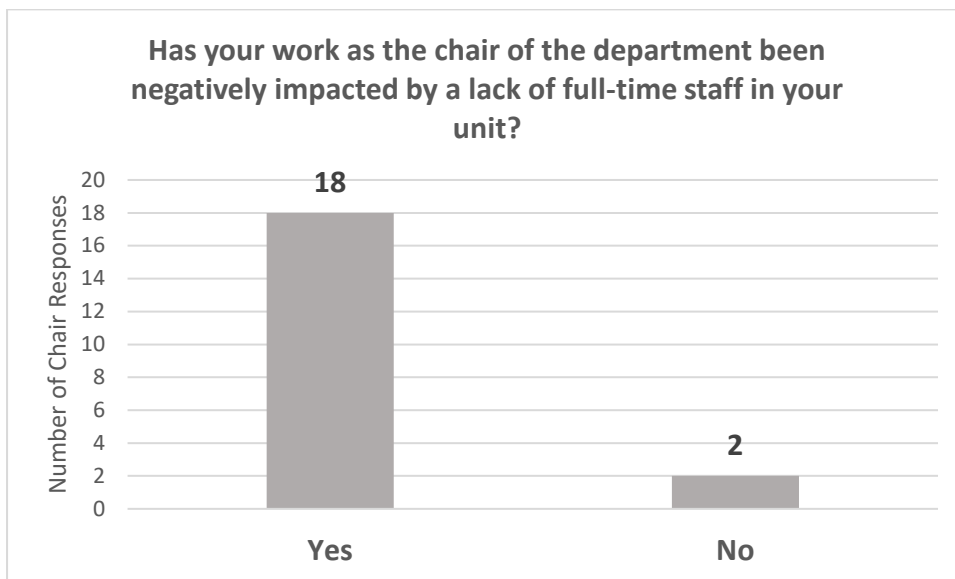


Figure 6. (N=20)

Another question was asked in an open-ended fashion about how the lack of staffing has negatively affected chairs in meeting their duties. These responses are provided in the phrase cloud in Figure 7 below. Table 2 in the Appendix lists the number of mentions of each phrase used to construct the phrase cloud in Figure 7. The most often stated issues were not having a staff person negatively impacted the chair included issues over insufficient work time (along with several other related chair tasks). One chair responded with the problem of centralizing staff in the dean’s offices, “It’s really an impossible job. At the risk of retreading well-known territory, systems that do not align with end users, but rather align with needs of the centralized units creating them, double or triple this workload.” Another chair stated, “Morale of both faculty and staff would be massively improved by increasing staff support for departments....I have never seen morale this low.” Others linked lack of support to student learning opportunities, such as one asserting, “our students are materially impacted by the lack of support,” and another chair responding, “Time spent on unassisted activities...leaves me often having to choose which items are left undone, which impact ability to serve faculty and students.” Finally, another common theme was inability to work on grants or research because of the need to relentlessly engage in small and disruptive tasks, as one chair stated, “I don’t even have time to read the funding call emails that come out, never mind apply for grants as the PI.”

