

UW Staff Leave Time Survey

October 2014

Introduction

This report provides an overview of a survey conducted by Staff Senate to evaluate the experience of UW staff members with regard to leave time.

Feedback received from this survey will be used to inform conversations between Staff Senate and members of the University Administration regarding leave time practices and policies.

Background

Staff Senate currently has a website feature that allows staff members to submit anonymous questions about their employment at the University. Members of the Senate Communications Committee investigate these questions and publish the answers in the Staff Senate Newsletter. After receiving numerous questions regarding leave time policies and practices, the Communications Committee decided that a survey was needed to determine how common the experiences of these staff members are.

Methodology

An online survey was deployed via UW email to all classified staff members that have passed the probationary period. In all, the survey was deployed to a total of 1,215 individuals. A reminder email was sent out approximately 2 weeks after the initial deployment. A total of 628 respondents completed the survey.

Discussion of Findings

The survey revealed a number of pressing issues concerning compensatory time (comp time) and vacation leave.

Vacation Leave

One of the most striking findings of the survey is that 35% of respondents reported being at or near the vacation accrual cap. Further, 34% reported that at some point they have lost vacation accrual because of the cap, and 6% report losing vacation accrual “often” or “about half the time.”

A number of the comments that were received regarding leave time revealed that many staff members feel too busy to use their leave time due to staffing shortages. Others stated that there are no other staff members available to perform their duties while they are on leave, and this will greatly increase their workload when they return from leave. In some cases, it was reported that the lack of coverage may negatively impact the staff member’s performance evaluation because their assigned tasks are not

completed while they are away. Some respondents also reported leave time blackout dates in their units which make it very difficult to use their leave time. In a handful of cases, Staff Senate received direct feedback from staff members noting that they had not even been aware that they were at the vacation accrual cap and losing vacation accrual until they received the invitation to take this survey. Although a good number of staff members have lost vacation accrual and/or taken on increased workloads, many still report strong commitment to their work and to the University.

Comp Time

On the issue of comp time, 29% of respondent reported that their comp time is not recorded on their UW timesheet. Of these, 24% reported that comp time is tracked internally while the other 5% use some other means for recording comp time. A number of the comments on comp time indicated that in the respondent's unit, comp time is accrued at straight time rather than time and a half. Other comments indicated that some staff members have lost their comp time when moving to a different department within the University because their comp time was only tracked internally. In addition, some respondents commented that comp time is counterproductive in their units because they are too busy to use their comp time, or are required to use it before using vacation leave. In some cases, this exacerbates the problem of loss of vacation leave accrual due to the cap.

Policy Issues

Finally, the practices reported and comments received in this survey reveal a lack of clarity on what the University's policies are on leave time accrual and use. A number of respondents stated directly that they could not answer questions about whether they are able to use their comp time and vacation leave in accordance with UW policies because they could not understand what those policies are by reading the Employee Handbook. In addition, several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on when they are allowed to use their leave time, but noted that this supervisory practice does not seem to be a policy violation.

Recommendations

Based on survey findings, Staff Senate has the following recommendations.

Clarification and Enforcement of Leave Time Policies

The Employee Handbook should be revised to clarify UW policies on use of vacation leave and comp time. The proper method of reporting comp time should also be covered, and the issue of blackout dates for both vacation leave and comp time should be addressed. A number of exempt employees have also requested a clarification of the policy on the use of flex time versus leave time for exempt employees.

For non-exempt staff members, the recording of comp time should be standardized across units. All employees who are eligible for comp time should report it on their UW timesheet, and accrue it at the rate of time and a half. Managers should work with their employees to enable them to use their comp time in a timely manner that accommodates both departmental needs and the preferences of the employee.

Workload Issues

In departments that have lost staff members due to budget cuts, supervisors should work with Human Resources personnel to ensure that the workload assigned to each staff member is appropriate. Leave time should be accounted for in assessments of the workload for each staff position. Since an assessment of the workload (amount of work versus types of tasks) is not currently included in an employee's Position Description Questionnaire, a cross-campus conversation on how to account for workload would be very beneficial.

