

Faculty Life-Work Balance: Survey Analysis and Insights

Prepared by:

Dr. Julie Hancock

On behalf of:

UNT Faculty Senate Life-Work Resources Ad Hoc Committee

April 2026

Faculty Life-Work Balance Overview

This report synthesizes findings from the Life-Work Balance Committee survey conducted on March 5, 2026. Data from 298 responses (~23% faculty response rate) reveals a faculty body experiencing significant professional strain, characterized by a widening gap between institutional expectations and available resources. The most critical takeaways include:

- **The Compensation-Productivity Paradox:** Stagnant salaries combined with rising inflation and "R1 workload expectations" are creating a workforce that feels "grotesquely underpaid." Many employees report needing side hustles or multiple jobs to survive.
- **Systemic Overload and Initiative Fatigue:** A primary driver of stress is the imposition of "frantic changes" and "excessive zeal for new initiatives" (e.g., rapid P&T policy rewrites, conversion of core classes to 2,000-student mega-sections) on short timelines without adequate consultation or staffing.
- **Caregiving Vulnerability:** The absence of standardized paid parental leave, the lack of affordable or subsidized childcare, and "inhospitable" scheduling for parents of young children or caregivers for aging parents are significant points of resentment.
- **The "Invisible" Barrier to Resources:** Even when resources exist, faculty are often unaware of them or, more critically, feel they cannot utilize them due to "unreasonable expectations" and a "fear of retaliation" or negative impact on annual reviews.
- **Leadership Disconnect:** There is a perceived chasm between upper administration, which was noted for "bloated" salaries and "half-hearted" balance efforts, and the "burned-out" faculty who are frequently told to "do more with less."

Core Challenges to Life-Work Balance

The survey respondents identified several overlapping categories of challenges that undermine their ability to maintain a healthy life-work boundary.

1. Workload and Resource Scarcity

- **Unsustainable Service Demands:** A "small number of faculty" often carry the majority of service work, which is frequently uncompensated or overlooked in performance evaluations.
- **Staffing Shortfalls:** Vacant positions remain unfilled, forcing remaining employees to do "the job of three people."
- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Faculty reported having to use personal funds for essential supplies (markers, web subscriptions) and personal devices for multi-factor authentication and communication.
- **Research vs. Teaching Conflict:** For tenure-track faculty, "endless pressure" to secure grants and publish is exacerbated by "paltry resources" and high teaching loads (e.g., 4-4 loads for lecturers).

2. Compensation and Economic Stress

- **Cost-of-Living Misalignment:** The lack of merit raises or cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) over several years was the most cited source of stress.
- **Competitive Disparity:** Respondents noted that UNT salaries are often lower than local K-12 districts (e.g., Denton ISD) or peer R1 institutions.
- **Financial Burden of Work:** Costs such as faculty parking, health insurance premiums with "crappy" coverage, and the lack of employee discounts for the university gym or childcare center further erode take-home pay.

3. Scheduling and "24/7" Connectivity

- **Boundary Erosion:** Expectations from students and administration for immediate responses on evenings, weekends, and holidays are pervasive.
- **Erratic Scheduling:** Last-minute changes to teaching assignments—sometimes just one week before classes begin—disrupt childcare and research planning.
- **Meeting Inefficiency:** "Bullshit meetings" and events scheduled after 3:00 PM or on weekends interfere with school pickups and family commitments.

Institutional and Cultural Barriers

The survey highlights significant barriers that prevent employees from utilizing existing work-life balance resources.

Barrier Category	Specific Evidence from Source Context
Cultural Stigma	Fear of being "marked down" on annual reviews or "crucified" by Personnel Affairs Committees (PACs) for taking leave or requesting accommodations.
Informational Gaps	A widespread "lack of knowledge" or "unawareness" regarding available resources. Many reported hearing about resources for the first time through the survey itself.
Administrative Friction	Processes for FMLA or ADA accommodations are described as "harder instead of easier," involving "going in circles" across different campus offices.
Managerial Discretion	Reliance on "chair discretion" rather than standardized university-wide policy leads to inequitable treatment across different departments.
Retaliation Fears	Concerns regarding "tyrannical" leadership (specifically noted in the College of Information) and fear of "losing my job" if concerns are raised.