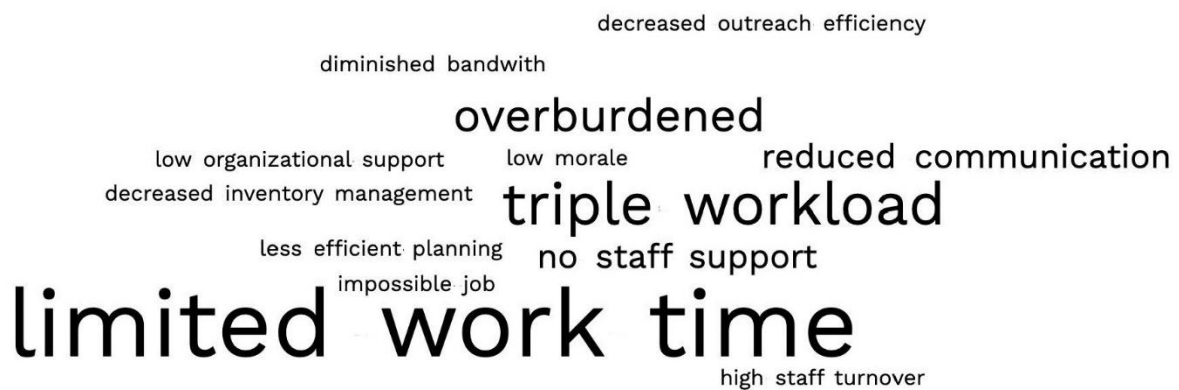


Figure 7. Phrase Cloud of Most Common Negative Impacts for Chairs caused by lack of staff.

A final question was asked about the number of full-time staff within peer departments at R1 universities. The responses are summarized in Figure 8. On average, R1 peer institutions have 3 to 4 full-time staff dedicated at the department level. This matches the optimal number of staff to report to managers/supervisors in organizational science (Scott and Davis 2006). The responses ranged from 1 to 15 full-time staff. Interestingly, 25 percent of chairs (5/20) responded that they did not know how many staff their peer departments employ at other research universities. This is an alarming proportion of “don’t know” responses and suggests UCM may need a chair outreach campaign on the basic administration and division of labor of research universities at the departmental level.

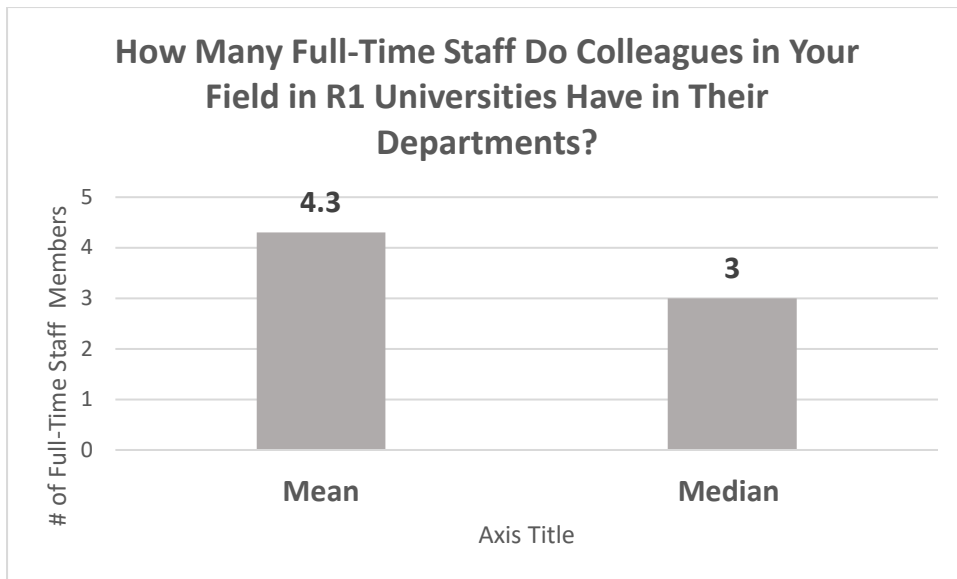


Figure 8. N=15

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Given the urgency of the staffing situation in academic departments at UC Merced, and the susceptibility of the campus to claims of discrimination against low-income students of color, CAPRA recommends that the university immediately fund at minimum one full time staff person for each of the twenty-one academic departments at UC Merced with eight or more faculty members by the fall of 2023. **School-level deans should also avoid any reduction in school-level staff support to academic departments once internal departmental staff are hired.** As this is critically important for faculty who may want to propose new programs, we believe these funds should initially come from the Accelerating Campus Evolution (ACE) program. The cost over the next ten years would likely be in the range of \$20 million given that each FTE with benefits would cost roughly \$100 thousand per year. In the future, these costs should be seen as part of the normal running of a research university and the most rational pathway to reach R1 status. CAPRA believes this is the most urgent staff hiring priority for the campus

References

- Garcia, Mario. 2014. *Blowout! Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hamilton, Laura and Kelly Nielsen. 2021. *Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Scott, W. Richard and Gerald Davis. 2006. *Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural and Open System Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Appendix

Table 1. Phrases Used in Word Cloud in Figure 5.