Staffing coverage for vacation leave and comp time should be addressed by an employee and their supervisor collaboratively. Cross-training within units should be pursued wherever possible. In cases where a staff member feels that it is not possible for them to be out on leave time for any period of time without experiencing negative repercussions, clear and accessible options should be available for requesting help in negotiating the issue of leave time coverage.

In many cases where staffing losses have occurred, little or no provision has been made for streamlining necessary tasks, and identifying low-priority tasks that can be eliminated to both accommodate vacation leave and reduce the accrual of comp time. In cases where there are inefficient processes or redundant tasks, methods of eliminating those inefficiencies should be pursued. It is clear from the feedback collected through this survey that attempting to maintain the same volume of work with fewer staff members is not a sustainable approach.

Supervisor Training

Survey data reveals that there are a number of divergences from University policy within campus units that could be resolved by more comprehensive and targeted supervisor training. Supervisor training should make University policies clear while also addressing best practices for department management and employee retention. All UW employees who hold a supervisory role, whether they are faculty or staff, should be required to attend training. In addition, resources and assistance for supervisors when dealing with workload and coverage concerns should be readily available.

Communication

During and after the deployment of this survey, a number of UW staff members commented to Staff Senate representative that it would be helpful to receive a notification when they reach the vacation accrual cap, as employees at other state agencies do. Staff Senate recommends that automatic notifications be set up via the payroll system that would notify a staff member when they reach a threshold of vacation leave time that is at or near the cap.

Conclusion

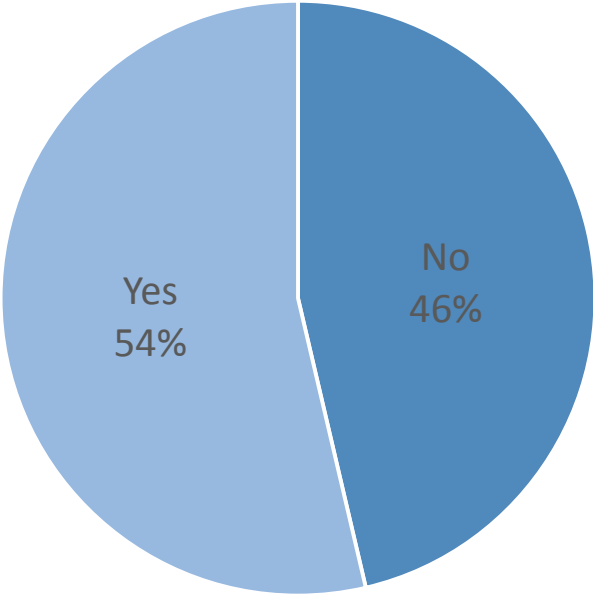
Staff Senate looks forward to working with administrative personnel on the issues highlighted by this survey.

Staff Senate Leave Time Survey

Deployed October 13, 2014 to all classified staff

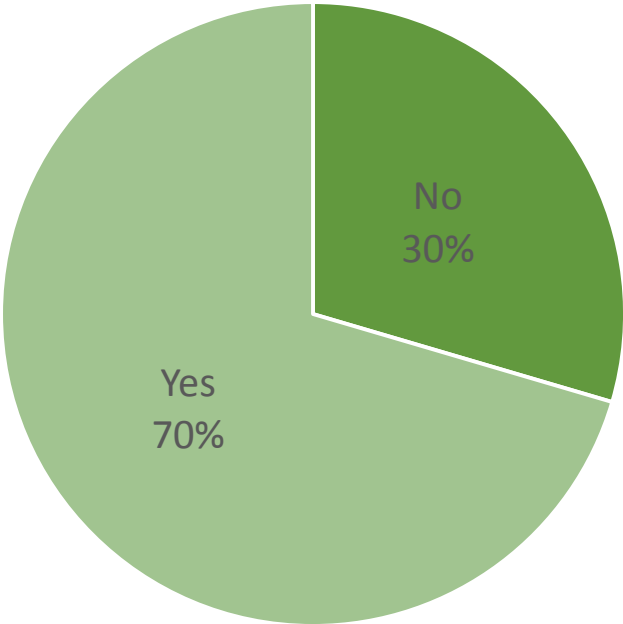
628 total respondents

In your current position at the university are you an exempt employee?