Caregiving and Family Support Deficiencies

The survey results emphasize a critical need for structural support for families, which currently appears to be handled on an ad-hoc basis.

- **Parental Leave:** The lack of a clear, university-wide paid parental leave policy is a "huge" issue, with many faculty forced to use sick leave or take "modified workloads" that depend entirely on the goodwill of their department chair.
- **Childcare Inaccessibility:** While the Child Development Laboratory (CYC) exists, it is cited as having "no discount for faculty and staff," making it as expensive as private options.
- **Caregiving for Seniors:** Employees caring for aging parents feel invisible, noting that "snow days" being taken away burdens those with caregiving obligations disproportionately.
- **Lactation and Facilities:** A lack of functional, accessible mothers' rooms and basic facilities like changing tables in restrooms across campus.

Location-Specific Concerns: Discovery Park and Satellite Campuses

Faculty at Discovery Park and other satellite locations feel neglected compared to the main Denton campus:

- **Facility Neglect:** Reports of the need to modernize facilities, remove old carpets, and improve classroom signage at Discovery Park.

- **Food and Health:** "Poor access to quality dining" and a lack of exercise facilities at Discovery Park.
- **Commuting Logistics:** Long commutes between Frisco, Denton, and Discovery Park "suck hours" of life daily, with "oversold" parking lots creating high anxiety upon arrival.

Overview of Faculty Perceptions of WLB

- **Poor Current WLB:** Figure 1 shows that a substantial proportion of respondents experience poor work–life balance. Approximately 43% rate their balance as terrible or poor, while only 24% describe it as good or excellent. This distribution indicates that insufficient balance is a widespread condition rather than an isolated concern, with most respondents clustered in the lower to middle range.
- **Lack of Adequate Resources:** Figure 2 demonstrates that a majority of respondents do not believe the university provides adequate resources to support work–life balance. Roughly 56% disagree that resources are adequate, compared with only 20% who agree. The sizable neutral response suggests uncertainty or uneven access, reinforcing concerns about awareness, clarity, and usability of existing supports.
- **Fear of Retaliation:** Figure 3 indicates that fear of negative consequences is a significant barrier to accessing work–life supports. Over 50% of respondents report moderate to great fear of retaliation when requesting accommodations. This finding suggests that even where policies exist, perceived risk may strongly limit their practical use, particularly in evaluative or tenure-related contexts.

Faculty Proposed Solutions and Recommendations

To address these challenges, the open-ended feedback suggests several targeted improvements (see Appendix A for additional examples):

Immediate Resource Needs

- **Competitive Salaries:** The "only thing that is going to move the needle" is a meaningful salary increase to match inflationary pressures and peer institutions.
- **Staffing Support:** Hiring more TAs, RAs, and administrative staff to offload "invisible labor" from faculty.
- **Standardized Policies:** Implementing university-wide protections against last-minute schedule changes and enforceable parental leave policies.

Cultural and Administrative Shifts

- **Leadership Modeling:** Leaders and supervisors should model healthy boundaries by not sending emails at 1:00 AM or on weekends.
- **Transparency in Workload:** Creating a "master list" of resources and clear, data-driven workload equity policies to ensure service and teaching are distributed fairly.
- **Reduced "Busy Work":** Eliminating "dumb" certificates for high performance, reducing mandatory training that "takes forever," and simplifying "sophisticated" systems like the Registrar's class schedule or FIS.
- **Enhanced "Life" Perks:** Providing free or discounted access to the Rec Center, university sporting events, and the planetarium for faculty to foster community and "LIFE" alongside work.

