Higher Ed's Hybrid Workplace:

How are colleges managing this new campus culture?

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

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Institutions of higher education are at an inflection point as education leaders grapple with lower student engagement and struggling course attendance, rising student drop-out rates, and new challenges faced due to the oncoming enrollment cliff. Many will look to attract new and non-traditional learners by leveraging technology to transform the student experience.

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Cover image: iStock

Three and a half years after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid and remote work for higher-education's staff members is here to stay. What was once an emergency workplace solution has become a new reality.

While faculty members have always enjoyed a level of flexibility in their work, the necessity of operating during the pandemic created work-from-home options for staff members as well, and colleges saw that their employees could be just as productive working from home as in the office.

To learn more about how colleges are managing this new work environment, *The Chronicle*, with support from Cisco, conducted an online survey from July 12 to July 24, 2023. We received 873

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How is your work force operating?

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Fully in-person	36%
Fully virtual	1%
Hybrid	63%
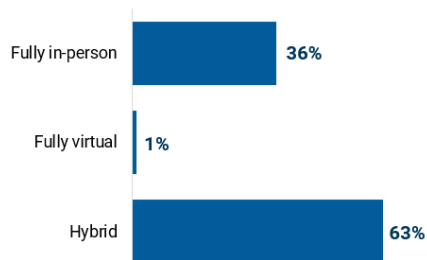
What best describes the workplace expectation for your role?

■ Faculty

Fully in-person	46%
Fully virtual	3%
Hybrid	51%
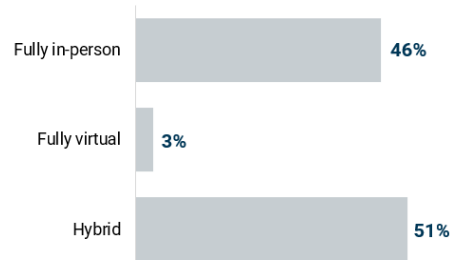
Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members

responses, about evenly divided between academic and administrative leaders (437) and faculty (436). In addition, *The Chronicle* interviewed more than a dozen people, including college administrators, higher-ed and human-resources consultants, and faculty and staff members for this report.

Would you prefer if your institution offered a hybrid work option?

Academic and Administrative Leaders ■ Faculty

	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Yes	52%	39%
No	48%	62%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working fully in-person or expected to do so. Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.
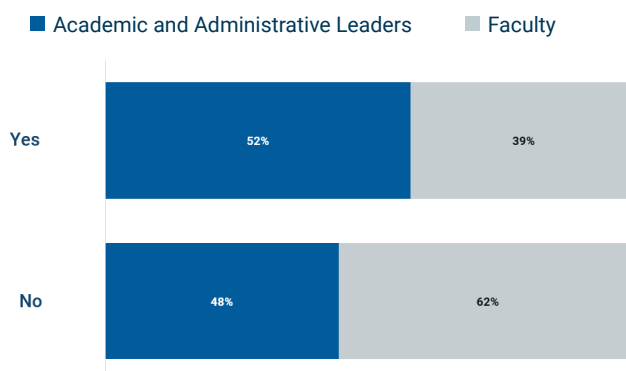
Most survey respondents, 63 percent of administrative leaders and 51 percent of faculty members, said that they were operating in a hybrid model.

Though hybrid options have remained popular, fully remote positions have not: A mere 1 percent of staff and 3 percent of faculty said they were operating fully remotely or were expected to do so.

Among those working fully in person or expected to do so, there were varying levels of satisfaction with the setup. About half (52 percent) of administrative leaders wished their institution offered a hybrid option. Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of faculty members (62 percent) responded that they did not want their institution to offer hybrid options.

For colleges that decided to return fully in-person, the key factor was the students' experience, with respondents listing a
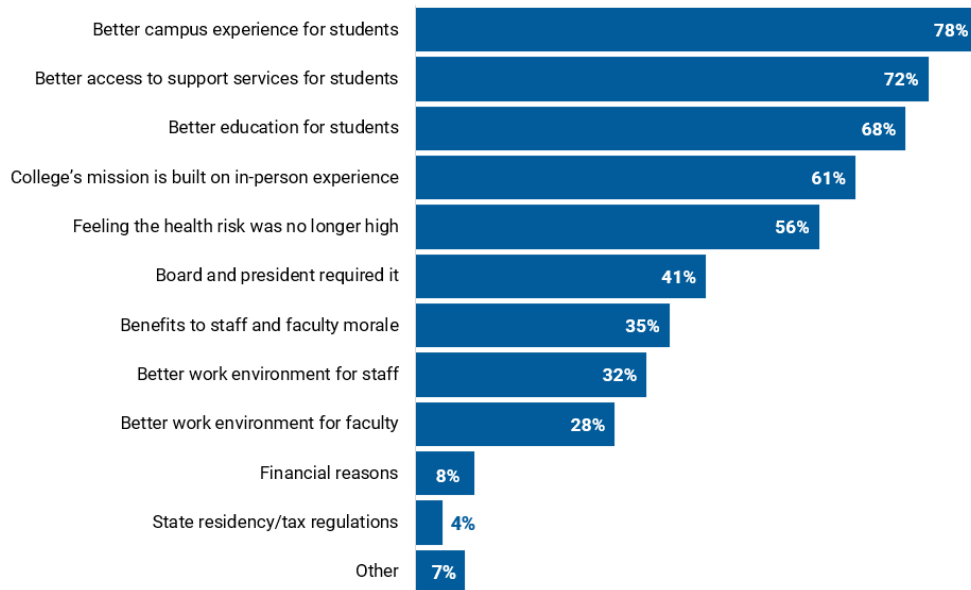
Why did your institution decide to be fully in-person? (Select all that apply.)

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Better campus experience for students	78%
Better access to support services for students	72%
Better education for students	68%
College's mission is built on in-person experience	61%
Feeling the health risk was no longer high	56%
Board and president required it	41%
Benefits to staff and faculty morale	35%
Better work environment for staff	32%
Better work environment for faculty	28%
Financial reasons	8%
State residency/tax regulations	4%
Other	7%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working fully in-person.

Would you prefer if your institution were fully in-person?

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders   ■ Faculty

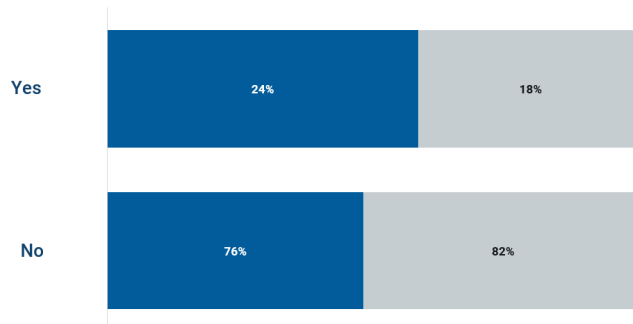|	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Yes	24%	18%
No	76%	82%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working hybrid or expected to do so.

better campus experience for students as the No. 1 reason for the decision (78 percent), and student access to support a close second (72 percent). "Better education" for students (68 percent) and the "college's mission being built on an in-person experience," (61 percent) were the other top reasons.