Yes	337
No	291
Total	628

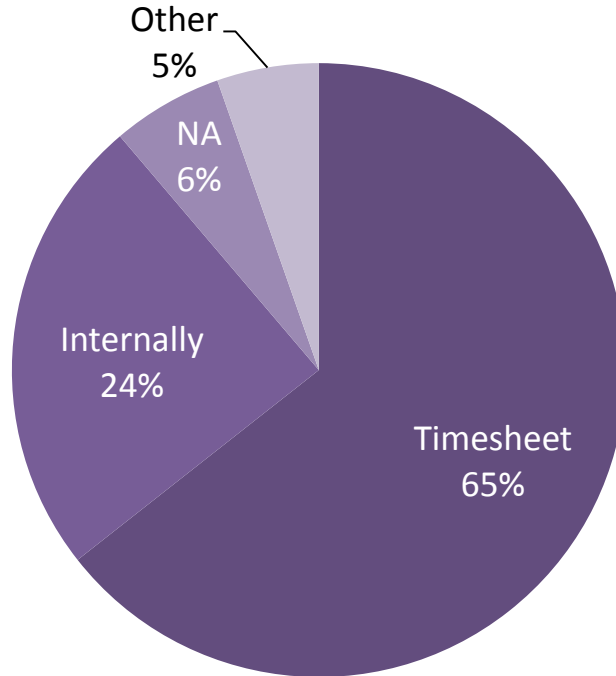
In your current position at the university do you ever work additional hours in exchange for comp time?



Yes	205
No	86
Total	291*

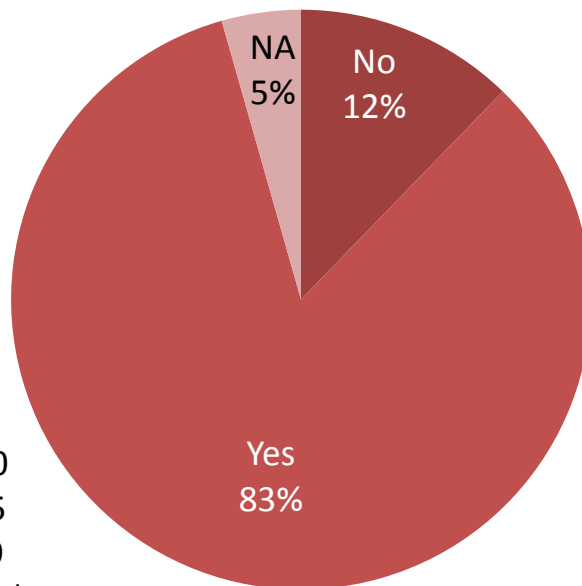
*indicates reduced number of respondents because the question was conditional on an earlier response.

How is your comp time recorded?



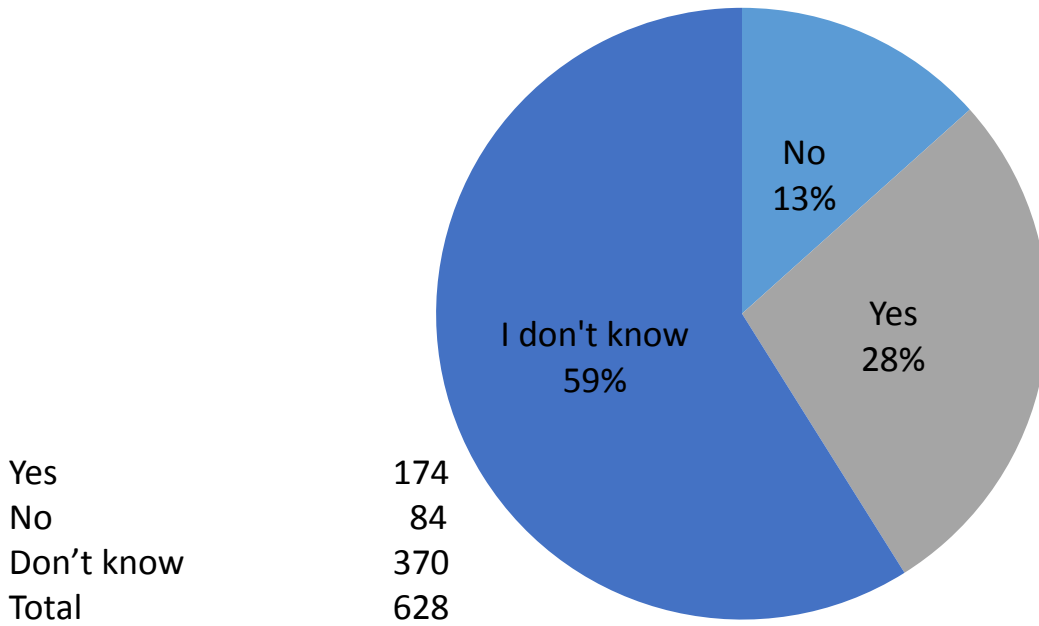
On my UW Timesheet	132
With internal documentation	50
NA (not recorded)	12
Other	11
Total	205*

