

**Summary of Findings: Student Affairs Staff Survey
Northwestern University
Fall 2019**

Introduction

Every other year, Northwestern’s Division of Student Affairs conducts a staff survey to gain feedback about satisfaction, sense of community, needs, and experiences as employees in the Division. This is an important survey to us, as we use the information to guide our decision-making around issues and practices that impact the Division and Northwestern students.

The data presented here are reflective on the past two years. However, our current circumstances around the Coronavirus pandemic may have a significant impact on staff morale and organizational health in a variety of ways. As you review these results, consider where some aspects may remain the same as last fall, whereas other things may have changed given our current environment.

Overview

The 2019 Student Affairs Staff Survey was distributed from November 11 to November 22, 2019, to 307 staff members in the Division. Eighty percent (80% or 234) of the staff responded, a slight decrease from the 85% response rate in 2017. The survey consisted of 133 items and sought staff members’ feedback in six areas: (1) the Division, (2) personal experience in the Division, (3) staff training and development, (4) departments, (5) SALT, and (6) supervisors. This report focuses on responses to questions related to the entire Division and does not delve into department-level feedback. It also includes bi-annual trend data since the survey’s first administration in 2011. Additional reports will be generated that focus on 1) differences across demographic populations, and 2) a deeper dive into staff development initiatives.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Thirty-four questions about the Division were asked across the various administrations of the instrument. Twenty-four of these questions were measured on a 4-point scale where 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. **Therefore, we strive for average scores to be at 3.0 or higher, indicating the typical respondent agrees with the question.**

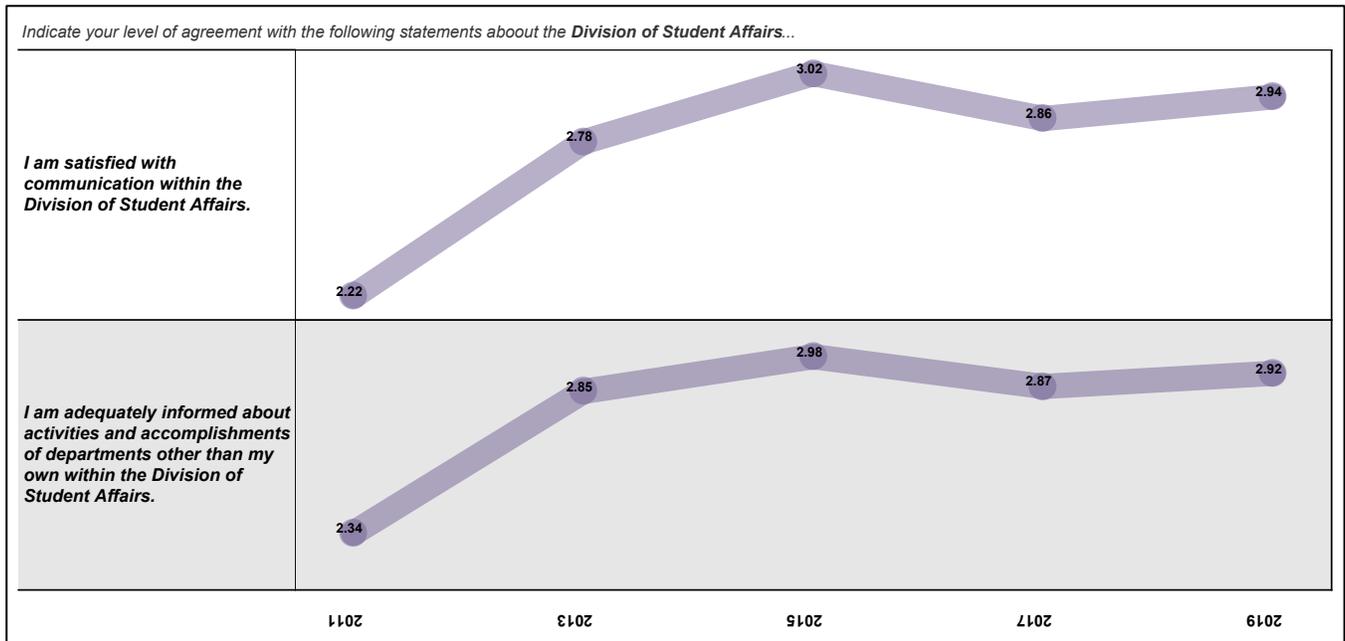
PRIMARY THEMES

As with any large-scale assessment requesting the opinions of many, there were both strengths and challenges expressed in these results. This report defines “strengths” as trends that are increasing since the prior administration (2017), and “challenges” as those that are decreasing. Some 2019 mean scores may hover just above or below the desired 3.0 goal.

