

2020 MIT Quality of Life Survey Highlights

I. Introduction

MIT has administered five major quality of life surveys. The first survey of faculty and staff was run by the ad hoc Committee on Work and Family in 1989. The second survey was sponsored by the MIT Council on Family and Work¹ in October of 2001. In 2012, the survey underwent a major revision, including aligning many of the questions with MIT's quadrennial survey of faculty. The 2012 survey was repeated in 2016. The 2016 survey is one of the most used survey datasets administered by Institutional Research.

In 2013 and 2017, a separate survey was administered to all enrolled students at MIT and covered some of the same topics as the faculty and staff survey. In 2020, the two surveys were combined, and for the first time the entire MIT community was surveyed at the same time.

On January 28, 2020, more than 26,000 faculty, staff and students on campus and at Lincoln Laboratory were asked to share their views about MIT. The survey closed on March 11th with an overall response rate of 50%.

Figure 1: Response Rates by Role, Location, and Year

	Main Campus		Lincoln Laboratory	
	2016/2017	2020	2016/2017	2020
Administrative Staff	71%	72%	54%	69%
Faculty	64%	60%	n/a	n/a
Other Instructional Staff	47%	38%	n/a	n/a
Postdoctoral Scholars	40%	43%	n/a	n/a
Research Staff	44%	51%	44%	55%
Service Staff	29%	23%	32%	39%
Support Staff	68%	68%	56%	57%
Undergraduate Students	45%	43%	n/a	n/a
Graduate Students	39%	38%	n/a	n/a

¹ The MIT Council on Family and Work monitors the state of family and work life at MIT and works to ensure MIT is a place where faculty, staff, and students can have fulfilling and productive professional and personal lives. As part of its charge, the council sponsors the MIT Quality of Life Survey, which is administered to students, faculty, other instructional staff, researchers, postdoctoral scholars, administrative staff, support staff, and service staff on MIT's main campus and at Lincoln Laboratory.

The 2020 survey relied heavily on previous quality of life surveys. Because multiple surveys were combined to form this survey, not everyone saw every question. For example, faculty were not asked about extracurricular activities, and postdoctoral scholars were not asked about their experiences with tenure.

Figure 2: Proportion of Questions in 2020 Asked in Prior Years

Of the 288 questions on the 2020 survey:

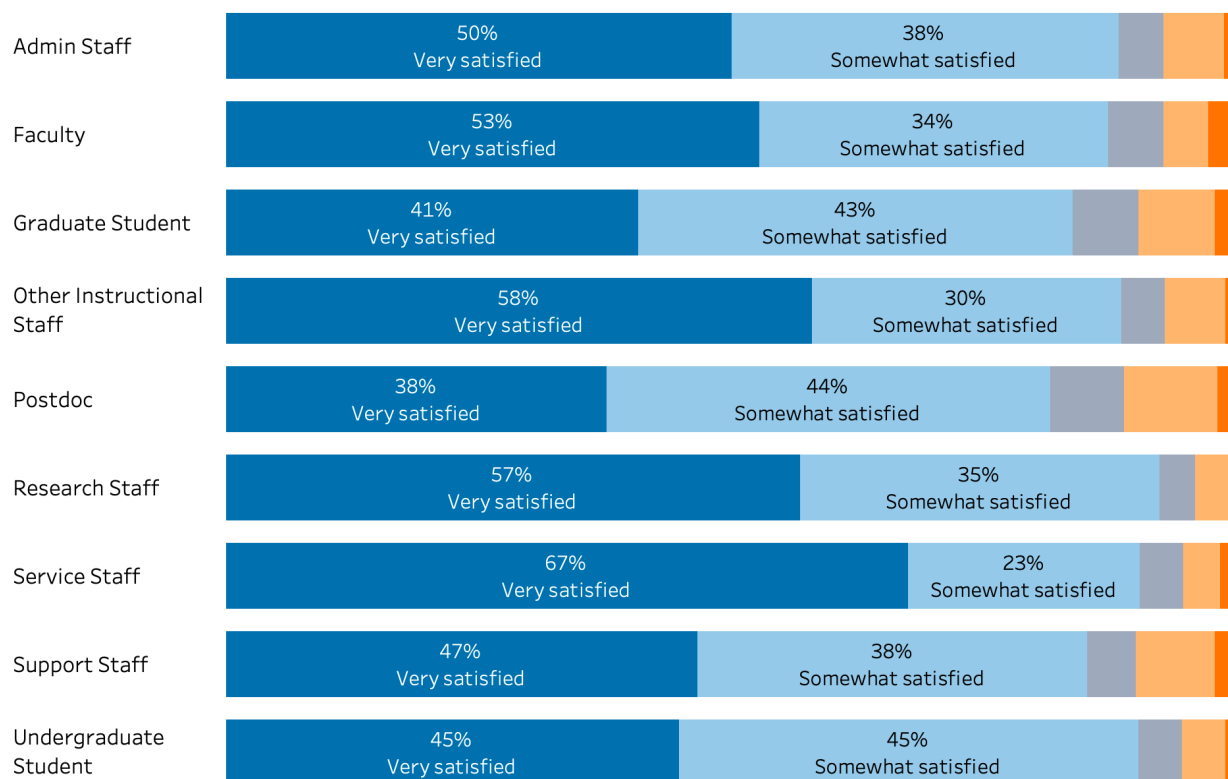
New questions in 2020	17%
Questions in all surveys 2012-2020	5%
Questions in all three student surveys	23%
Questions in all three faculty/staff surveys	20%
Questions repeated in a mix of years (mostly most recent two)	35%
Total number of questions	288