Hybrid workers were resolute in their desire to stay that way. Just 24 percent of administrative leaders and 18 percent of faculty wanted their institutions to be fully in-person.

This report will examine how higher-education institutions are approaching remote work and its challenges, looking at such questions as: Do different types of institutions approach hybrid work differently? How does it affect campus culture and workplace morale? Who is offered remote work? And how do higher-ed institutions create a productive and sustainable work environment while remaining true to their missions of educating students?

nstead of returning to the workplace model of the pre-pandemic past, most higher-education institutions are bolstering and refining their remote-work policies. Though some college leaders have moved their staff members back to campus, insisting that their everyday presence is important for students' campus experience, these institutions are in the minority.

"Hybrid work and remote work — in some ways, shapes, and forms — is here to stay," says Andy Brantley, president and chief executive of the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR).

The prevalence of hybrid work follows national trends. According to a survey by the labor and employment firm Littler Mendelson PC earlier this year, over 70 percent of U.S. employers use the hybrid working model.

Like other employers, higher ed has been dealing for the past three years with what's been called "The Great Resignation." Beginning in the spring of 2020, tens of millions of Americans quit their jobs, leaving businesses and higher-ed institutions scrambling to fill openings. While resignation rates are finally on the decline, the number of people looking for work hasn't kept up with job openings, meaning colleges are having a hard time finding talent to fill open roles. Across the work force, people are seeking flexibility in their jobs, and employers have taken note.

Compared to 2022, managing a hybrid work environment …
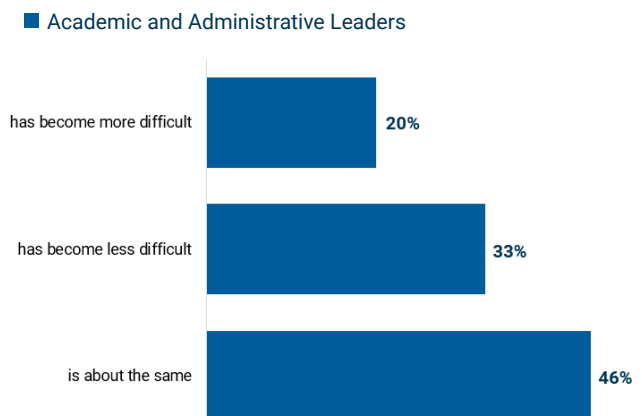
■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

has become more difficult — 20%

has become less difficult — 33%

is about the same — 46%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

But college leaders are still learning how to best organize a hybrid work-place. Most administrative and academic leaders are ambivalent that their hybrid work environment has improved since 2022. Forty-six percent said that it's about as difficult to manage as it was a year ago, while 33 percent said managing a hybrid work environment has become less difficult.

When asked if their institution has done a good job helping managers navigate a hybrid work force, respondents were more positive: Sixty-nine percent of administrative leaders somewhat or strongly agreed their institution had done a good job, and 63 percent of faculty somewhat or strongly agreed.

College leaders are also deciding what hybrid arrangements look like at their institutions — and what make-up of hybrid, remote, or in-person staff

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"My institution has done a good job helping managers navigate a hybrid work force."

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders ■ Faculty

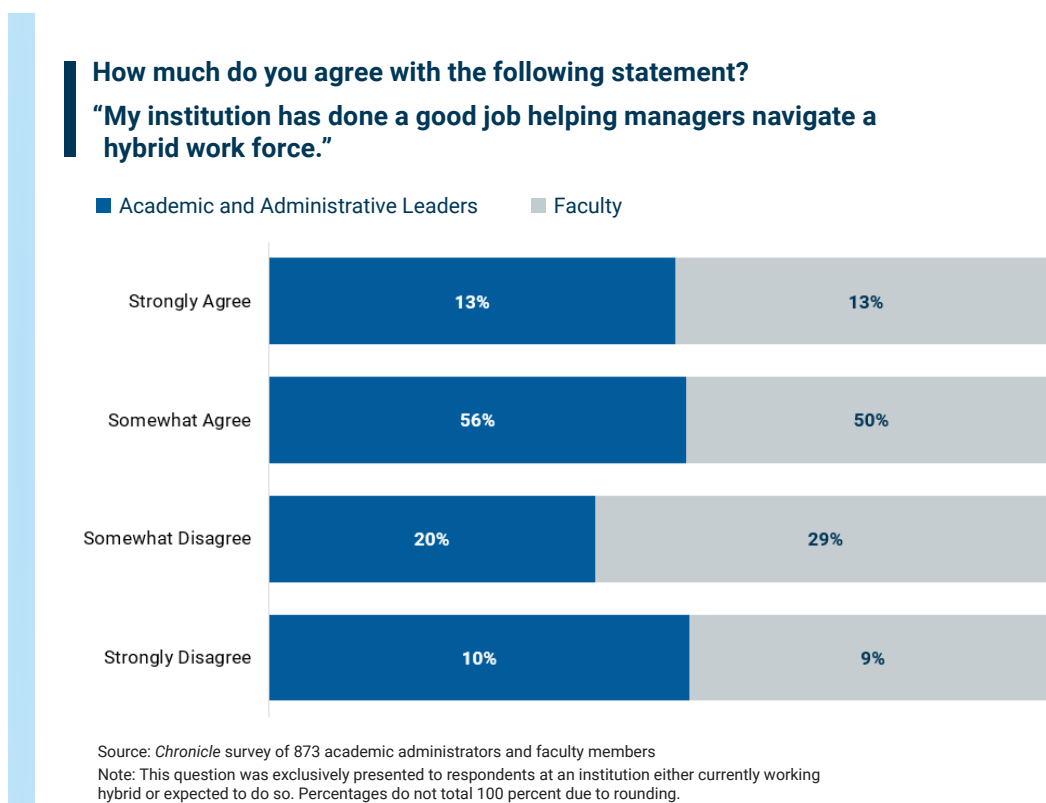|	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Strongly Agree	13%	13%
Somewhat Agree	56%	50%
Somewhat Disagree	20%	29%
Strongly Disagree	10%	9%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working hybrid or expected to do so. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.
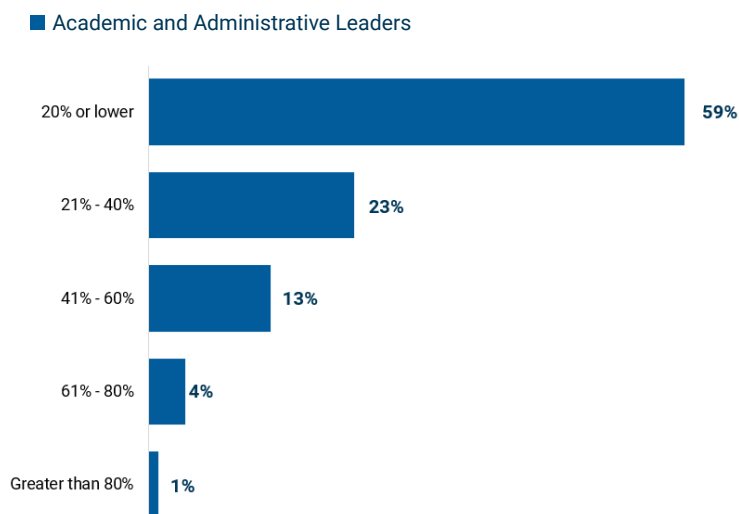
best serves their missions. "If it's a hybrid work arrangement, what does that mean?" Brantley says. "Does that mean that everyone's in the office on the same day? Does it mean that the staff are rotating through the particular days to ensure that there's on-site staffing each day? Is it particular hours per day? All of those things have to be carefully managed and carefully thought out."

