

Loyola Staff Views on Returning to Campus for Fall 2021 in Context of COVID-19

Office of Institutional Effectiveness Research Report, July 2021

July 30, 2021

In March 2020, in response to the worldwide public health crisis around the COVID-19 pandemic and keeping our community safe, Loyola moved all classes to an online format and asked students to return to their homes off campus. Most staff and faculty began to work at home and Loyola’s campuses grew quiet. The summer of 2020 and the 2020-2021 school year brought a few students, staff and faculty to campus but the large majority remained working from home. Periodically during this time, Loyola University Chicago leaders reached out to survey staff, faculty, and students about their concerns and their work. With COVID-19 vaccines and testing widely available in Chicago and the US in summer 2021, LUC administration has joined many other universities in preparations for on-campus classes, student residential life, and workspaces for faculty and staff. In this report, we describe the views of staff who responded to a survey in early July 2021 that asks about their August 2021 return to campus.

LUC staff members from all three campuses (LSC, WTC, HSC) were surveyed from July 6-13, 2021, through the Staff Return to Work Survey distributed online. 985 individuals provided answers to the survey for a response rate of 54.4%. This survey specifically asked staff about their comfort level with returning to campus in August given the recent COVID-19 public health situation developments and the health and safety protocols in place on campus. We note that staff were surveyed prior to the July 29, 2021 announcement by Loyola President Jo Ann Rooney and Provost Margaret Callahan that “Loyola University Chicago will now require all full-time and part-time faculty and staff, along with students, to be vaccinated from COVID-19.”

Survey Respondents

There were 985 people who responded to the survey. Of those, slightly less than half (48.1%) reported that they primarily work at Lakeshore campus, about one-third (32.2%) work at Water Tower campus, and less than twenty percent reported work at our Health Sciences or Other campus locations. The vast majority (95.5%) reported that they are full-time employees of the university, and slightly more than seventy percent (71.6%) are salaried employees. Respondents were also asked to share their racial/ethnic background and sex/gender as they felt comfortable. Table 1 below shows the racial/ethnic breakdown of respondents with the majority of respondents identifying as White or Caucasian (67.4%).

Table 1. Respondent Race/Ethnicity

	N	%
Asian or Pacific Islander	61	6.3
Black or African American	89	9.2
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	113	11.7
Native American or Alaskan Native	4	0.4
Multiracial or Biracial	22	2.2
White or Caucasian	649	67.4
A race/ethnicity not listed here	25	2.6

Slightly less than two-thirds (63.7%) of respondents identified as female while 31% identified as male, less than one percent of respondents identified as trans/non-binary/third gender, and about five percent preferred not to disclose this information or identified in a way not captured by the options.

Comfort in Returning to Campus

Over half of all survey respondents (55.8%) reported feeling very/somewhat comfortable returning to campus given the mitigation and safety efforts in place at the university for in-person work. However, one-fourth of respondents indicated that, despite the mitigation efforts in place, they still felt very/somewhat uncomfortable returning to in-person work. See Table 2 below for more detailed information.

Table 2. Staff Comfort with Returning to Campus

	N	%
Very Comfortable	260	26.9
Somewhat Comfortable	279	28.9
Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable	94	9.7
Somewhat Uncomfortable	154	16.0
Very Uncomfortable	88	9.1
Not applicable, I have remained on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic or returned to work during the fall or spring	90	9.3

Staff were asked about their agreement toward workplace safety given mitigation efforts in place. Overall, staff respondents felt that the university was making efforts to keep them safe from COVID-19 while at work. About three-quarters (73.9%) of respondents reported that they felt protected from health and safety hazards while performing their job in-person. More than three-quarters were confident that the organization would take appropriate measures to keep them as safe as possible when returning to in-person work (78.9), and they believed appropriate safety protocols will be in place for returning to in-person work (78.1%). However, approximately a quarter of respondents did not feel that the mitigation efforts put in place would keep them safe at work and disagreed/strongly disagreed with each of those statements. See Table 3 below for more information.

Table 3. Staff Perceptions of Mitigation and Safety Efforts in Place

	Strongly Agree/Agree		Strongly Disagree/Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
I feel protected from health and safety hazards performing my job in-person.	709	73.9	251	26.1
I am confident that my organization will take appropriate measures to keep me as safe as possible when we return to work on campus.	749	78.9	200	21.1
I believe appropriate safety protocols will be in place when I return to campus.	746	78.1	209	21.9

As Table 4 below shows, many of the people who felt very/somewhat uncomfortable returning to campus also do not feel that the mitigation efforts put in place by the university will keep them safe from COVID-19 while at work. Among respondents who indicated that they were somewhat/very uncomfortable with returning to campus 79.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed that they felt protected from health and safety hazards; 60.2% indicated that they were not confident that the organization would take appropriate measures to keep them safe when returning to in-person work; and 63.6% did not believe that appropriate safety protocols will be in place when returning to campus.