STRENGTH: COMMUNICATION

- Average scores related to communication and for being adequately informed about activities and accomplishments from around the Division both increased slightly from 2017 and are almost back up to 2015 levels.
- Trends around communication in the Division have increased since 2017, particularly around satisfaction with communication. All trends are currently trending just below 3.0.
- **Open-ended comment:** *“I would like SA to know itself better and by that, I mean all of us not in leadership. We do a great job of communicating from the top down, but I believe there could be better communication from the bottom up....I feel we are doing a very good job for our students, but we need to make sure our employees are supported in order to continue this great service.”*

Figure 1: Communication Trends (mean scores on a 4-point scale)

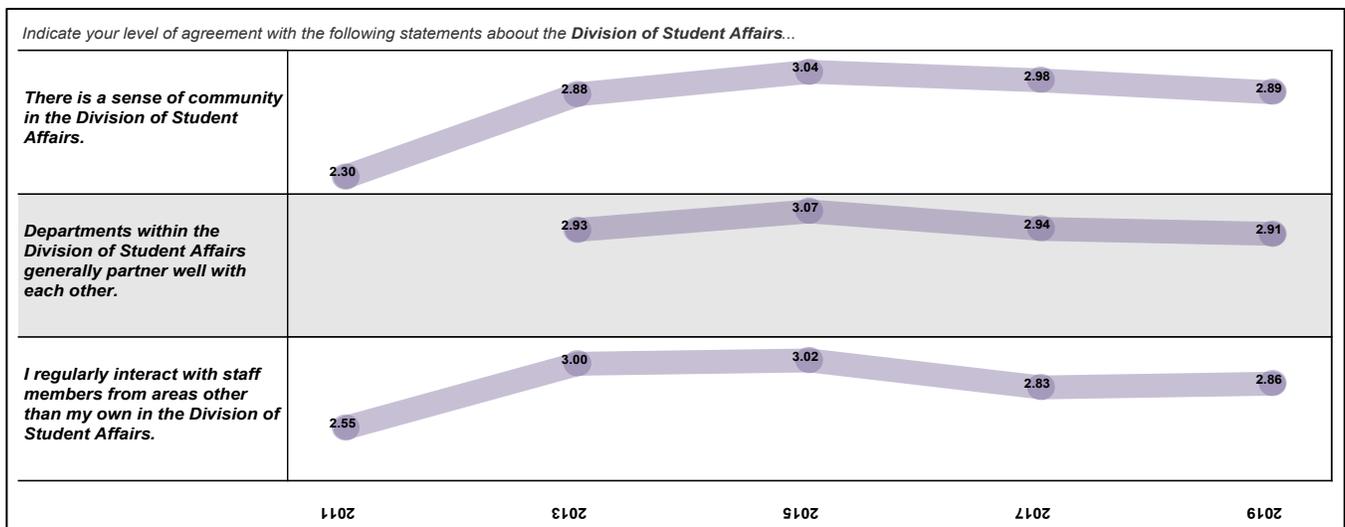


STRENGTH: COMMUNITY

There are numerous connections that can be made between communication and community, as community often grows from good communication, and good communication often fosters community. Generally speaking Student Affairs staff continue to enjoy working with each other, and they express this in a variety of ways.

- **Open-ended comment** *“Commencement volunteering, Dillo Day volunteering, Wildcat Welcome volunteering--I feel like I engage with colleagues across campus when working these events more than at the breakfasts, assessment conference, holiday party, etc.”*

Figure 2: Community Trends (mean scores on a 4-point scale)