To what extent higher-education work forces are hybrid is another matter college presidents must consider. A majority of administrative leaders overseeing a hybrid work force said only a fifth or less of their employees are working virtually.

Offering hybrid accommodations is not without its challenges. According to Susan Basso, a principal with the higher-education strategy and operations team at Huron, a professional-services firm, "These institutions have to be able to ensure that they have continuity of operations, they have to be able to recruit and retain top talent across geographic boundaries, and they have to be sure that they can develop a nimble operating model that they can scale up or scale down." She says that colleges have to consider "employee engagement and satisfaction, there have to be provisions in place to drive accountability and ensure consistency," and they have to minimize risk with regulatory and compliance requirements.

What percentage of the work force is virtual?

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

20% or lower	59%
21% - 40%	23%
41% - 60%	13%
61% - 80%	4%
Greater than 80%	1%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid.

> **"If it's a hybrid work arrangement, what does that mean? Does that mean that everyone's in the office on the same day? Does it mean that the staff are rotating through the particular days to ensure that there's on-site staffing each day? Is it particular hours per day?"**

The leaders of hybrid work forces are also grappling with connections between colleagues, how to best maintain team morale and culture, how to decide who gets to work remotely, and how to balance the needs of staff with those of the students whom they serve.

Given those challenges, is a hybrid workplace worth it? Experts and campus leadership the *Chronicle* spoke to overwhelmingly said that it was, in some format or another, but they cautioned against a one-size-fits-all strategy. "My opinion is that flexibility right now is an excellent approach, and one lever within an organization's talent strategy," Basso says. But she acknowledges the headwinds of embracing a new workplace configuration. Reimagining the future is "not an easy thing to do," she says. "Change is difficult, particularly in higher ed."

Recruiting and Retaining Talent

Since the 1960s, Graceland University has had two campuses — a rural one, in Lamoni, Iowa, and an urban one, in the Independence, Mo., metro area — meaning that long before Covid-19, the private college had to learn how to operate a work force in two locations. But when the pandemic hit and the talent pool changed, Patricia H. Draves, Graceland's president, realized the university would have to offer more remote options to recruit and retain good staff.

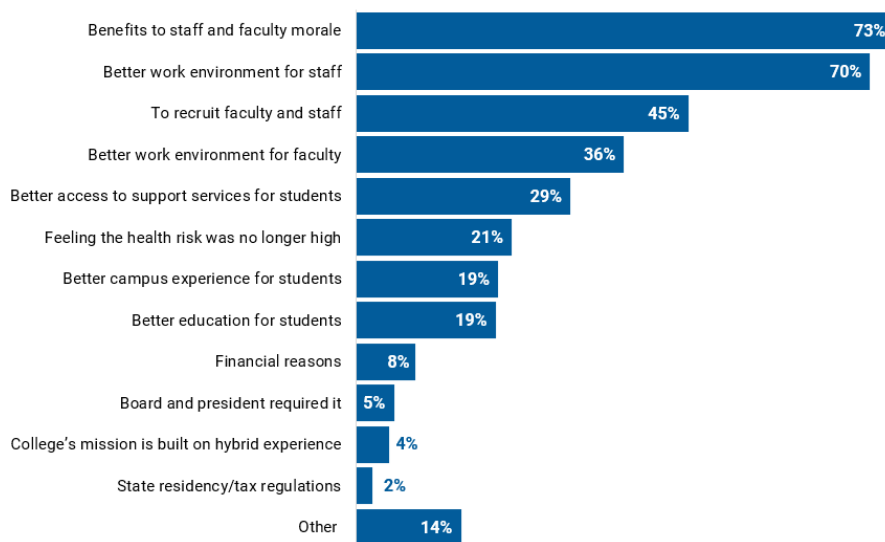As a result, she says that Graceland has been able to recruit people who wouldn't have necessarily wanted to move to a rural location, either because of spousal reasons or because they weren't interested in living in a small town.

Rather than trying to sell the idea of rural Iowa to job candidates, the university was able to offer a virtual option, hiring five advancement candidates to work hybrid. "They raised twice as much money this year as in the past two years," Draves says. "So I'm like, fine, I don't care if you're sitting at your kitchen table!"

According to one of the new employees, "I would have not taken the job had I not been able to be hybrid. ... I really wanted to work for the president but I still wouldn't have done it if I had to uproot my family and home."

Why did your institution decide to be hybrid? (Select all that apply.)

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Reason	Percent
Benefits to staff and faculty morale	73%
Better work environment for staff	70%
To recruit faculty and staff	45%
Better work environment for faculty	36%
Better access to support services for students	29%
Feeling the health risk was no longer high	21%
Better campus experience for students	19%
Better education for students	19%
Financial reasons	8%
Board and president required it	5%
College's mission is built on hybrid experience	4%
State residency/tax regulations	2%
Other	14%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid.

Other colleges have come to the same realization as Graceland. *The Chronicle*'s survey results and conversations with campus leaders have indicated that the desire to retain and recruit talent has increasingly driven both two- and four-year institutions to offer some remote or hybrid options to employees.

A 2022 [survey] by the consulting firm McKinsey and Company found that a flexible-work option was one of the top-three motivators for people to seek a new job. Similarly, the *Chronicle* survey found that academic leaders listed staff retention and recruitment as a top reason to offer hybrid opportunities, exceeded only by benefits to staff and faculty morale and a better work environment for staff.