As with all surveys run by Institutional Research, the survey data are treated as confidential, and the results are not presented in a way that identifies individual respondents.

In this document we will briefly highlight some of the results in six areas: Satisfaction, Workload, Climate, Isolation and Stress, Health and Wellness, and Ethics. In general, respondents reported being satisfied at MIT, working hard to succeed in their studies and jobs, and sometimes finding it difficult to manage all they have to do.

II. Satisfaction

The first question on the survey asked everyone about their satisfaction in their particular role (e.g., faculty, staff, student) at MIT. Overall, 87% of respondents reported being “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied.” The percentages varied by role and location. On average, Lincoln Laboratory staff reported higher levels of satisfaction than main campus staff. Among students, undergraduate students reported higher levels of satisfaction than graduate students.

Figure 3: Overall, how satisfied are you in your role at MIT?

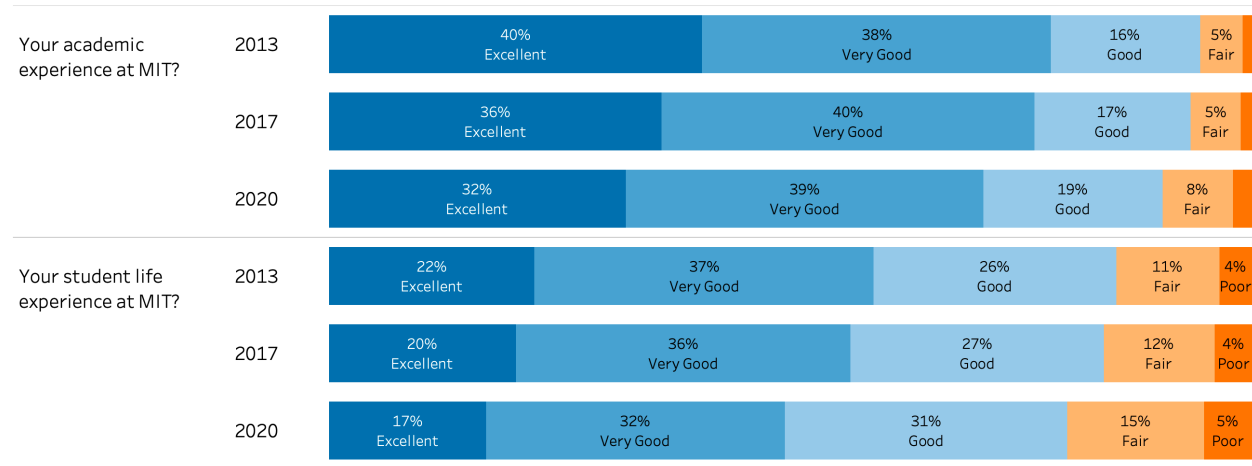
Over time, overall satisfaction has dropped for students and main campus faculty and staff. Faculty satisfaction (percent somewhat or very satisfied) was 92% in 2012, 93% in 2016, and 87% in 2020. Similarly, for on-campus staff, the figures were 90% in 2012 and 2016 and 86% in 2020. At Lincoln Laboratory, overall satisfaction was in the low 90s each of the three years.

Students showed a marked decrease among those who answered “very satisfied;” 51-52% of students said they were very satisfied in 2013 and 2017, compared to 42% in 2020.

This is reflected in their ratings of the quality of their academic and student life experience. In 2013, 78% of students reported that their academic experience was excellent or very good. 59% said their student life experience was excellent or very good. In 2020, those percentages declined to 71% for academic experience and 49% for student life experience.