Table 4. Very/Somewhat Uncomfortable Returners Attitudes Toward Mitigation Efforts

	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	
	N	%
I feel protected from health and safety hazards performing my job in-person.	191	79.6
I am confident that my organization will take appropriate measures to keep me as safe as possible when we return to work on campus.	141	60.2
I believe appropriate safety protocols will be in place when I return to campus.	152	63.6

In a separate question, respondents were asked to indicate their concerns in returning to campus based on a provided list of common concerns with an option to enter your own in a text box. Respondents were allowed to select multiple answers to this question. Among respondents who were very/somewhat uncomfortable returning to campus their most frequently cited concern from the list was interacting with unvaccinated co-workers and visitors (89.6% of respondents indicated this was one of their concerns). The second most frequently cited concern was being exposed to COVID-19 while commuting to work (72.6%) followed by concerns about safety protocols in place on campus and in workspaces (69.3%). Table 5 below has more detailed information on all the responses.

Table 5. Very/Somewhat Uncomfortable Returners Returning Concerns

	N	%
Interacting with unvaccinated co-workers and visitors	216	89.6
Being exposed to COVID-19 while commuting	175	72.6
Safety protocols in place on campus and in workspaces	167	69.3
Personal commitments with childcare arrangements and/or caring for family members at home	110	45.6
Potentially infecting my peers and others in the workplace	94	39.0
Issues with office equipment and related resources	51	21.2

Through this survey item, respondents were allowed to select an option indicating “other” concerns with the opportunity to share those through a comment box. One hundred and fifty-three people shared concerns or challenges in this way. Exposure to COVID from others was one of the most commonly cited concerns. Thirty-six staff respondents shared that they have concerns about other staff members’ and students’ behaviors. One respondent shared that, “Co-workers have never adhered to the protocols and believe the rules do not apply to them. I have never seen them wear masks properly and I doubt this will change.” Another respondent shared that they are concerned about “working with

others [faculty, staff, or students] that do not want to take the appropriate safety measures.” Further, 21 staff members shared that they have concerns about getting COVID-19 and spreading it to unvaccinated/immunocompromised individuals in their households or under their care.

Another common theme among responses was about the challenges or concerns with commuting. Thirteen respondents shared that they are concerned about long commute times, cost of commuting, and lack of parking as barriers to coming to campus and a productivity/efficiency.

Motivations for Returning to Work

Survey takers were asked a question about potential reasons to feel motivated to return to in-person work. Respondents chose from a list of options and were allowed to select multiple choices for this question. Approximately one-third of staff respondents indicated that personal interaction with co-workers and/or students was a motivation for their return to in-person work and about one-fifth of respondents (20.1%) indicated that access to office equipment/resources was a motivation for them. Table 6 below has more information on responses.

Table 6. Respondent motivations for returning to work on campus

	N	%
Personal interaction with co-workers and/or students	609	31.2
Access to office equipment/resources	393	20.1
Fostering teamwork and increased collaboration with other community partners	345	17.7
Engaging in activities that promote a collegiate experience for our students	296	15.2
Working in a more professional office environment	225	11.5
Other	84	4.3

Additionally, staff who indicated “other” on this survey item were prompted to share their insights through write-in responses. Eighty-one people shared additional information through comments in this way. One of the most frequent responses that employees shared was a lack of boundaries between work and home during remote operations during the pandemic. Eleven respondents shared that they saw returning to work on campus as an opportunity to establish “hopefully a better work/life balance” and that they were looking forward to “work remain[ing] at work and home remain[ing] at home assisting in work/life balance.” Other employees (N=8) shared that they were looking forward to feeling energy that comes with interacting with students/patients in-person or doing work together as a team on-campus. One person shared that, “we build off of the energy of our colleagues and students, so that will be nice to feel in the air again.”

Anticipated concerns or challenges with work modalities (in-person, hybrid, remote)

This fall, as in-person operations resume on campus, staff were asked to think about potential concerns or challenges that they have with three different work modalities: completely in-person, completely remote, or a hybrid (3 days per week remotely and 2 days per week on-campus). This question did not

ask participants to indicate their preferred modality—it asked them to think about challenges with each modality. In addition to thinking about challenges with meetings, keeping schedules, communication, and safety among each modality, respondents were allowed to choose an option that stated that they did not have concerns with each modality. While there seemed to be more support for completely remote or hybrid modalities than completely in-person work, less than half of respondents felt that they had no concerns or challenges with the modalities. Table 7 below shows more detailed data.

Table 7. Respondents who cite no concerns with each modality

	Completely In-Person		Completely Remote		Hybrid	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not have concerns or challenges with this work modality	273	16.7	600	43.7	578	43.7