While the *Chronicle* survey found that those who already had hybrid workplaces largely wanted them to continue, that desire was less strong among those working at institutions that were already back to fully in-person work. Just over half of those academic and administration leaders and about two in five of those faculty members wanted hybrid offerings. (See page 6.) Christopher S. Nickson, vice president for organizational effectiveness at Segal, a higher-education consulting firm, surmises that finding is among smaller institutions that returned to in-person work sooner and whose on-campus work "reinforced the sense of community." But while

> **"If you're going to try to retain or recruit talent, you need to be able to embrace hybrid work, otherwise you're going to lose folks."**

hybrid work proved the most popular; fully remote work was by far the least, with only 3 percent of academic and administrative leaders wanting such an arrangement.

So what makes hybrid work so popular? In a free-response section of the *Chronicle* survey, those eager to keep their hybrid arrangements cited the benefits of a "distraction-free work space," better "work-life balance," and "flexibility."

"If you're going to try to retain or recruit talent, you need to be able to embrace hybrid work, otherwise you're going to lose folks," David Zajchowski, director of human resources at Rollins College, says. "That's one of their first questions: 'Do you offer remote or hybrid options?'"

While higher education can be slow to adapt to changes, it is at the mercy of candidates' preferences, and candidates are keen for hybrid work.

"Time has proven that the value proposition between employee and employer has changed," says Bryan Garey, vice president for human resources at Virginia Tech. "You say it's

100 percent on-site, you get 10 applicants; you say it's hybrid, you get 50."

Yet recruiting hybrid or remote candidates brings its own challenges. Amherst College, a private liberal-arts institution in Massachusetts, has embraced a remote-work program, credited with its ability to recruit diverse candidates as well as those from other industries. But Kate Harrington, Amherst's chief human-resources officer, says that "one of the biggest challenges we face are the legal requirements in other states."

> "Time has proven that the value proposition between employee and employer has changed. You say it's 100 percent on-site, you get 10 applicants; you say it's hybrid, you get 50."

It's an issue that Nickson, the consultant at Segal, sees affecting small colleges with small human-resources teams. How do those teams figure out tax implications and state laws on workers' compensation and unemployment insurance in 50 states? The answer is, they don't. "Many of these schools are saying,

we can support you working in this state that we're located in and oftentimes some of the nearby states where there may or may not be some reciprocity agreement related to taxes and other compliance issues, but that's it," Nickson says.

That's different at bigger research colleges. "Large research universities often have 100-person HR staffs, and they've got several people dedicated to the compliance aspect of working from other states," Nickson says. "That's just not possible when you've got a six-person HR group for a community college or for a small liberal-arts school."

For the moment, Amherst offers its remote-work program to some staff members in Massachusetts and bordering Connecticut. Though the college has plans to expand its offerings to other states in the region, its priority is on individuals' hybrid arrangements in large part because in-person work is still valued and seen as maintaining the college's residential campus culture.

Aliesha R. Crowe is vice president for academic affairs at Northwood Technical College, a four-campus community college serving a large area of rural northwest Wisconsin. She says the advantages of hiring for hybrid or remote jobs are indisputable.

But each hire comes with a new set of questions: for example, what are the expectations for occasional face-to-face work? "When we hire someone from Florida, we as an institution

> Some liberal-arts colleges' missions are built on an in-person learning experience and tight-knit community. "And the result is that oftentimes that leads to a greater emphasis on on-site work and a de-emphasis on embracing hybrid or remote work."

have to decide whether we have someone travel to our institution for face-to-face interaction."

And of course, for every college that has decided to embrace hybrid roles, there are those that have returned to fully in-person work. Nickson points to some liberal-arts colleges whose missions are built on an in-person learning experience and tight-knit community. Such a vision "often translates into this idea of having a very high-touch, hands-on experience that is often translated into being physically occupying the same space," he says. "And the result is that oftentimes that leads to a greater emphasis on on-site work and a de-emphasis on embracing hybrid or remote work."

For Draves, the president of Graceland University, the mission stays the same whether her team is in the office or not. "But that doesn't mean you have to sit in an office and do your seat time to fulfill that mission."

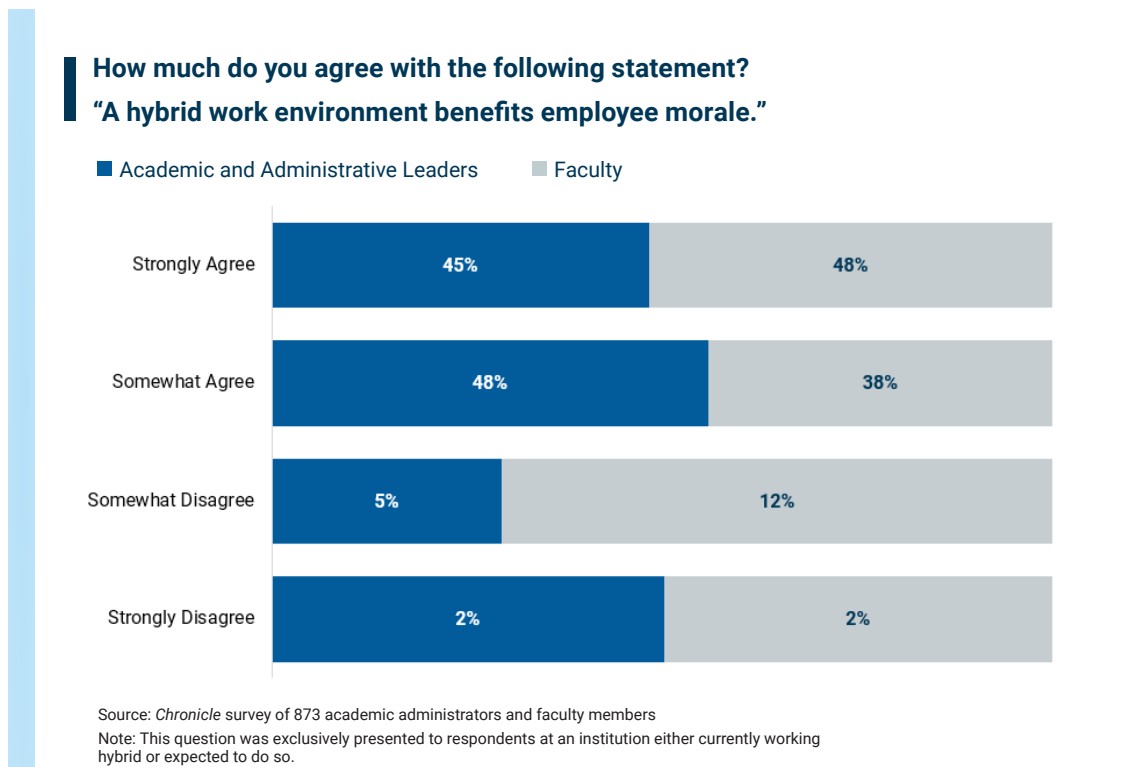# Campus Culture and Workplace Morale

For 14 consecutive years, staff members at Rollins College have rated the institution as a top college to work for, according to an annual survey developed by *The Chronicle* and Modern-Think. The medium-size liberal-arts campus has long sought to be a family-friendly employer, offering flexibility to its staff well before most other colleges did.