Figure 4: Quality of Academic and Student Life Experience

Overall, how would you rate the quality of:

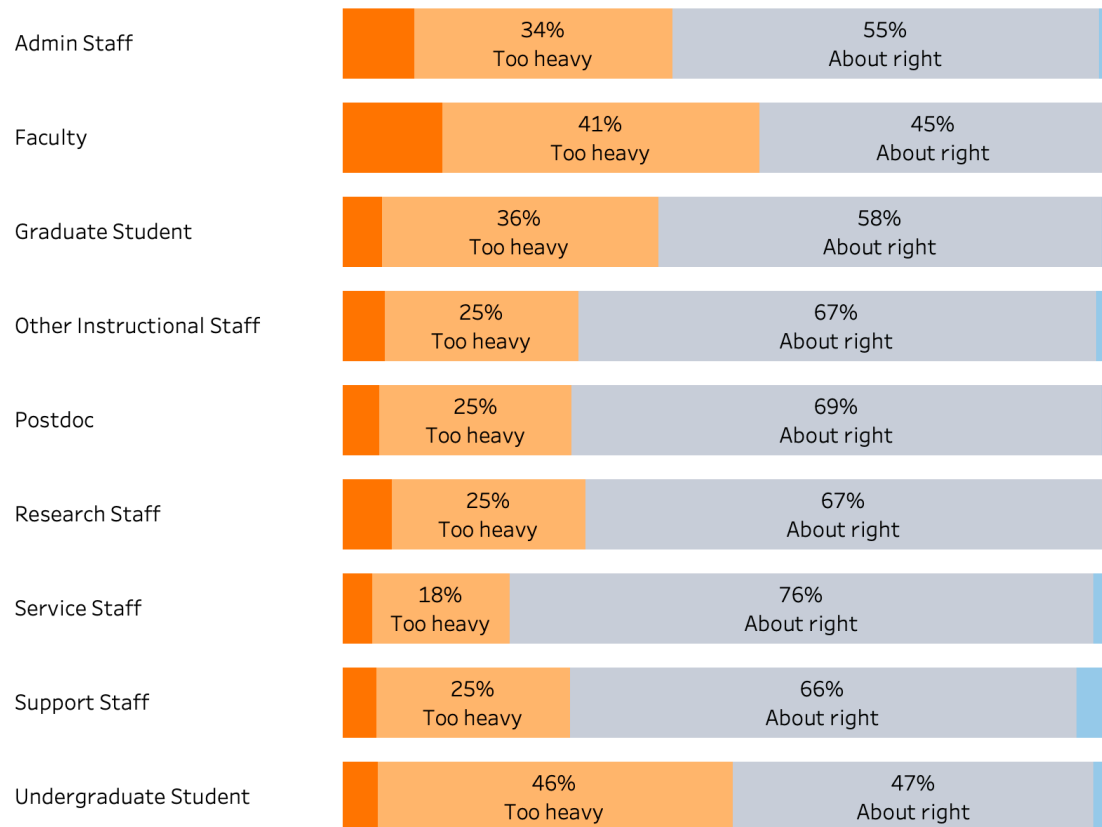


Another item on the survey asked about the balance between life inside and outside MIT. 79% or more of administrative, support, service, research, and other instructional staff said they were somewhat or very satisfied with their ability to integrate the needs of their work with their personal/family life. Faculty and postdoctoral scholars reported lower levels of satisfaction on this measure (69% and 66%, respectively). Across all groups, the results looked similar over time.

Students were asked a similar question on the survey: “How satisfied are you with your ability to balance academics and other aspects of your life?” 62% of students answered somewhat or very satisfied, down from 67% in 2017.

III. Workload

To further explore workload balance issues, the survey asked respondents to rate their workload at MIT. Very few respondents reported that their workload was too light or much too light. The percentage who reported their workload to be about right ranged from 82% of service staff to 45% of the faculty. A higher percentage of undergraduate students (51%) said their academic and research workload was too heavy or much too heavy compared to graduate students (41%).

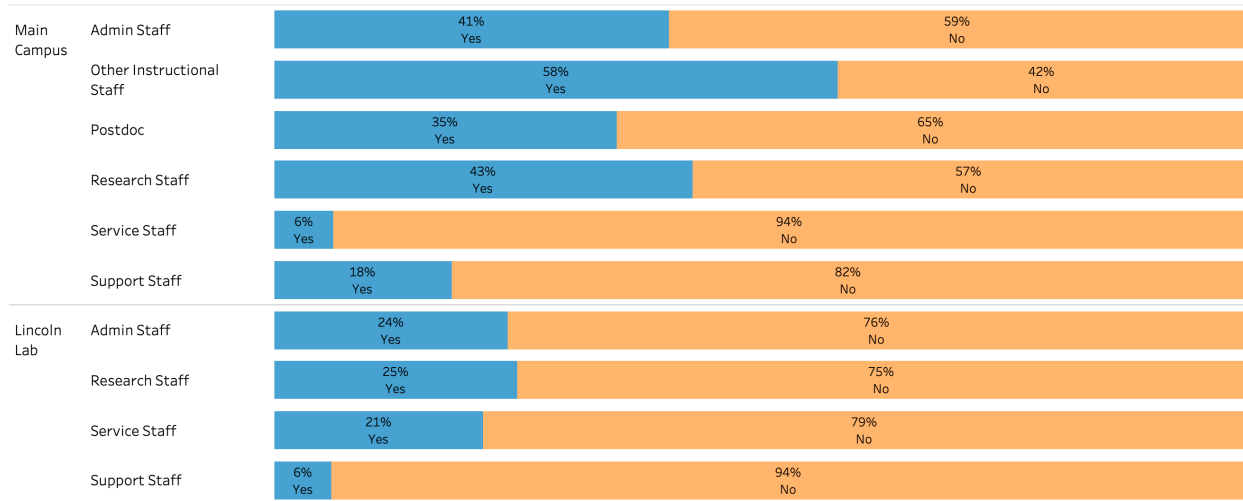
Figure 5: Overall, how would you rate your workload?