Information Accessibility

- **Peer and Aspirational Institutions:** including the University of Michigan, Cornell University, the University of Minnesota, and multiple Texas public universities—offer centralized, user-friendly life-work or family-resource webpages for faculty.
 - These webpages typically aggregate caregiving, wellness, flexibility, legal, financial, and family supports in a single, clearly branded location.
 - Resources are commonly organized by life stage or type of need, reducing time and cognitive burdens.
 - This design is particularly effective for employees experiencing stress, caregiving demands, or life transitions.
- **University of North Texas:** Table 1 offers an overview of available resources at UNT by campus, based on the committee's initial review. Currently, work-life resources are distributed across multiple unrelated platforms, including:
 - UNT System benefits webpages
 - ComPsych's Employee Assistance Program
 - Wellness webpages
 - Faculty Senate resource listings
 - Offerings are substantive individually, there is no unified landing page bringing them together coherently.
 - To successfully find resources, employees must already know:
 - Which office manages which support
 - What terminology to search for
 - How to navigate multiple systems
 - Survey respondents consistently identified this fragmentation as a barrier to awareness and use, especially for:
 - New faculty
 - Caregivers
 - Employees experiencing acute stress or crisis
 - Addressing this gap represents a low-cost, high-impact opportunity to improve faculty wellbeing, trust, and retention.
 - Table 2 offers an overview of challenges and possible recommendations by campus, based on respondent feedback.

Conclusion of Findings

The prevailing sentiment across the survey is one of "burnout" and "uncertainty." Faculty express a deep commitment to their students but feel that the current trajectory of increasing enrollment and initiatives while cutting budgets and ignoring salary stagnation is unsustainable. As one respondent noted, the university should focus not just on "work-life balance" but on "WORK balance" to ensure the core mission remains achievable.

Table 1. List of Life-Work Faculty Resources at UNT System Campuses*

Resources	UNT Denton	UNT at Frisco	UNT Health Science Center	UNT at Dallas
1. Urban Sitter (babysitting, nannyng, dog sitting, housecleaning, etc.), https://www.urbansitter.com/unt .	Available	Available	Available	Available
2. UNT preschool “Center for Young Children”, https://centerforyoungchildren.unt.edu/index.html .	Available			
3. UNT Library guide on family-centered resources (more geared to student-parents), https://guides.library.unt.edu/student-parents .	Available	Available	Available	Available
4. Counseling services for families, adolescents, children (sliding fee), https://coe.unt.edu/child-and-family-resource-clinic .	Available	Available	Available	Available
5. UNT Center for Play Therapy for children; sliding scale, https://cpt.unt.edu/center-play-therapy .			Available	
6. UNT Speech & Hearing Center-including communication therapy for children with autism, https://hps.unt.edu/aslp/aslp-clinics.html#slservices .	Available		Available	
7. UNT Kristin Farmer Autism Center offers clinical intervention services and is neither a public nor private school. Children attending the Center receive a program of evidence-based autism interventions not accredited by any specific accrediting association or regulated by any state education agency, https://autism.unt.edu/index.html .	Available			
8. Lactation Rooms for breastfeeding people (there are no sinks in the rooms, but wall-mounted hand sanitizer dispensers) installed, https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/center-for-belonging-and-engagement/non-traditional-and-commuter-student-support/student-parents/lactation-spaces.html .	Available		Available	
9. Lactation Breaks Accommodation Requests for lactation breaks/breast milk expression can request from their supervisor, https://hr.untsystem.edu/office-of-eo/title-vii/additional-workplace-accommodations.php , additional accommodations/requests outside of lactation breaks can be made via email: Workplace.Accommodations@untsystem.edu .	Available	Available	Available	Available
10. Pregnancy Accommodation Requests, https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UNTSys&layout_id=20 , contact: UNT System Office of Equal Opportunity.	Available	Available	Available	Available
11. UNT FMLA, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/employee-leave/family-medical-leave-act.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
12. UNT Family and Medical Leave Policy 05.064. https://policy.unt.edu/policy/05-064 .	Available	Available	Available	Available
13. UNT Parental Leave Policy 05.0161, https://policy.unt.edu/policy/05-061 .	Available	Available	Available	Available