Since Zajchowski, the director of human resources at Rollins College, arrived in 2002, the college has offered some form of compressed work week, flex time, seasonal leave and seasonal reductions, and work-at-home options. After the pandemic, Rollins increased those hybrid offerings, as more department heads — especially those initially skeptical of remote work — saw that their employees could work from home with the same level of productivity.

"People bring their whole selves to work, they don't leave their family and personal obligations at the door," says Zajchowski. Rollins, he said, always wanted to be a place that understood these obligations and committed to their employees' well-being.

According to the *Chronicle* survey, overwhelming majorities of faculty and academic and administrative leaders thought their institution's hybrid environment was a boon to employee morale. Ninety-three percent of academic and administrative leaders and 86 percent of faculty said they thought it somewhat or greatly

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"A hybrid work environment benefits employee morale."

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders   ■ Faculty

	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Strongly Agree	45%	48%
Somewhat Agree	48%	38%
Somewhat Disagree	5%	12%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working hybrid or expected to do so.

benefited staff morale. Respondents noted their ability to balance both work and life and were thankful to minimize commuting time.

While face-to-face interaction with colleagues is of "higher value, there is a lot of time wasted in commuting, sitting in traffic. Huge morale boost to be able to work remotely some of the time," one respondent wrote.

"Though I miss the old culture we had when all employees were here, I have found my team to be just as productive, happier, and responsive using the hybrid format. Student experience has not suffered, and the staff love it," another wrote.

In surveying their employees, Virginia Tech's Bryan Garey and Amherst's Kate Harrington found that the benefits were clear. "From our data on our climate survey, there's a lot more satisfaction," Garey says. And Harrington points out that "Our data supports that they are still feeling connected to the college."

Most academic and administrative leaders (66 percent) agreed that their institution does a good job of fostering collegial and collaborative workplace culture in a hybrid environment. (See page 24.) This echoes a poll from Gallup that showed that hybrid workers are more likely to feel connected to their company culture than in-person workers by about 3 percent. Brantley says the Gallup poll "is a reminder that just because people are all in-person does not mean that the culture is thriving and productive."

Since the onset of the pandemic, Mesa Community College, the largest community college in Maricopa County, Ariz., has had its hybrid staff members work three days in the office and two days remotely. When Tammy Robinson became the college's president last year, she continued it. The decision was a no-brainer, she says.

"I can get so much more out of people when the morale is high. Morale is everything. It'll take people 15 minutes to do something if they're happy; it takes two days if they're not," she says. "They have expressed to me that this hybrid space is important to them. It's important to listen to them."

> "Though I miss the old culture we had when all employees were here, I have found my team to be just as productive, happier, and responsive using the hybrid format. Student experience has not suffered, and the staff love it."

"With the rising cost of homes in Arizona," she says, many employees live farther away from the workplace. A hybrid schedule "offers them the ability to come to work and show up for students, but not drive as much as if we were back to five days a week."

Some experts say it's not so much about hybrid work, but flexibility. Basso, the Huron consultant, cautions against looking at hybrid work as the holy grail and suggests "reframing the conversation around flexibility versus remote, hybrid, or fully in the office."

When employees are entrusted with deciding for themselves on how to work — virtually, in person, hybrid, or which hours, "we see increased well-being, productivity, and retention," she says. "And it's a much more empowered approach."

Brantley, of CUPA-HR, says flexible work helps meet employees where they are. He points to an example of a single parent who might ask if they can shorten their lunch break or log in at night so they can leave a little early each day to pick up their children. "That makes such a big difference in our recruiting and retention efforts."

He cautions against believing hybrid work alone will improve morale. "There is no one approach to building and sustaining morale. It really boils down to that particular department, that particular supervisor, and how that part of the culture is managed."

Though most academic leaders said that their institution did a good job of fostering a collegial and collaborative workplace culture in a hybrid environment, they still cited connecting with peers as the biggest challenge, followed by ease of flow of communication, employee morale, and managing staff.
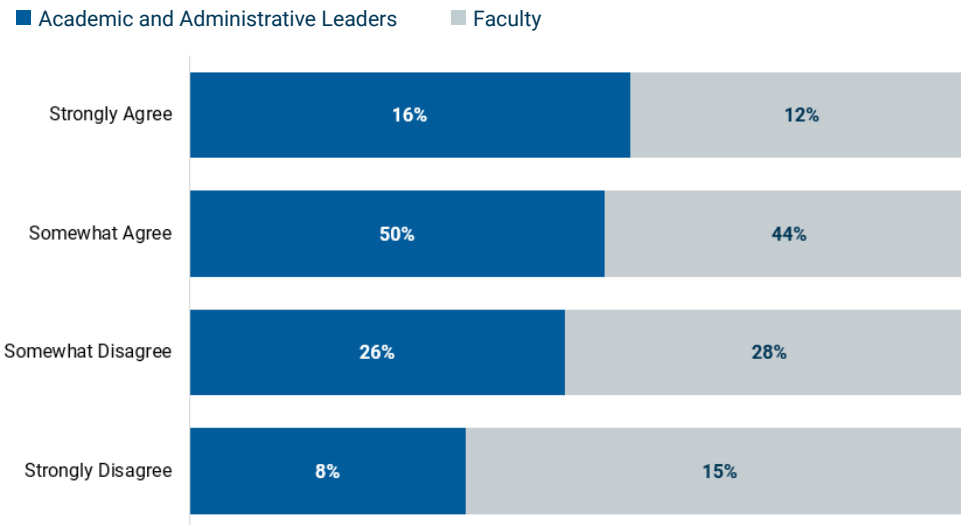
> "There is no one approach to building and sustaining morale. It really boils down to that particular department, that particular supervisor, and how that part of the culture is managed."

With everyone not being in the office all the time, staff aren't running into one another in the canteen or able to drop by a colleague's desk like they used to. Instant-messaging platforms and video meetings are great tools, but without being intentional about how you meet as a team, it's easy to run into "Zoom fatigue" or to see a breakdown in communication.