For main campus and Lincoln Laboratory staff, the survey asked a series of questions about work arrangements, including how much freedom employees had regarding their work schedule. A sizable percentage of respondents said they had the choice to work some portion of their time from home or another location; 51% of administrative staff, 63% of other instructional staff, 60% of postdoctoral scholars, and 54% of research staff answered “very much” or “a moderate amount.” Having the choice to work remotely, however, was less possible for support staff at 31% or service staff at 20%.

MIT staff were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with this statement: I am expected to be accessible (through email, phone, pager, etc.) outside of normal work hours. More than half of other instructional staff, postdoctoral scholars, and administrative staff somewhat or strongly agreed.

The survey included a question about whether or not employees worked off-site during regular work hours. The results varied widely by location and role. In general, a smaller percentage of Lincoln Laboratory staff reported working remotely than main campus staff. More than 40% of main campus other instructional staff, research staff, and administrative staff said they worked remotely, compared to just 6% of service staff.

Figure 6: Do you work off-site during regularly scheduled work hours?



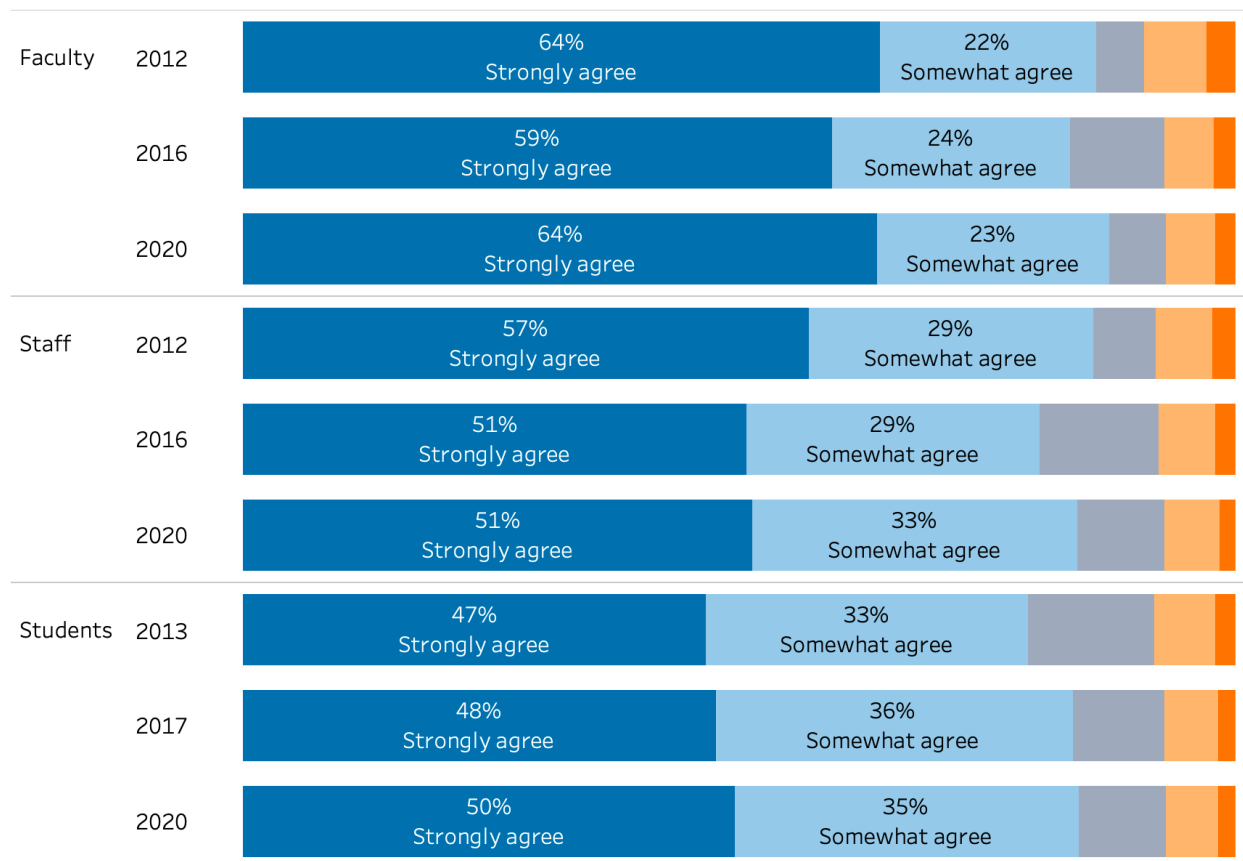
Finally, faculty and staff were asked if they had the resources (equipment, training, budget, etc.) they needed to do their job well. At Lincoln Laboratory, the responses to this question looked roughly the same by employee type; 79-83% at Lincoln said they somewhat or strongly agreed. There was more variation among main campus employees, ranging from 69% agreement (service staff) to 83% agreement (postdoctoral scholars).