Are you able to take your earned comp time in accordance with UW policies?



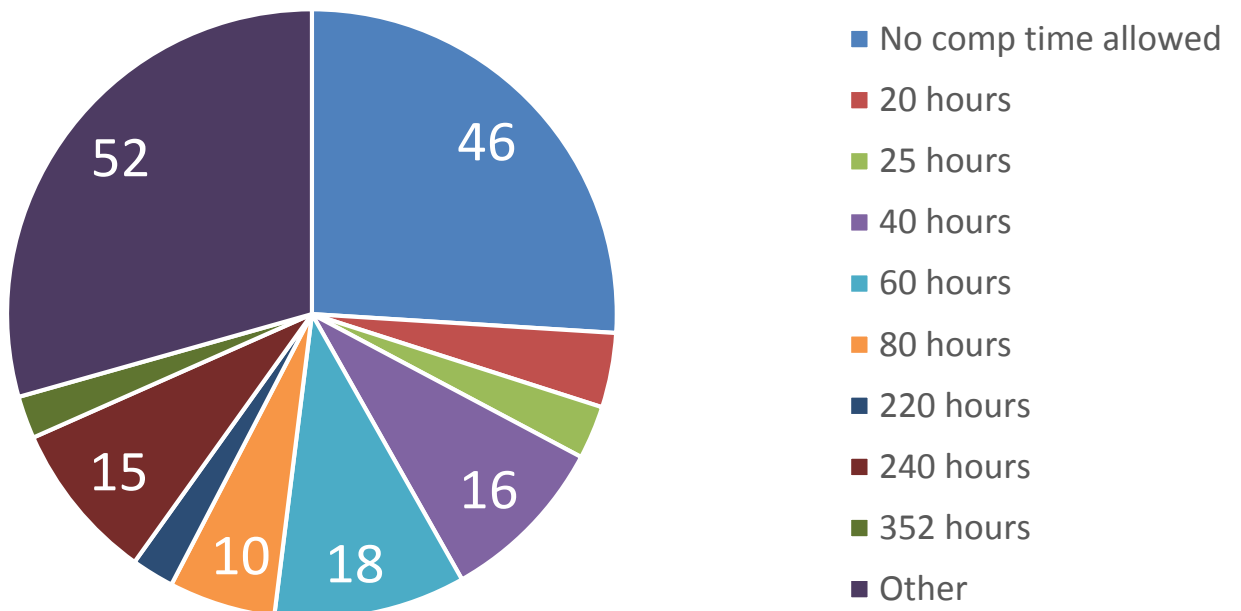
Yes	170
No	25
NA	9
Total	204*

Does your department, college, or division have a limit on how much comp time an employee can earn?