14. Family Leave Pool, https://hr.untssystem.edu/benefits/employee-leave/family-leave-pool.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
15. Employee Assistance Program (EAP), https://hr.untssystem.edu/benefits/eap/index.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
16. CARE Team - UNT created a network of professionals who are committed to a caring program of identification, intervention, and response in order to support students, staff, and faculty, and to provide our community with the greatest level of protection, https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/programs-and-services/care-team/ .	Available	Available	Available	Available
17. Mediation - a voluntary process that can help individuals find mutually agreed upon solutions to job-related interpersonal disputes between faculty, administrators, and/or staff. Student employees facing interpersonal disputes on the job should seek assistance from the Dean of Students Office, https://mediation.unt.edu/ .	Available	Available	Available	Available
18. Training Opportunities - comprehensive catalog covering a wide-range of topics for professional and leadership skill development, https://hr.untssystem.edu/employee-resources/organizational-development-engagement-ode/available-training-opportunities.php#a2 .	Available	Available	Available	Available
19. Perks - a wide variety of discount programs, dining, bookstore, and software perks for UNT System employees, https://hr.untssystem.edu/benefits/perks-unt-system-employees.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
20. Religious Observance Accommodations - Employees and job applicants can request an accommodation through the Office of Equal Opportunity. Employees who desire a religious accommodation should submit the request as early as possible and generally, within ten (10) days before it is needed, https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UNTSys&layout_id=21 .	Available	Available	Available	Available
21. Flexible Work Arrangements - arrangement that allows an employee to work an Alternate Work Schedule and/or at a Remote Work location, https://myunt.sharepoint.com/sites/ConnectHR/SitePages/Flexible-Remote-Work.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=W4YbNC&CID=90420466-2ec1-4467-8bd8-daf47a11a6eb .	Available	Available	Available	Available
22. Faculty, Staff, Retiree, and Dependent Educational Scholarship - the university is committed to promoting development and assisting faculty and staff in pursuing higher education for themselves and their dependents, https://policy.unt.edu/policy/10-025 .	Available	Available	Available	Available
23. Employee Tuition Benefits - The University of North Texas offers an Employee Tuition Benefit to eligible UNT and UNT System component institution employees and employee dependents enrolled in UNT courses, https://studentaccounting.unt.edu/employee-tuition-benefit.html .	Available	Available	Available	Available

24. Employee Tuition Benefits - The University of North Texas offers an Employee Tuition Benefit to eligible UNT and UNT System component institution employees and employee dependents enrolled in UNT courses, https://studentaccounting.unt.edu/employee-tuition-benefit.html .	Available	Available	Available	Available
25. Life insurance plans - for families, including dependent term, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/life-insurance.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
26. Short-term & Long-term Disability insurance - to provide support if one cannot work. Some STDs are useful for pregnant people, but all stipulations should be carefully scrutinized if planning to use for that purpose, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/disability-insurance.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
27. Retirement Plans. Voluntary Retirement Savings Plans-save for retirement by participating in the UNTS Voluntary 403(b) and 457 Plans, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/voluntary-retirement-savings-plans.php , ORP https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/orp-vendors.php , TRS https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/retirement-plans/trs.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
28. Well-being Leave - eight hours of paid time off upon completion of a physical exam as well as an online health risk assessment each fiscal year beginning September 1 to August 31, (https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/employee-leave/well-being-leave.php).	Available	Available	Available	Available
29. Fitness Leave - UNT Employees who are eligible to accrue leave may use Fitness Leave. Fitness leave may be used for a time period of up to thirty (30) minutes, three days per week, to participate in exercise, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/employee-leave/well-being-leave.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
30. Other Paid Leave - a wide variety of leave with pay for things like voting, donating blood, organs, or bone marrow, conferences, volunteer firefighters or EMS, etc., https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/employee-leave/other-paid-leaves.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
31. ERS Flexible Spending Accounts- certain medical expenses and dependent care expenses with funds deducted from pay prior to tax calculations. Benefits-eligible employees must enroll in TexFlex during the first 31 days of employment, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/healthcare-benefits/flexible-spending-plans.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
32. Health Savings Accounts - help cover the possibly higher out-of-pocket health expenses, pre-tax (\$45 per individual, \$90 per family for eligible members, https://hr.untsystem.edu/benefits/healthcare-benefits/flexible-spending-plans.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
33. ODE Resources, https://hr.untsystem.edu/employee-resources/organizational-development-engagement-ode/index.php .	Available	Available	Available	Available
34. The Learning Commons,	Available			Available