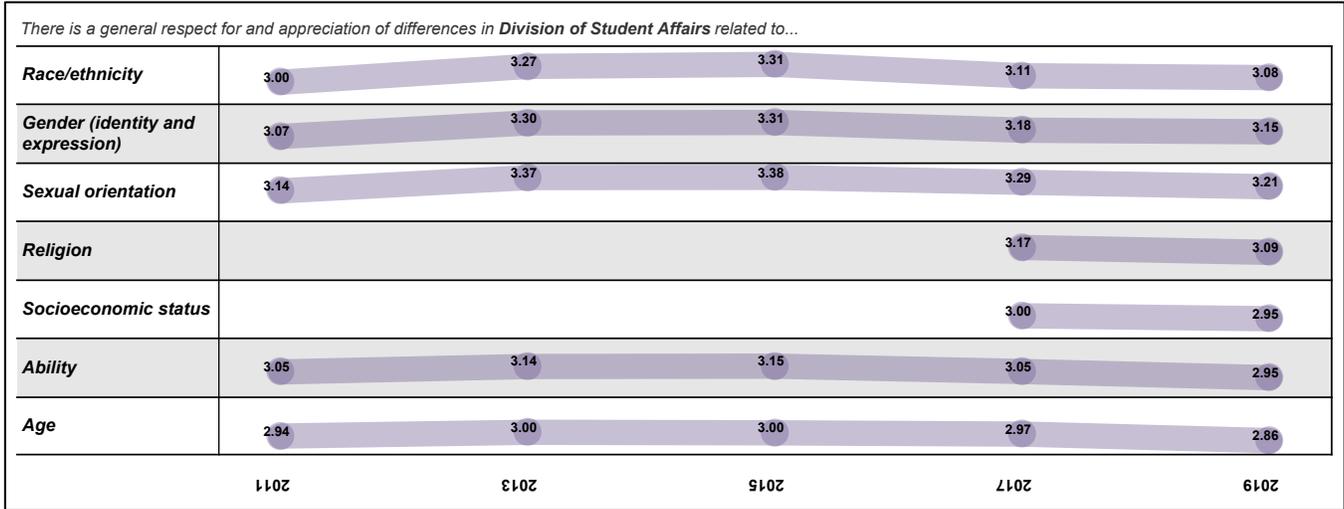


MIXED: RESPECT FOR/APPRECIATION OF DIFFERENCE

- A strength of the Division involves respect for/appreciation of difference. These scores have remained relatively stable over time, when analyzed in the aggregate form.

- However, some mean scores hover above or below the 3.0 range and should be watched carefully over the next few years. Additional analyses of these data will be conducted to disaggregate these results by their subpopulations (e.g., gender Identity will be analyzed by gender categories, and so forth) to better-understand trends by identity.
- **Open-ended comment:** *The division is far more progressive than the rest of the institution. This makes it difficult to find common ground with other units not within the division.*

Figure 3: Respect for Difference by Identity (mean scores on a 4-point scale)



MIXED: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE DIVISION

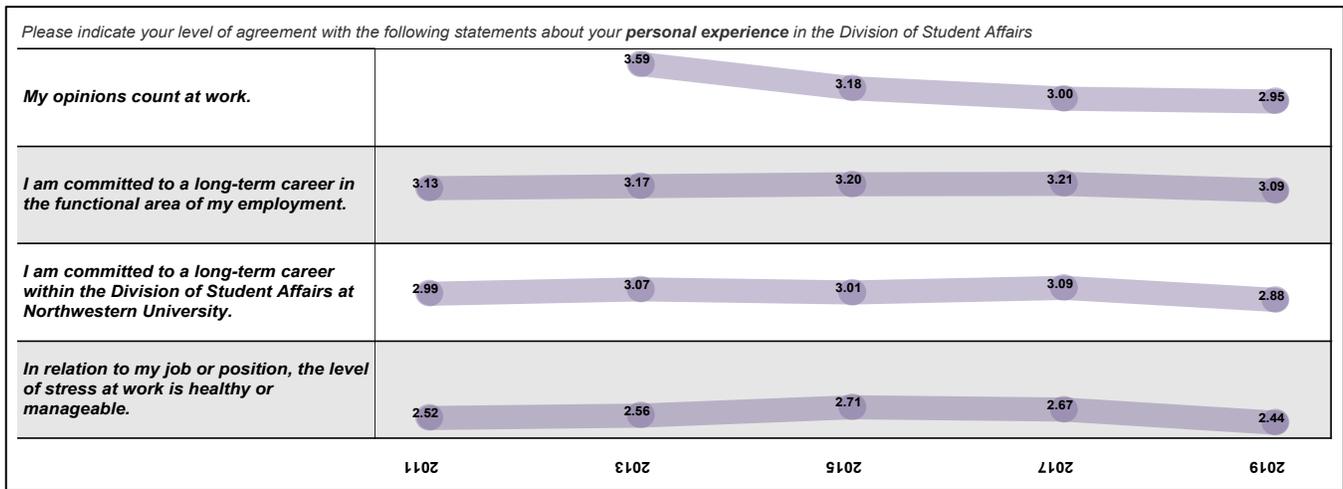
Personal experiences around Student Affairs vary greatly. Some aspects trend high like understanding my contribution to the Division’s mission and getting a sense of personal accomplishment for my work. Others have been chronically low for years, like the level of stress being healthy, or a commitment to a long-term career at NU Student Affairs.