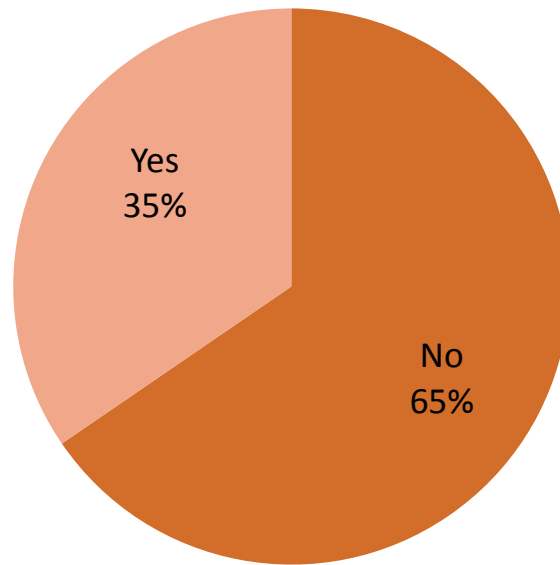


What is the limit for comp time accrual?

174 Responses*

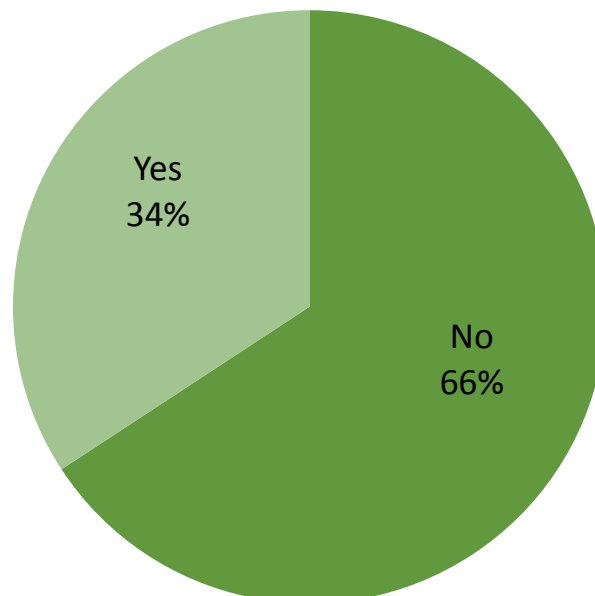


In your current position at the university are you at or near the maximum vacation leave accrual amount (352 hours)?



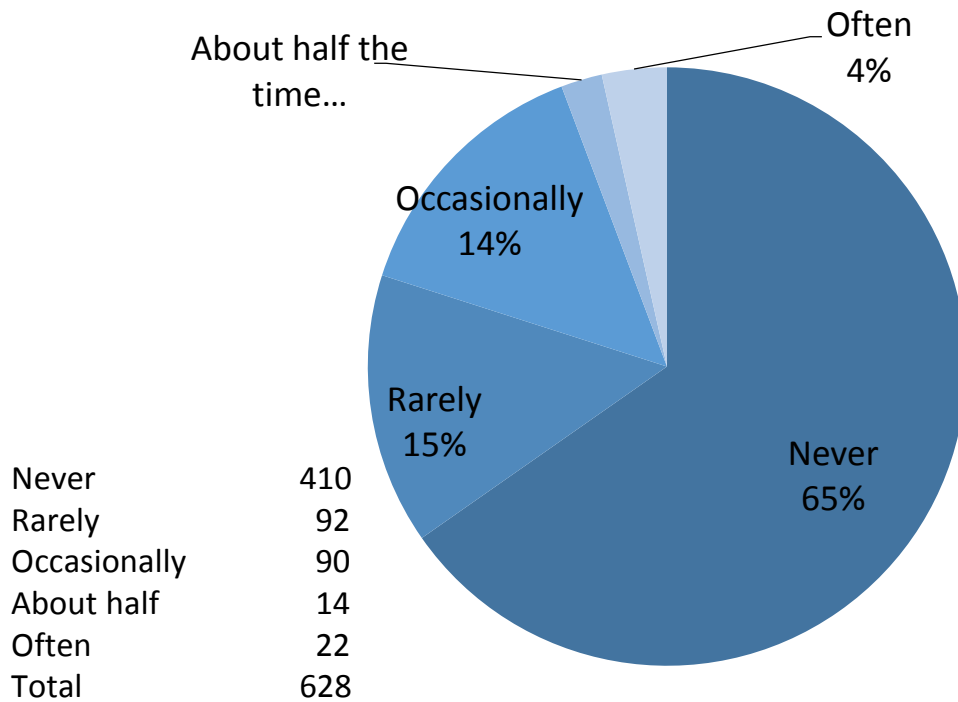
Yes	217
No	411
Total	628

Has there ever been a month when you did not earn vacation leave because of the maximum accrual amount?