https://www.untDallas.edu/learning/index.php . The Learning Commons is also known as the center for tutoring. The mission is to strengthen academic and professional skills through providing one-on-one and group tutoring, supplemental academic resources, and student worker development opportunities to facilitate students' success in their time at UNT Dallas and in future graduate programs and careers.				
35. Work Life Balance, https://vpaa.unt.edu/fs/resources/work-life .	Available	Available	Available	Available
36. Faculty Workload Modification for Parental Leave, https://vpaa.unt.edu/fs/resources/work-life/parental-leave .	Available	Available	Available	Available

*These resources were reviewed by committee members in late fall 2024/early spring 2025 and may have changed.

Table 2. Campus-Specific Recommendations Based on Life–Work Balance Survey Findings (N = 298)

Campus	Respondent Representation	Primary Challenges Identified	Priority Recommendations
UNT Denton	Majority of respondents; precise campus-level count not reported due to free-text response format	• R1-level workload expectations without commensurate staffing or compensation • Fragmented access to work-life resources • Significant caregiving and scheduling challenges • Fear of negative consequences in tenure, review, and evaluation processes	• Establish a centralized UNT Life–Work Resource Hub • Standardize and enforce parental and caregiving workload accommodations • Require college-level workload transparency reporting • Reduce unfunded administrative initiatives and duplicative “busy work” • Expect leadership to model healthy boundary-respecting practices
UNT at Frisco	Smaller but clearly represented subgroup; precise count not reported	• Long commutes and multi-campus teaching assignments • Limited on-site amenities (food, wellness, private/lactation space) • Scheduling instability and evening course concentration • Reduced visibility of work-life resources	• Improve on-site amenities • Protect predictable teaching schedules • Implement commute-aware scheduling and hybrid options where feasible • Integrate Frisco-specific resources into the centralized Life–Work Hub
UNT Health Science Center	Represented through qualitatively distinct responses; precise count not reported	• Overlapping clinical, teaching, and research responsibilities • Elevated burnout risk and limited recovery time • Rigid scheduling interacting with caregiving needs • Stigma related to use of mental health resources	• Align productivity expectations with protected time • Normalize use of mental health and wellness resources • Expand flexible scheduling within clinical constraints • Develop targeted caregiver supports
UNT at Dallas	Represented with fewer respondents than Denton; precise count not reported	• Lean staffing models and role overload • High teaching and service demands with limited redundancy • Limited local access to institutional supports • Perceived distance from system-level resources	• Increase baseline staffing and clarify role expectations • Ensure equitable access to system-level work-life resources • Establish redundancy and cross-training for leave coverage • Improve communication through the centralized Life–Work Resource Hub

Note: Campus-level respondent counts were not aggregated numerically in the survey export. Campus representation is based on qualitative analysis of free-text responses and recurring campus-specific themes.

Figure 1. Current Work–Life Balance Ratings (n =298)