Figure 4: Strengths in Personal Experiences (mean scores on a 4-point scale)



Areas of challenge in Personal Experience are represented in Figure 5:

Figure 5: Challenges in Personal Experiences (mean scores on a 4-point scale)

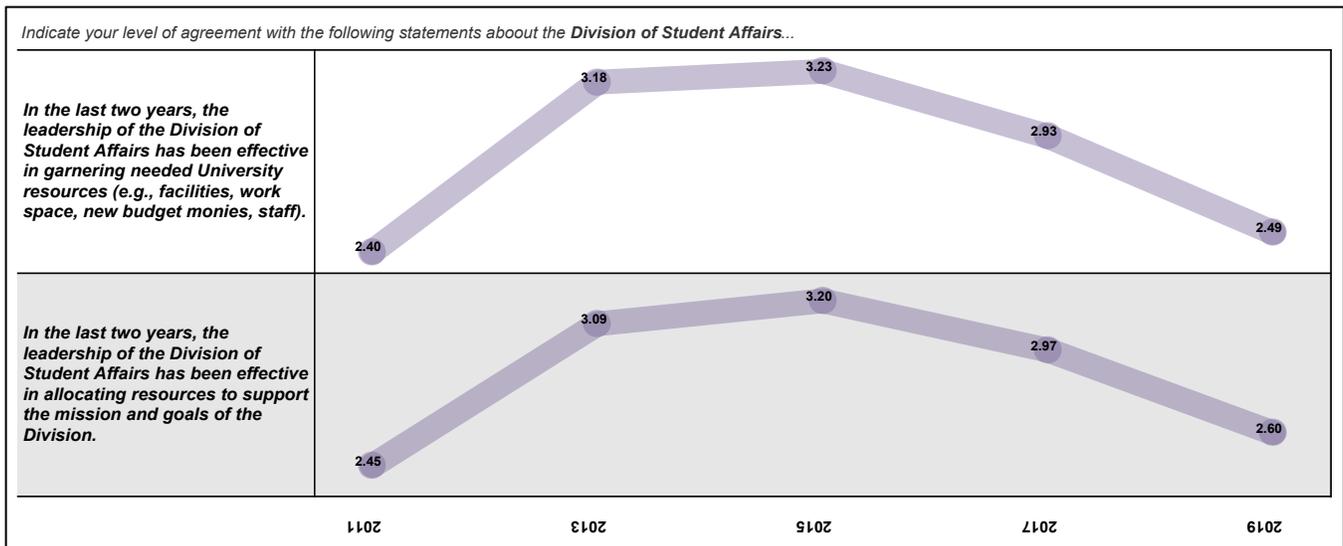


- Open-Ended Comment:** *"I've heard from several colleagues that they're moving on to other jobs due to burn-out. Northwestern is truly special and exceptional at supporting students. That said, at some point, we need to acknowledge that this [current workload] is not sustainable, we cannot do more with less if we want to keep quality staff."*

CHALLENGE: HANDLING RESOURCES IN A RESTRICTED CLIMATE

The discussion of the University’s and the Division’s resources has been at the top of most minds during the past two years, since the last Staff Survey was administered. It is no surprise that this is an area of challenge for Student Affairs, as it is university-wide as well. As seen in Figure 4, there were decreases in items related to the garnering (15% decrease since 2017) and allocation of resources (12% decrease since 2017):

Figure 6: Garnering and Allocation of Resources (mean scores on a 4-point scale)



CHALLENGE: VISION, PURPOSE, AND DIRECTION

Familiarity with and awareness of the Division’s strategic plan has decreased during the last three administrations of this survey. This could be explained by the fact we are in a transitional time, and that the Division’s strategic plan has been in effect for several years.

- **Open-Ended Comment:** *“The fact that SA has a vision/mission, values statement, strategic themes etc. makes it somewhat difficult to feel as if we are all focused and aligned. Programs and offices definitely reflect aspects of all these guiding statements, but it sometimes can feel disjointed.”*

Figure 7: Survey items related to vision and strategic plan (mean scores on a 4-point scale)