IV. Climate

Another goal of the survey was to gain perspectives on the general climate at MIT, as well as the climate in departments, labs, centers, and other units. The survey had a number of questions about department/unit climate, among them one that asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with: My department/unit is a good fit for me. 78-87% (depending on student level and employee type) said they somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement.

Unlike the overall satisfaction measure, which experienced noticeable drops over time in some areas, the good fit question looks relatively stable.

Figure 7: My primary unit/major is a good fit for me



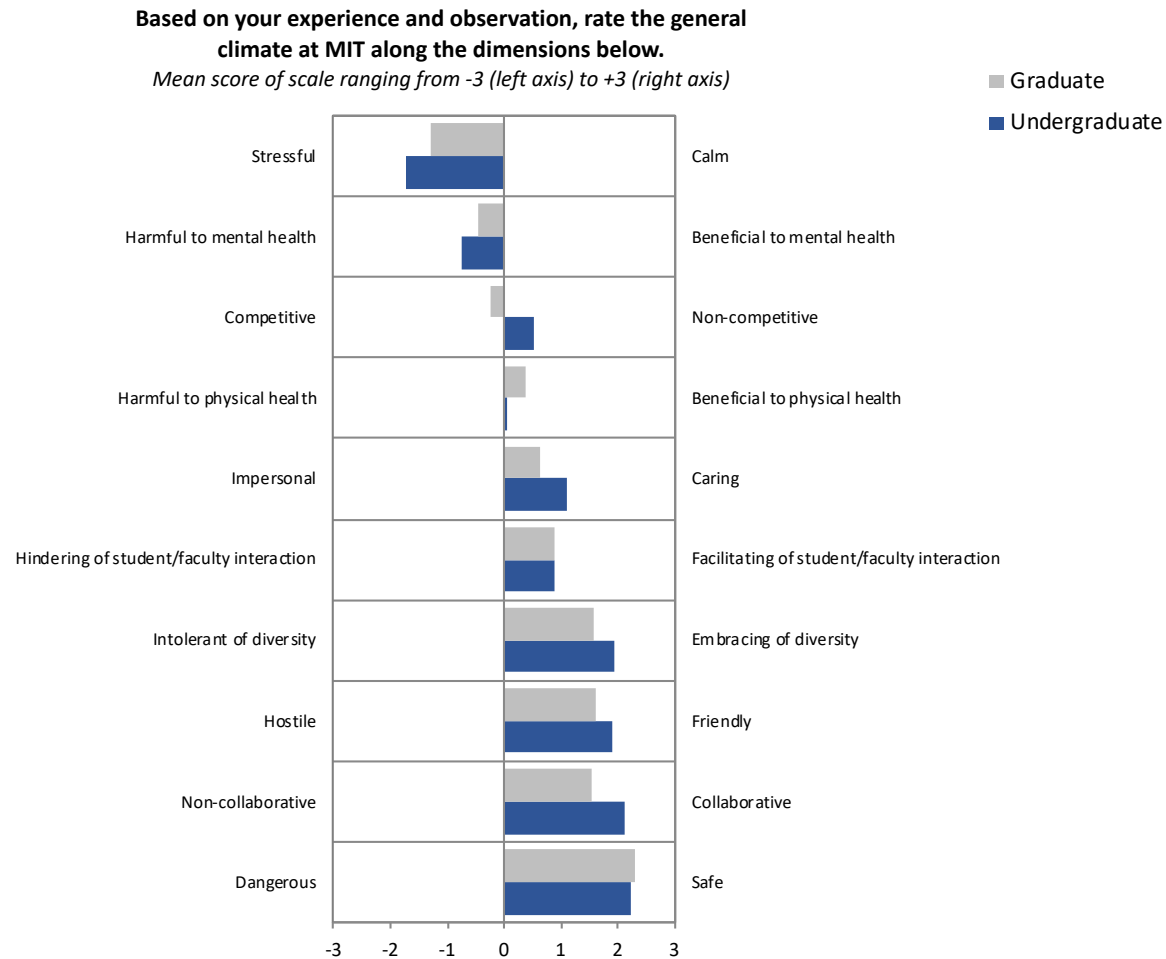
Below are additional items asked of faculty and staff in this section of the survey. The figure next to each statement is the percent who answered “Somewhat agree” or “Strongly agree.”