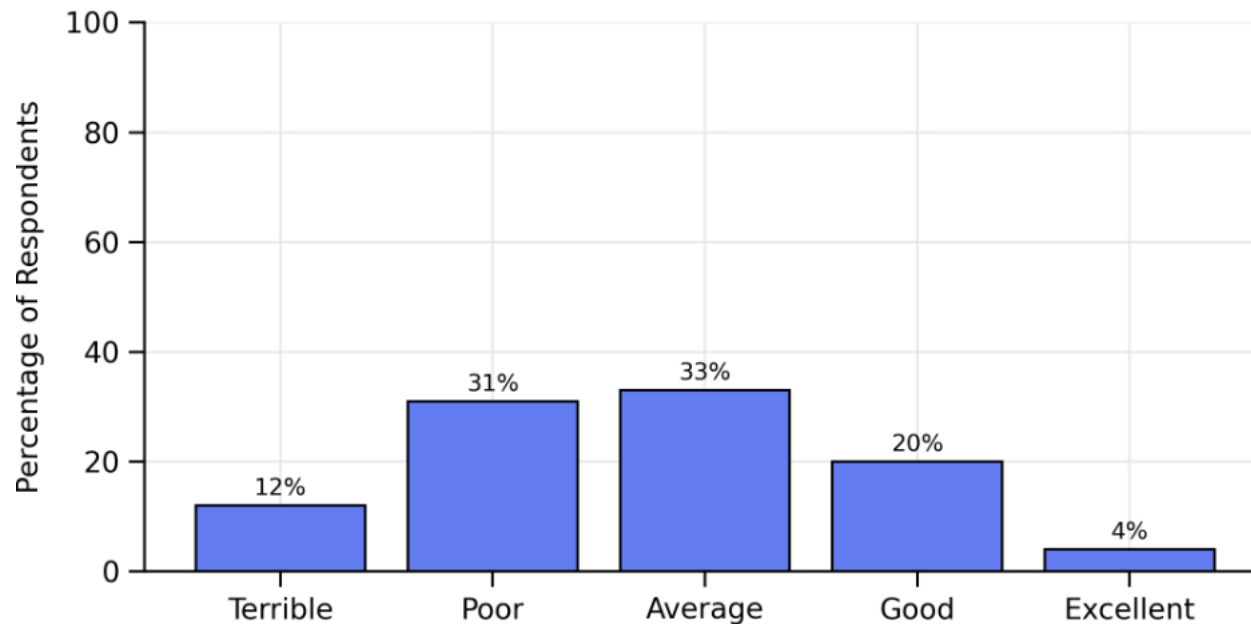


Figure 2. Perception of Adequate Institutional Resources (n = 298)