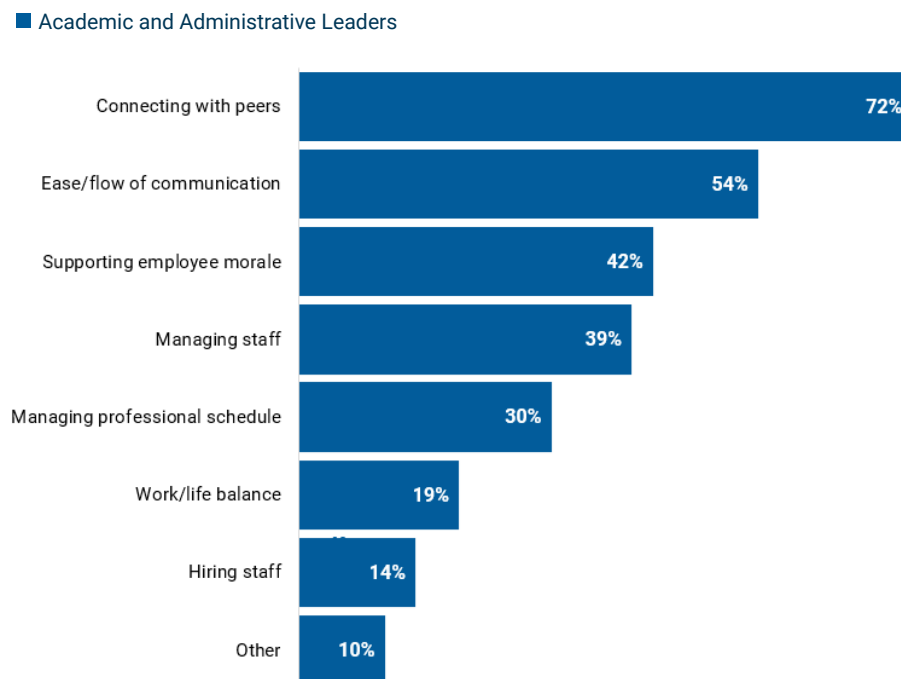To Northwood Technical College's Aliehsa Crowe, colleges' struggle

How much do you agree with the following statement?

"My institution does a good job of fostering a collegial and collaborative workplace culture in a hybrid environment."

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders　■ Faculty

	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Strongly Agree	16%	12%
Somewhat Agree	50%	44%
Somewhat Disagree	26%	28%
Strongly Disagree	8%	15%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working hybrid or expected to do so. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

What are the hardest issues to manage in a hybrid work environment? (Select all that apply.)

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Connecting with peers	72%
Ease/flow of communication	54%
Supporting employee morale	42%
Managing staff	39%
Managing professional schedule	30%
Work/life balance	19%
Hiring staff	14%
Other	10%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid.

with connecting colleagues makes sense. "We were all trained and had practice as leaders in face-to-face settings. I think it's really important to distinguish the two. Leading a team of people and managing your work is very different in a remote or hybrid setting."

Northwood's academic-affairs leadership staff participated in training on how to lead a team in a hybrid setting. To build community and improve their leadership, they set up a learning community in which deans shared research on managing a hybrid work force and worked to apply that to their practice. They decided to be "deliberate and intentional about meeting practices," setting expectations for certain face-to-face meetings like the faculty professional-development week, and holding regular college-wide virtual meetings.

Last year, leaders at Graceland University focused on internal communications. "We work really hard on cohesion," says Joel Shrock, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty at Graceland. "Covid was a huge challenge. One of the things that we learned is that we need to communicate to the entire community often. We started regular communications on the strategic plan."

They began sending emails every Monday to keep staff members in the loop and held collegewide meetings once a month to give updates on the administration's strategic plans and to get feedback. The meetings were held in-person on one of the campuses and broadcast for people on the other campus and those who were remote. At the end of the year, a university survey found that staff members were much happier with the new practices.

> "We were all trained and had practice as leaders in face-to-face settings. I think it's really important to distinguish the two. Leading a team of people and managing your work is very different in a remote or hybrid setting."

Of course, faculty in hybrid environments face different challenges. While according to the *Chronicle* survey, a majority of faculty members are back to teaching their classes in person, some college leaders have decided to transition to a hybrid teaching format.

At St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York, the pandemic, a small

endowment, and a new state-of-the-art but smaller campus led the small Catholic institution to shift to hybrid teaching. By convening some, but not all, class sessions online for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, the college sought to solve its space issue and provide greater flexibility to its predominantly Hispanic student body, whose members are often first in their families to go to college and often need to work. But to many faculty members, the move felt all wrong.

The college "really feels like a ghost town half the time," says Athena Devlin, an associate professor and chair of literature, writing and publishing at St. Francis. "Professors are coming in less, students are coming in less. Trying to create a robust lively community under the hybrid model is really difficult."

The college "really feels like a ghost town half the time. Professors are coming in less, students are coming in less. Trying to create a robust lively community under the hybrid model is really difficult."

"I miss knowing my students," Devlin says. "The big thing that everyone said at the end of the fall semester last year, which was the first year we did it, was, 'I still don't know the names of our students.' Our students deserve to really be known to us."

Who Gets to Work From Home?

Which employees are most likely to be offered work-from-home options? Staff members in information and technology departments. According to administrative leaders surveyed by the *Chronicle*, 83 percent of IT roles were offered hybrid work and 47 percent of IT staff had the option for fully remote work.
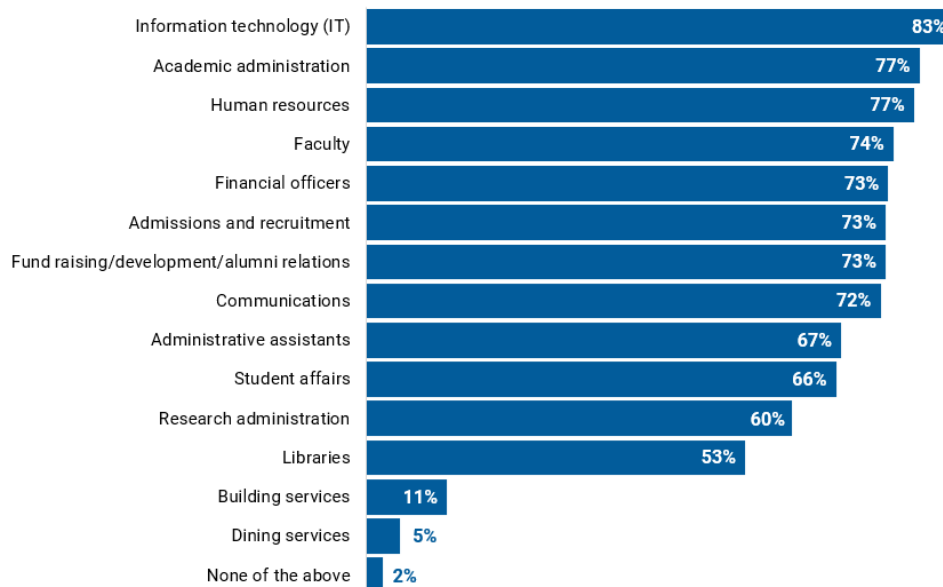
The *Chronicle* survey found that following IT, academic administration, human resources, faculty, financial officers, admissions and recruitment, and fund raising and development were among the most likely to be offered hybrid offerings. The least likely were staff members in dining and building services, people whose jobs simply aren't possible to perform without setting foot on campus.