- In my workplace everyone is treated with respect (76%)
- My unit’s procedures are fair and equitable (70%)
- I have a voice in the decision-making that affects the direction of my unit (62%)
- I can navigate the unwritten rules concerning how I should conduct myself in my position at MIT (80%)
- My workplace is free from bias and discrimination (66%)

From a list of 10 different dimensions, students were asked to rate the general climate at MIT using a six-point scale. At one end of the scale was one word (e.g., Dangerous), and at the other end was another word (e.g., Safe). The figure on the next page shows the mean score for each word pairing, separately for undergraduate students and graduate students.

For the word pairing Stressful: Calm, many more students selected “Stressful” than “Calm.” Graduate students, on average, rated MIT’s environment as more competitive than undergraduate students. Conversely, undergraduate students rated MIT as more collaborative than graduate students. Both undergraduate and graduate students rated MIT’s environment as more harmful to mental health than helpful.

Figure 8: Student Rating of General Climate at MIT



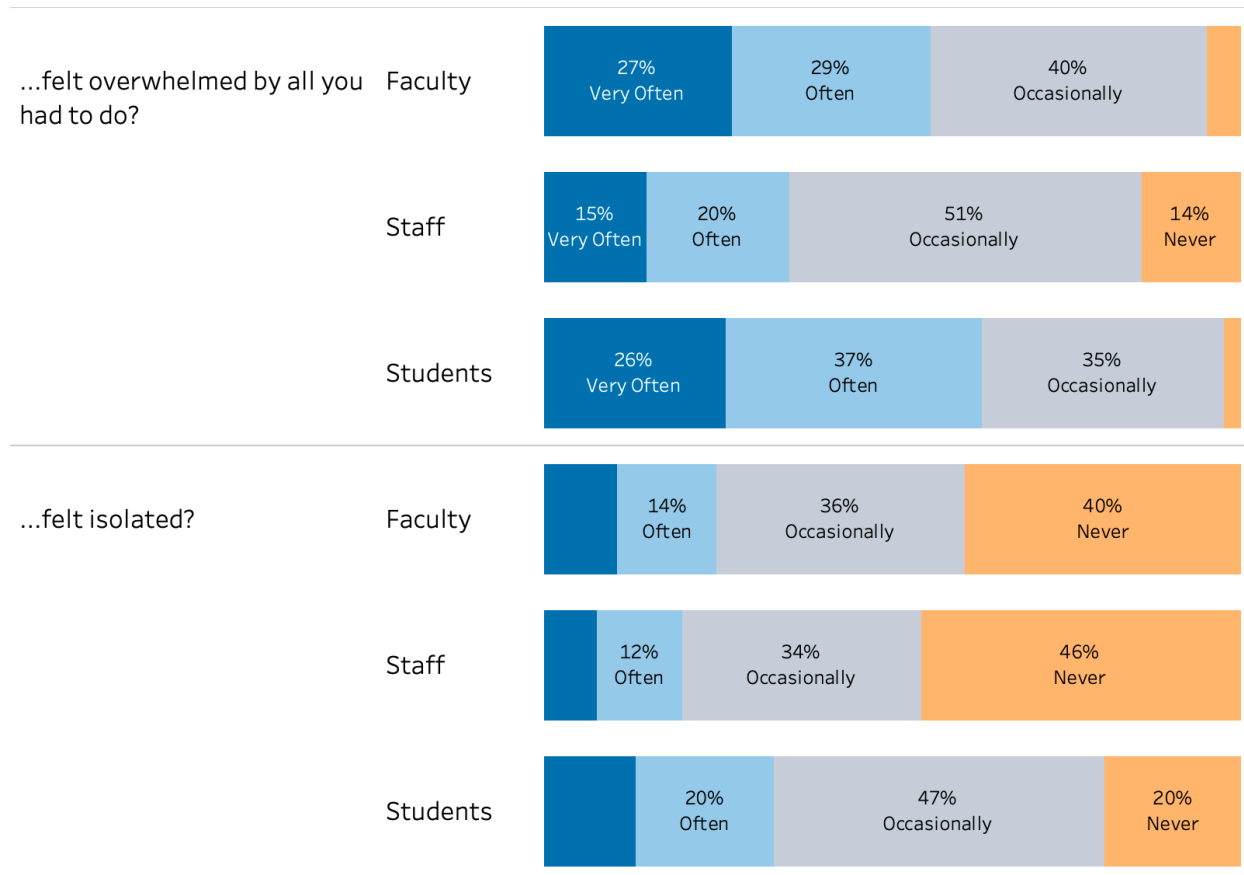
V. Feeling Overwhelmed & Isolated

Another section of the survey focused on potential sources of stress and the frequency of feeling overwhelmed and isolated. When asked how often they felt overwhelmed by all they had to do, more than half of students (65% of undergraduates, 60% of graduate students) and faculty (56%) said “Often” or “Very often.” Staff reported a lower percentage at 35% overall, ranging from 40% of postdoctoral scholars to 13% of service staff.

On average, a lower percentage of respondents reported feeling isolated than feeling overwhelmed. A third of students said they often or very often felt isolated, compared to a quarter of faculty and 19% of staff.