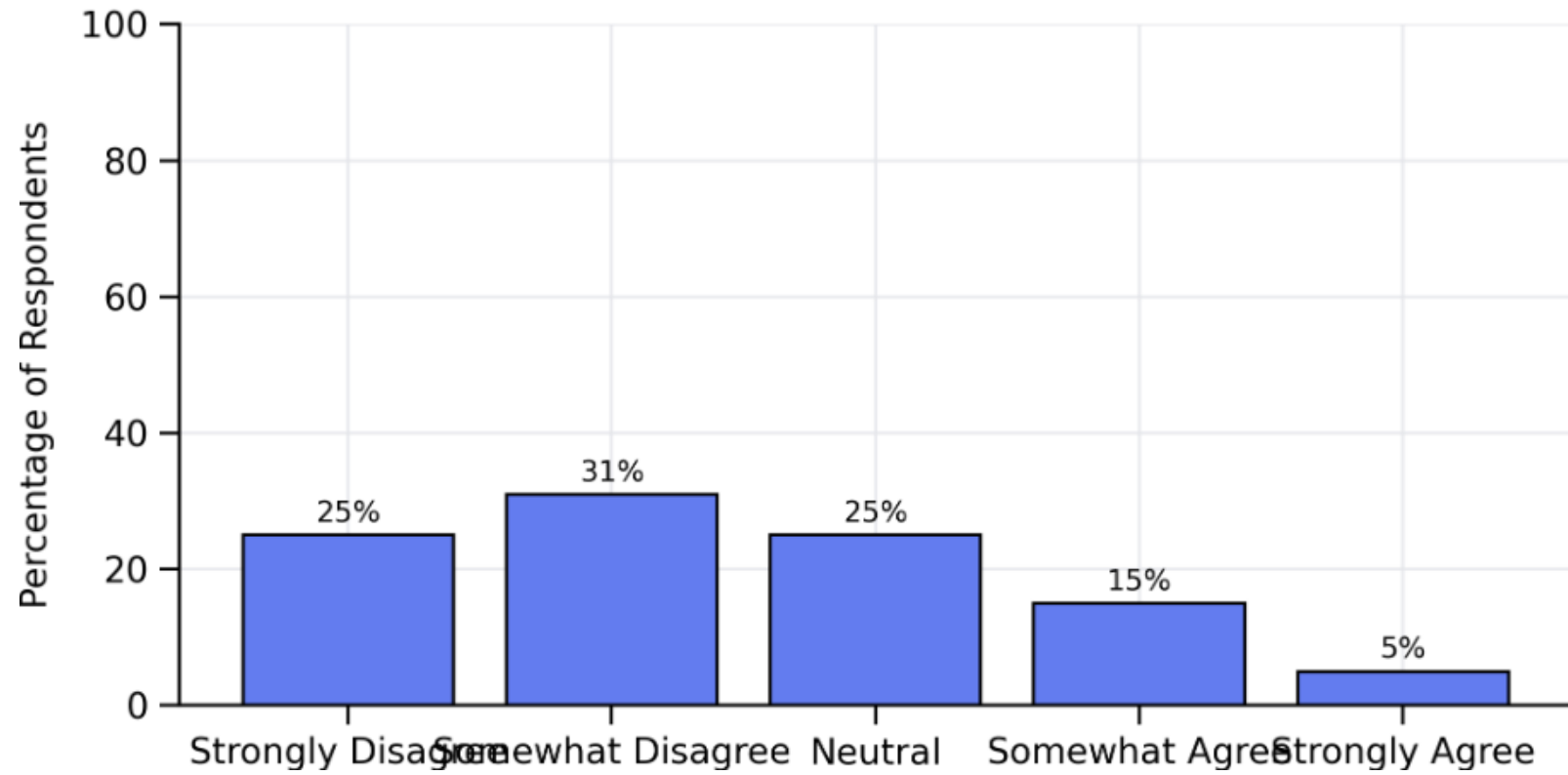
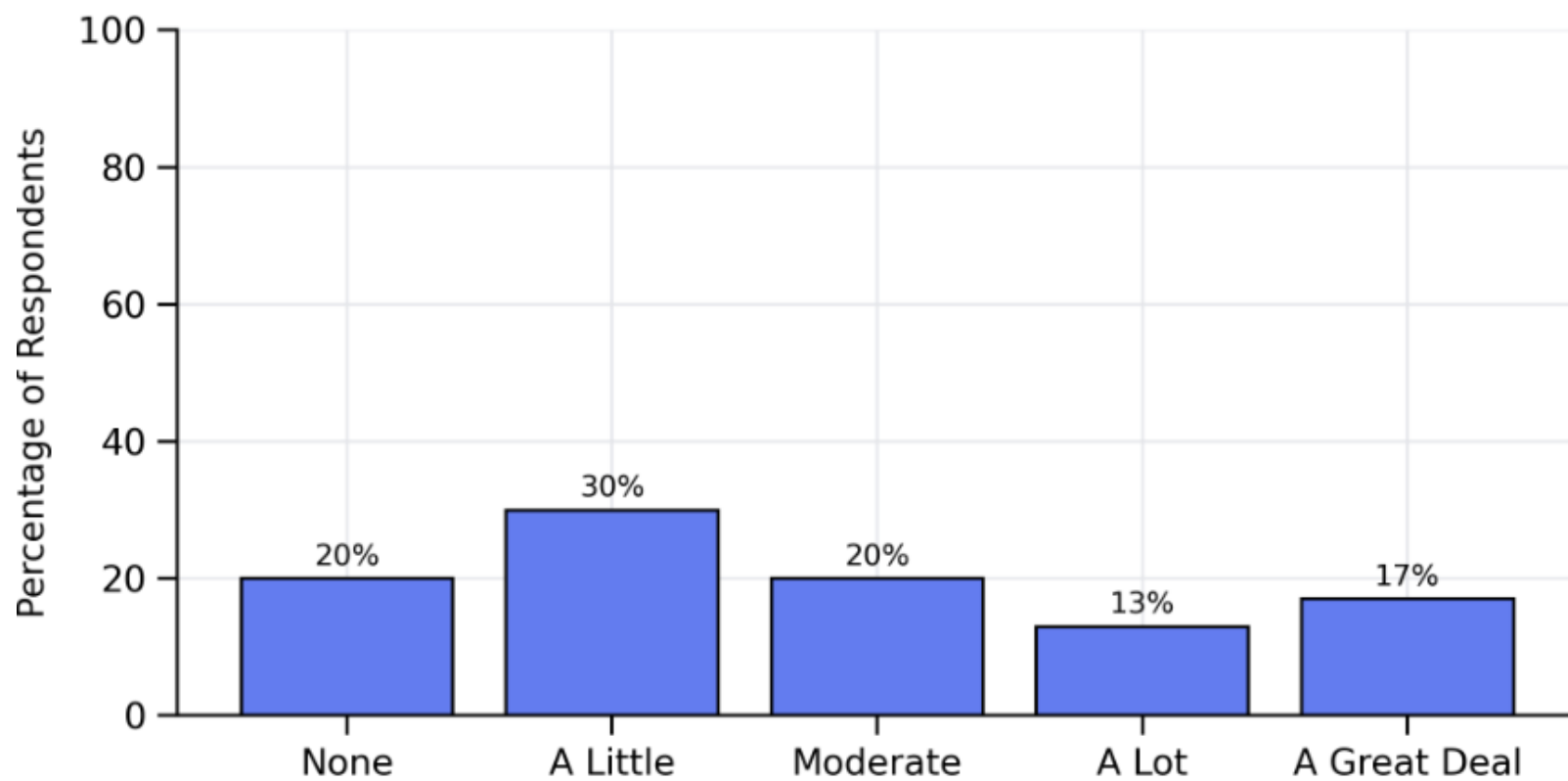