Item Mentioned	# of Mentions
Event Coordination	10
Agendas	5
Communication	5
Organize Meetings	5
Scheduling	5
Budgeting	4
Record-Keeping	3
Administrative Support	2
Course Scheduling	2
Curriculum Planning	2
Manage Documents	2
Media Updates	2
Student Outreach	2
Webpage Updates	2
Arrangements Assistance	1
Assist Faculty Seeking Reimbursement	1
Book Meeting Rooms	1
Booking Travel for Speakers	1
Check In With Faculty	1
Coordinate Office Assignments	1
Course Assessment Activities	1
Data Collection	1
Data Requests	1
Deal with Complaints	1
Deal with Student Problems	1
Everything	1
External Review	1
Faculty Recruitment	1
Graduate Student Support	1
Grant Proposals	1
Handle Emails	1
Help Onboard Faculty Members	1
Hiring TA's	1
Inventory	1
Manage Deadlines	1
Meeting Minutes	1
Memos	1
Mentoring Program	1
Miscellaneous Requests	1

Organizational Support	1
Organize Undergraduate Recruitment Events	1
Organizing Curricular Changes	1
Outreach	1
Overseeing Lab Remodeling	1
Planning Seminars	1
Process Financial Transcripts	1
Program Growth	1
Provide Memory	1
Reimbursement	1
Resolving Faculty Issues	1
Run Votes on Department Issues	1
Shift Staff Responsibilities	1
Space Management	1
Support Budget Committee	1
Support Department Committees	1
Support Faculty Meetings	1
Support Space Committee	1
Support Teaching Committee	1
Support Undergraduate Professional Clubs	1
TA Assignments	1
Take Notes	1
Technology Requests	1
Track Potential Donors	1
Tracking Alumni	1

Table 2. Phrases Used in Word Cloud in Figure 7.

Issue Mentioned	# of Mentions
limited work time	7
triple workload	4
overburdened	3
no staff support	2
reduced communication	2
decreased inventory management	1
decreased outreach efficiency	1
diminished bandwidth	1
high staff turnover	1
impossible job	1
less efficient planning	1
low morale	1
low organizational support	1

Table 3. Chair Survey

Dear Current Department Chair,

The UCM Academic Senate Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation (CAPRA), is undertaking an assessment of staffing needs at the level of Academic Departments. One major part of this assessment is a survey below for current department chairs. The information from this survey will be used to evaluate staffing priorities in the three schools of SSHA, SNS, and SOE and make recommendations to the Divisional Council of the Academic Senate (DIVCO) and Administrative Leadership. This survey is anonymous, and CAPRA will share the final results with you and recommendations upon your request. We are asking all current department chairs to take the brief survey. It will take less than ten minutes to complete. If possible, please complete this survey within two weeks.

Thank you for considering this request,

CAPRA

1. Does your department have a full-time staff person dedicated **only to your unit**?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

1a. If you have shared staff with other academic departments, how many departments share the staff member?

2. How many Senate faculty are in your department?
3. Would having a full-time staff person assist your department in running its daily operations?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Please specify ways a full-time staff person would assist your department. (open-ended)
5. Has your work as the chair of the department been negatively impacted by a lack of full-time staff in your unit?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5a. If yes, in what ways? (open-ended)

6. To the best of your knowledge, how many full-time staff do colleagues in your field in R1 research universities have in their departments?
7. Your department is located in the .
 - a. School of Natural Sciences
 - b. School of Engineering
 - c. School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Art