Workers in roles that are less student-facing were much more likely to be offered fully remote or hybrid options. "It's just the degree to which the campus leaders believe that having some on-campus presence for those positions is essential to performing what's needed for the institution," CUPA-HR's Brantley says.

Which roles or offices on your campus have an option for hybrid work? (Select all that apply.)
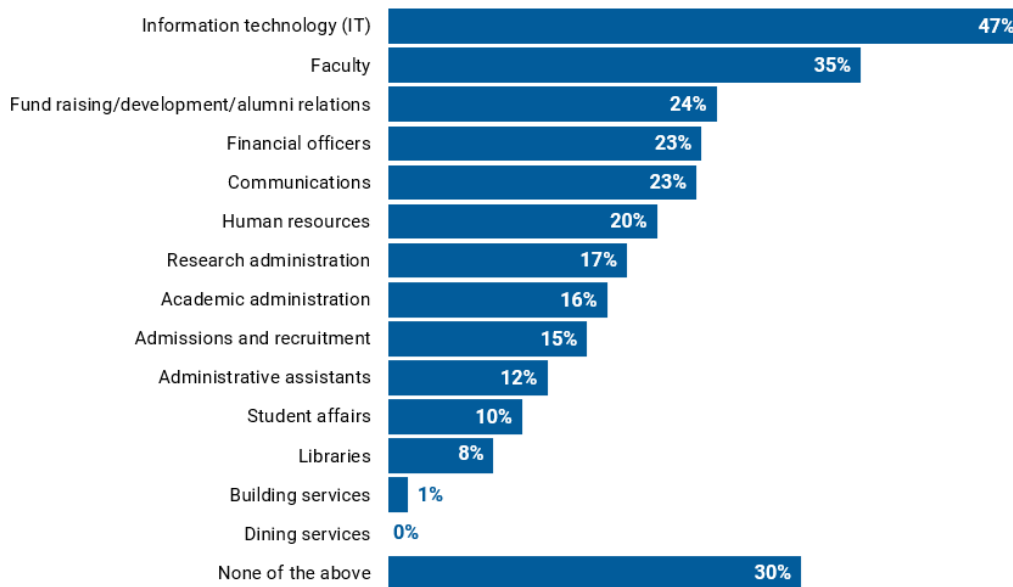
■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Role	Percent
Information technology (IT)	83%
Academic administration	77%
Human resources	77%
Faculty	74%
Financial officers	73%
Admissions and recruitment	73%
Fund raising/development/alumni relations	73%
Communications	72%
Administrative assistants	67%
Student affairs	66%
Research administration	60%
Libraries	53%
Building services	11%
Dining services	5%
None of the above	2%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid.

Which roles or offices on your campus have an option for fully remote work? (Select all that apply.)

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders

Role/Office	Percentage
Information technology (IT)	47%
Faculty	35%
Fund raising/development/alumni relations	24%
Financial officers	23%
Communications	23%
Human resources	20%
Research administration	17%
Academic administration	16%
Admissions and recruitment	15%
Administrative assistants	12%
Student affairs	10%
Libraries	8%
Building services	1%
Dining services	0%
None of the above	30%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid.

WHAT ABOUT FACULTY MEMBERS?

Professors, of course, have long had a fair amount of freedom — hybrid offerings are likely in keeping with that. At Virginia Tech, Bryan Garey, the vice president for human resources, says that while nearly 100 percent of the teaching on campus is in person, "flexible work has always been inherent."

Conversations and comments by survey respondents reflected a general belief that teaching should be done in person when possible, and that students learn better in the classroom. The survey found that 53 percent of faculty members are teaching fully in person, 18 percent are offering their courses in person

> "Since I teach Spanish, I need my students to 'see' me, and I need to have their attention. While Zoom was OK during the pandemic, students are more responsive when in a classroom situation."

with online components, and 8 percent are fully virtual. Notably, only 6 percent are teaching HyFlex courses, which requires simultaneously

teaching an in-person and online class, a role that can be extremely difficult for instructors to perform.

"Since I teach Spanish, I need my students to 'see' me, and I need to have their attention," one respondent wrote when explaining why they wanted to teach in person. "While Zoom was OK during the pandemic, students are more responsive when in a classroom situation."

Hybrid learning isn't easy for everyone. Devlin, of St. Francis College, in New York, found that to be the case for many of her students. "With students who are first-generation, who don't have study spaces or the necessary technology, hybrid learning can really be a challenge," she says. "We have students who are underprepared for college. I personally fought against the hybrid model because I think a lot of the work we do is remedial. We have to set aside time for that remedial work, and that can be frustrating for students. They're not going to do that on their own."

Frederick Cooper, dean of arts and sciences at Technical College of

> ## "Roles should come first, then the organizational priorities and goals and individuals' preference."

the Lowcountry, in South Carolina, echoed that. While much of the staff is working Monday through Thursday in the office and Friday remotely, the college has instituted some requirements for faculty members: They must be on campuses to teach, provide office hours, and participate in committee meetings. "One of the aspects we take for granted is that students have access to technology — and that's not necessarily the case. Just because they have a smartphone doesn't mean they have access to internet," he says.

HOW COLLEGES DECIDE

A theme emerged from *The Chronicle*'s conversations with academic and administrative leaders who had developed hybrid policies: Students' needs were usually at the forefront.

Draves of Graceland University says her institution's guiding principles for hybrid work were: How can we serve students? What do they need? "We had a couple of core philosophies all around student services," she says. "So if you are in a highly student-connected position, then we needed you to be on campus every day." On the other hand, she notes, "What student goes to the comptroller?"

Most of the colleges that *The Chronicle* spoke to provided department heads with guiding principles and a framework to determine hybrid- or remote-work suitability, but

gave the ultimate choice to department leaders.

For Virginia Tech's Garey, it was a no-brainer. "We are not a monolithic operation," he says, pointing to the university's veterinary medicine and agriculture schools. "We empowered our deans and vice presidents to explore what level of flexibility they would be willing to embrace and adopt."