Figure 9: Feeling Overwhelmed & Isolated

How often have you...



The survey included a bank of questions asking respondents to rate potential sources of stress during the current year. [Note: while some of the stress items were asked of all students, faculty and staff, some items were unique to role and location, e.g., scholarly productivity was only asked of faculty, other instructional staff, main campus research staff, and postdoctoral scholars.] For each potential source of stress, the 4-point scale ranged from “not a source of stress” to “very stressful.” Below is list of the top three sources of stress for a sample of groups at MIT as measured by the percentage who answered very or moderately stressful.

- Faculty: Lack of time to think and reflect (57%), Scholarly productivity (56%), and Securing funding for research (54%).
- Postdoctoral scholars: Securing my next professional position (73%), Scholarly productivity (71%), and Cost of housing (67%).

- Staff at Lincoln Laboratory: Commuting to Lincoln Laboratory (34%), Managing household responsibilities (32%), and Cost of housing (25%).
- Students: Balancing multiple commitments (70%), Expectation to perform as well as my peers (58%), and Concerns about life after MIT (50%).

VI. Health and Wellness

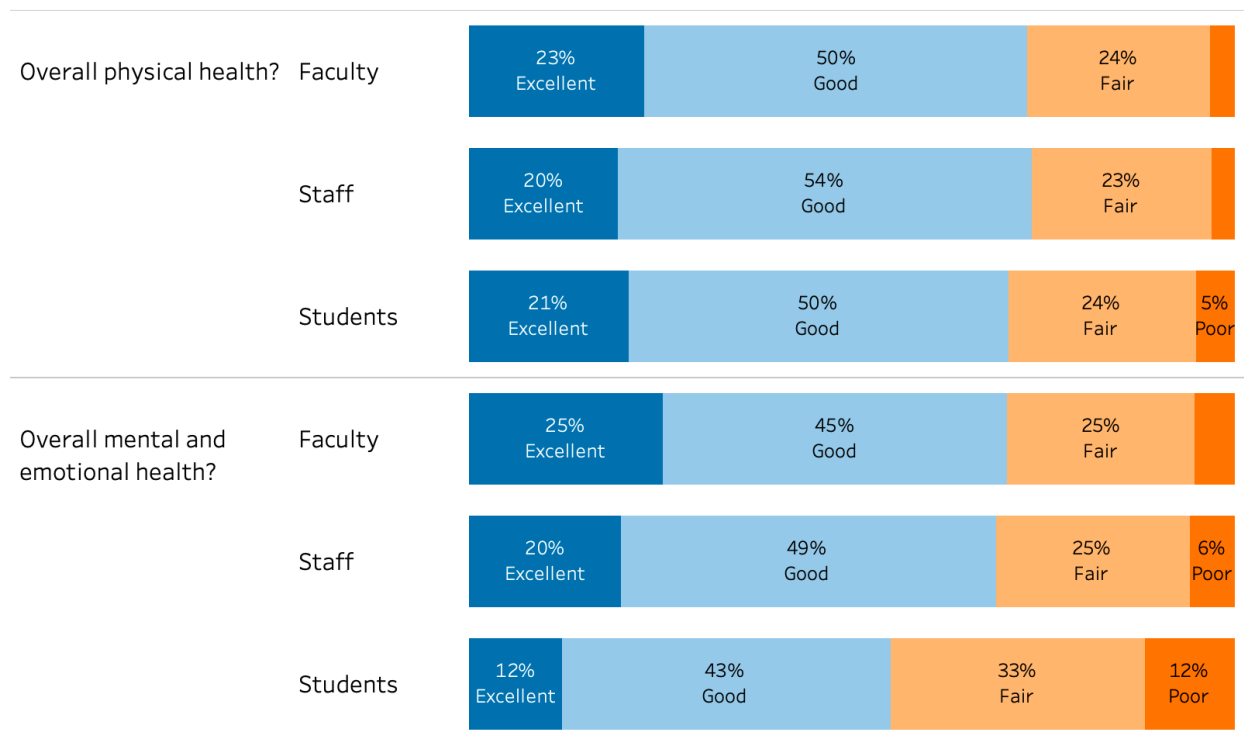
Another important component of the survey looked at health and well-being issues, including questions about sleep habits and physical and emotional health.

When asked on how many of the past 7 days students got enough sleep so that they felt rested when they woke up, 20% said fewer than three days per week (22% for undergraduate students and 18% for graduate students). A higher percentage (32%) of faculty and staff said the same.

71% of students described their overall physical health as good or excellent, similar to the rate for faculty (73%) and staff (74%). Most groups rated their physical health higher than their mental and emotional health. The gap between ratings for physical health and mental/emotional health was higher for students (16 percentage points) than for faculty and staff (5 percentage points).