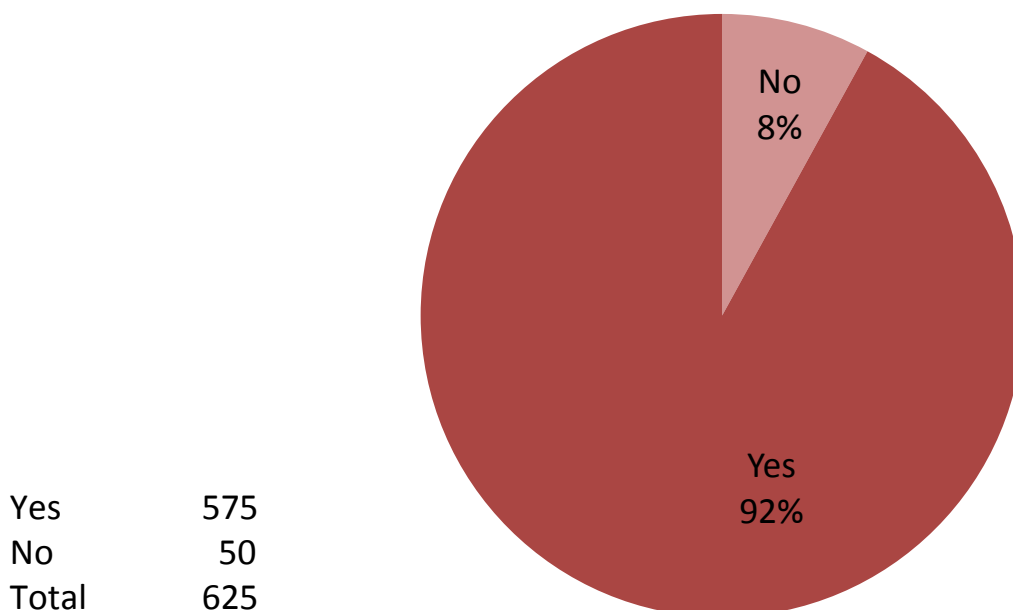


Yes	215
No	413
Total	628

How often have you forfeited vacation leave time because you were at the maximum?