Virginia Tech's HR team created a suitability guide that analyzed the role and who it serves. "Roles should come first, then the organizational priorities and goals and individuals' preference," Garey says. He gives an example of how different departments might handle the same role. "If you're an administ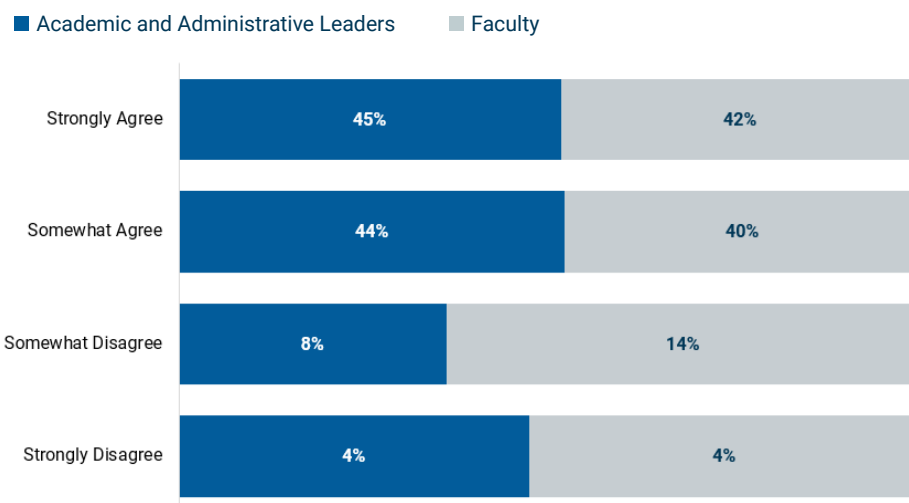rative assistant in the veterinary hospital, you have to deal with patients and companions, but the same administrative assistant in IT with a largely remote team might not need to be onsite."

At Amherst, the college's HR office provided departments with a guiding set of principles and a process to approve a hybrid arrangement that looks first at whether the role is appropriate for a hybrid work arrangement and second at whether the staff member exhibits the qualities and work habits to successfully work in a hybrid model. "It's decentralized," Harrington says. "We ask that the supervisor and employee make that determination together."

Of course, not everyone is going to be able to have hybrid arrangements for work. For library-services

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"My institution has the right technology in place to support a good hybrid work environment."

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders   ■ Faculty

	Academic and Administrative Leaders	Faculty
Strongly Agree	45%	42%
Somewhat Agree	44%	40%
Somewhat Disagree	8%	14%
Strongly Disagree	4%	4%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution either currently working hybrid or expected to do so.

and building-services staff members, Amherst is experimenting with other flexible arrangements, such as a compressed work-week pilot offered this summer. While Harrington, the college's chief human-resources officer, initially worried that explaining why one role received hybrid accommodations and another did not would be a challenge, she found that workers were generally supportive. "We've done a few poll surveys to see how it impacts staff who can't work remotely," Harrington says. "Over all, they have been supportive of the college offering flexibility."

TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE IT ALL HAPPEN

Overwhelming majorities of academic and administrative leaders (89 percent) and faculty members (82 percent) believe their institutions have the right technology in place to support a good hybrid work environment, with many citing various video platforms and learning-management systems.

When asked if their colleges were experimenting with generative artificial intelligence or augmented virtual reality as part of their hybrid work, most administrative and academic leaders either said no or that they were unsure. They were largely split on whether such

technology would aid productivity in a hybrid environment.

But a few departments are experimenting with artificial-intelligence tools. Human-resources departments across the country have begun using chatbots to point employees and prospective candidates to the right webpage or to connect them with a staff member.

"It didn't take long for the conversation to pivot from a punitive environment of 'Thou shalt not do that' to an inclusive environment of: 'This stuff's going to be here to stay. How do we encourage students to use the technology in creative and constructive ways, and for faculty members, for that matter, to use it with guardrails?'" asks Geof Corb, a managing director at Huron.

Has your institution experimented with generative artificial-intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, as part of its approach to hybrid work?

■ Academic and Administrative Leaders
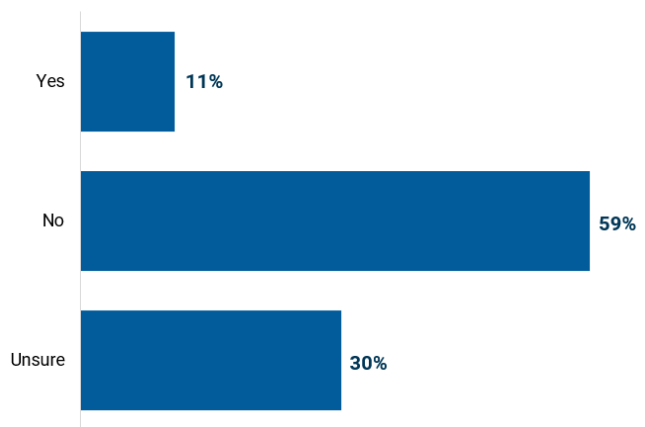
Yes — 11%
No — 59%
Unsure — 30%

Source: *Chronicle* survey of 873 academic administrators and faculty members
Note: This question was exclusively presented to respondents at an institution currently working hybrid. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Graceland's faculty training this past summer featured an entire session on generative AI tools like ChatGPT. While much of the discussion focused on their use in academic settings, it also covered how different departments could use the tools to make their work easier.

"Can my psychology faculty say, 'I need a marketing plan for the psychology department' and get what they need? Can we use this to write syllabi? For teachers, can you write lesson plans?" says Shrock, who initiated the college's task force on AI tools and best practices. He points to Graceland's marketing department, which is looking at how to use generative AI to improve communication flow with students and parents.

"There's an iceberg here, we're just tapping the top of it," Shrock notes.

The pandemic's arrival in 2020 forced higher-ed institutions to shift to emergency remote work. Now colleges are accepting that a hybrid work force, in some form or another, is here to stay. College leaders are recognizing hybrid work as a good recruitment tool and potential benefit to the staff experience but are still learning how to best implement an arrangement that doesn't come at the expense of students' success.

Forward-looking institutions will need to embrace the advantages of hybrid work and the flexibility it grants staff and faculty, while grappling with the challenges of sustaining workplace culture, peer communication, and students' on-campus experience. No single approach will work for all institutions — or for that matter even within an institution — but by developing a robust technology infrastructure, providing flexibility to employees where possible, working on employee connection, and continuing to center students, higher-ed leaders are adapting to and learning about the evolving work-force landscape.

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The nationwide survey of U.S. college administrators and faculty members employed at two- and four-year institutions was held online from July 12 to July 24, 2023.

Of the 873 respondents, 437 were academic and administrative leaders and 436 were faculty members. Twenty-seven percent work for a two-year college, 35 percent at a four-year public university, and 38 percent at a four-year private university. Thirty-seven percent identified themselves as directors, 19 percent as deans (including assistant, associate, or vice deans), 7 percent as department heads, 16 percent as vice presidents, 11 percent as provosts (including assistant, associate, or vice provosts), and 8 percent as chancellors or presidents.

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