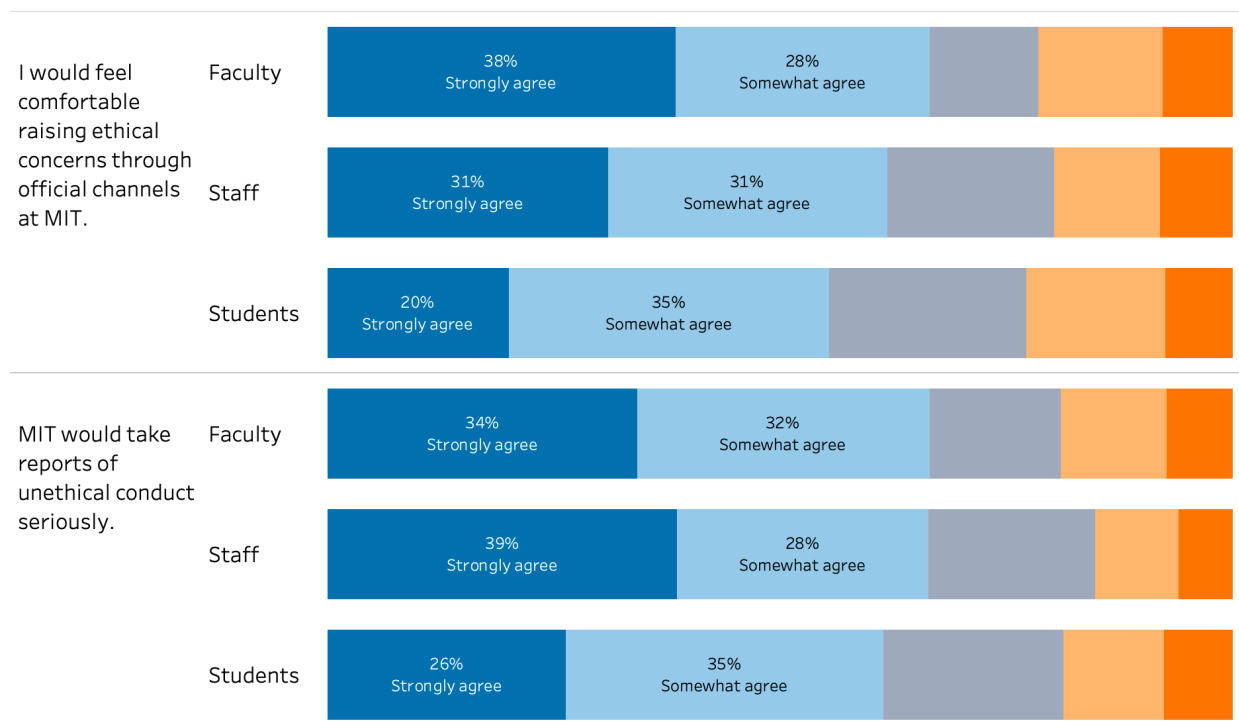
Figure 10: Physical & Mental/Emotional Health

How you would you describe your...



VII. Ethical Concerns

For the first time, the 2020 survey included two questions about raising ethical concerns. 66% of faculty somewhat or strongly agreed that they would feel comfortable raising ethical concerns through official channels at MIT and that MIT would take reports of unethical conduct seriously. For on-campus staff, these percentages were 57% and 62%, respectively. Students reported similar figures at 55% and 61%. For Lincoln Laboratory staff, the percentages were much higher at 73% and 79%.

Figure 11: Raising Ethical Concerns

VIII. Open-Ended Questions

The survey included several opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to provide open text comments. At the end of the survey were two questions:

1. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most positive aspects of the current MIT environment for you.
2. Please use a few words to describe the one or two most negative aspects of the current MIT environment for you.

After a preliminary analysis of the comments, some themes have emerged. Many Institute employees shared that they valued their colleagues highly. They also stated that although the benefits provided by the Institute were generous, pay rates were lacking. In addition, they expressed frustration with policies and procedures regarding promotion, saying the path to upward mobility was unclear. Lastly, a number of Institute employees in all roles stated that their commute and parking were a source of dissatisfaction.

Student respondents shared different concerns. Stress and academic pressure were a notable source of dissatisfaction. Some student respondents shared that the MIT community was open and welcoming. At the same time, there were also students who shared feelings of isolation. These themes are not comprehensive and represent only part of an ongoing analysis of the open text responses.

VIX. Next Steps

Over the next year, the Council on Family and Work will be focused on analyzing the results in a number of ways. There are several major themes that will be explored, including satisfaction, climate, health and wellness, diversity and inclusion, and ethics. Additionally, the results will be explored based on several discrete populations: faculty, other instructional staff, postdoctoral scholars, administrative and support staff, research staff, service staff, as well as undergraduate and graduate students. Some of this analysis will be done by the Council and some will be done in conjunction with representatives of these populations. The results will be made available to the various diversity committees on campus as well as the academic school-based gender equity committees. A substantial amount of analysis will be done in collaboration with individual academic and administrative units.