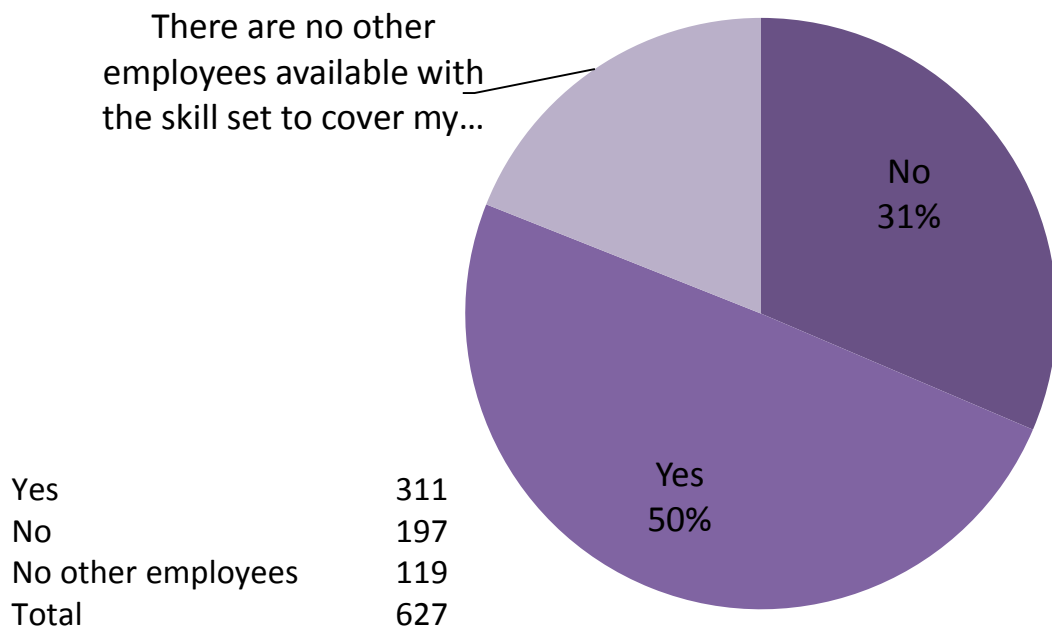


Are you able to take your earned vacation leave in accordance with UW policies? ¹

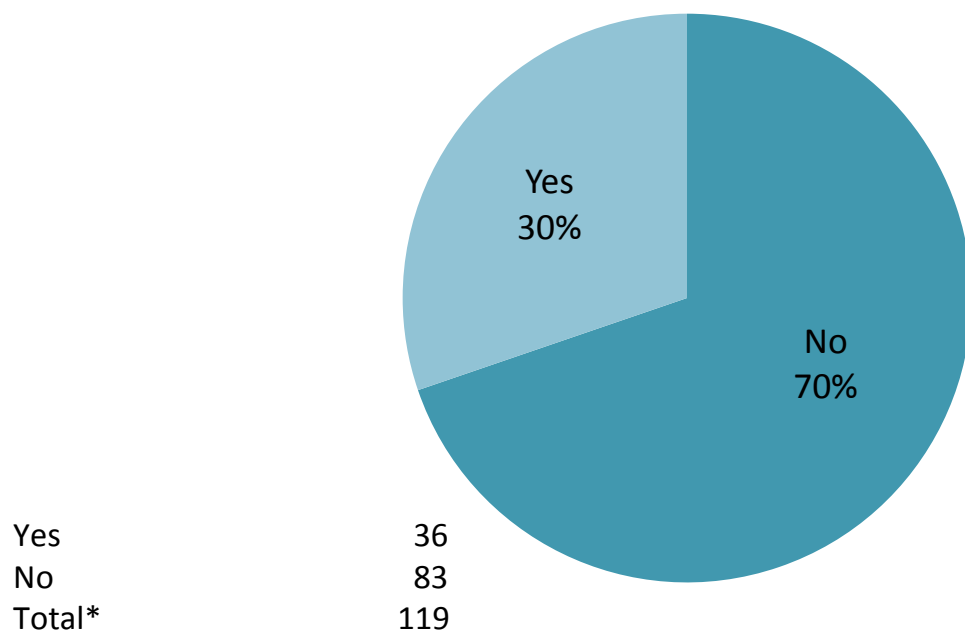


¹A link to the UW Employee Handbook was included with this question.

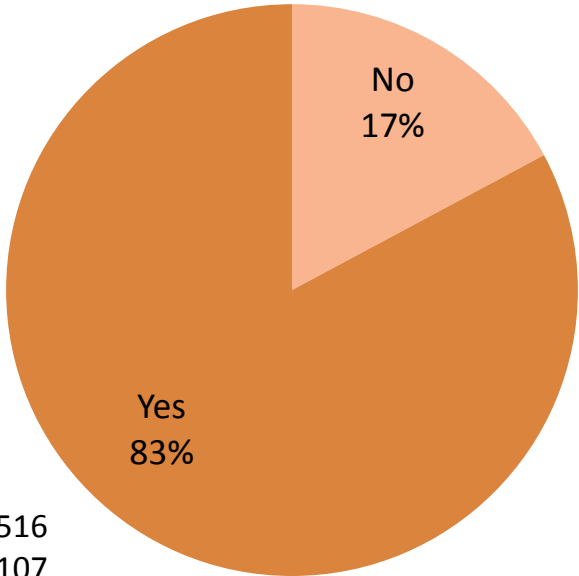
When you take vacation, sick, bereavement, or other leave time, is another employee assigned to cover some or all of your work duties?



Is leave time built into your regular work plan in collaboration with your supervisor?



Do you feel that there's flexibility in when you use your vacation leave or comp time?



Yes	516
No	107
Total	623