Figure 3. Fear of Retaliation When Requesting Accommodations (n = 298)



Appendix A. Qualitative Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Responses

This appendix summarizes the dominant themes that emerged from open-ended survey questions. Responses were synthesized into primary themes with illustrative, anonymized examples. The table below highlights recurring patterns across respondents (n = 298).

Survey Question	Primary Themes Identified	Representative Comments (Anonymized)
Q9. What work-life balance challenges do you face as a faculty member?	• Excessive workload and long hours • R1 expectations without commensurate staffing or compensation • Caregiving responsibilities (children, aging parents, disabled family members) • Scheduling instability and evening/weekend work expectations • Erosion of personal–professional boundaries	“I regularly work nights and weekends just to keep up.” “I am expected to meet R1 standards on a salary that does not cover basic living costs.” “Last-minute schedule changes make childcare impossible.”
Q10. What additional resources or support would improve your work-life balance?	• Competitive and inflation-adjusted salaries • Increased staffing and administrative support • Paid parental leave and caregiving accommodations • Reduced service and administrative burden • Clearer workload expectations and enforcement • Leadership modeling of healthy boundaries	“Pay us enough to not need a second job.” “We need fewer initiatives and more people to do the work.” “Leaders should model not sending emails at midnight.”
Q11. What barriers prevent you from utilizing available work-life balance resources?	• Lack of awareness of available resources • Fragmented navigation across multiple websites • Insufficient time to access resources • Fear of retaliation or negative evaluation • Stigma around mental health or accommodation requests	“I did not know these resources even existed.” “You have to already know what you are looking for to find anything.” “I worry using accommodations will hurt my annual review.”
Q12. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about improving work-life balance at the university?	• Widespread burnout paired with institutional loyalty • Perceived disconnect between leadership messaging and daily realities • Frustration with repeated surveys without visible action • Calls to align expectations, compensation, and resources • Desire to reframe from wellness rhetoric to structural work balance	“We care deeply about this institution, but the current model is unsustainable.” “Stop treating this as an individual wellness issue—it is systemic.” “Do not ask us how we are doing if nothing changes.”

