

# Salaries & Status of Sustainability Professionals in Higher Education 2020



Results of AASHE's 2020 Higher Education  
Sustainability Staffing Survey



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On the cover: Over 40 higher education sustainability professionals gathered at the Pendle Hill Retreat Center near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to participate in AASHE's 2017 Sustainability Professionals Retreat.

# Introduction

Every two to three years since 2008, AASHE has conducted a survey of sustainability professionals employed in higher education. These surveys collect information from sustainability staff as well as more specialized positions such as recycling & waste staff and energy management staff. This report presents the results of the 2020 Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey and serves as an update to our 2017 report. It examines the nature of sustainability positions at colleges and universities in the United States, Canada and other countries, providing insights into salaries, funding, supervision, job satisfaction, challenges and more.

## Timeframe

The survey on which this report is based closed on February 14, 2020. As a result, the findings capture the higher education sustainability sector on the eve of a global pandemic that closed many campuses and triggered a major economic downturn. Since then, the financial outlooks for many institutions have changed dramatically. There is no doubt that the impacts are being felt within the higher education sustainability community too, in ways that almost certainly would have impacted responses to some survey questions. Similarly, the survey closed just before a rise in widespread, global protests calling for an end to police brutality and systemic racism. The work that higher education sustainability professionals are doing to advance equity and social justice (see [page 36](#)) may have changed in response to these events.

The results of this survey may not fully represent the current circumstances of higher education sustainability staff given recent events. Nevertheless, the results are useful in understanding how the field has evolved over time and in providing a baseline for determining how a global pandemic and widespread calls for racial equity impact the profession moving forward. Sampling & Data

## Sampling

Survey respondents were largely based in the U.S. and Canada, so findings in this report provide a comprehensive view of higher education sustainability positions in these countries. Nonetheless, we cannot definitively claim to have captured representative samples for any position type. Sampling may also account for differences between years.

## Data

For readability, graph data labels were rounded to the nearest percent throughout this report, even though bar values are not rounded. As a result, two values both labeled as "4%" may have slightly different bar widths.

# Sustainability Position Types

AASHE disseminated and publicized a 50-question survey for a four-week period in January and February 2020. Responses from 517 individuals were collected, and 475 of them were included for analysis in this report. Responses increased slightly since the last survey - in 2017, 503 total responses were collected, with 452 included for analysis. Consistent with previous years, partially completed responses and respondents working in sustainability less than 25% of the time were excluded from results.

Respondents were grouped into position types based on their titles and other data provided in the survey. The seven position types listed below had sufficient respondents to track and analyze as cohorts. Representing 89% of all survey respondents, these position types are used throughout this report as filters for data views where relevant.

## Position Types for all Survey Respondents

Position Type	Count	Percent
Sustainability Coordinator, Specialist, Analyst or similar	130	27.4%
Sustainability Director, Chief Sustainability Officer, Executive Director or similar	108	22.7%
Sustainability Manager or similar	89	18.7%
Assistant or Associate Sustainability Director or similar	34	7.2%
Curriculum Development & Academic staff	27	5.7%
Recycling & waste staff	21	4.4%
Energy management staff	16	3.4%
All other staff	50	10.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>100%</b>

Relative to our 2017 survey, there was an increase in academic staff respondents with an administrative role in sustainability, so a dedicated group for such respondents has been included as a filter in data views for the first time. The amount and proportion of Sustainability Coordinators, Managers and Directors align with past years' surveys and reports.

The All other staff category includes a variety of respondents whose roles and responsibilities did not allow them to be grouped with enough respondents to be analyzed as a distinct cohort. The 50 respondents in this category had positions focused on dining services, environmental health & safety, equity & social justice, marketing & communications, non-energy physical plant management, transportation and administrative support. Student sustainability workers are also included in this category.



# Respondent Demographics



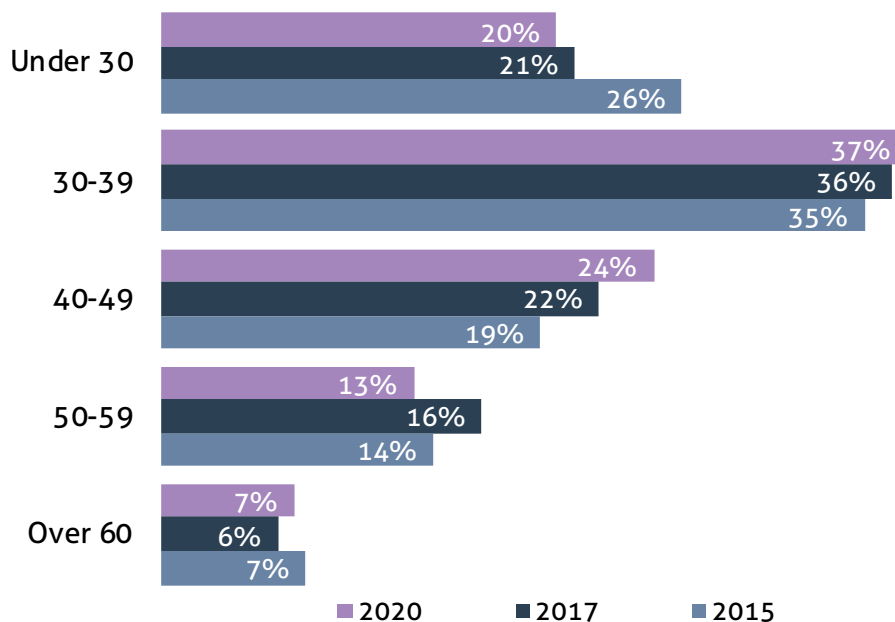
A breakout group of higher education sustainability professionals work together on a group activity during the 2017 Sustainability Professionals Retreat at the Pendle Hill Retreat Center near Philadelphia, PA.

# Age

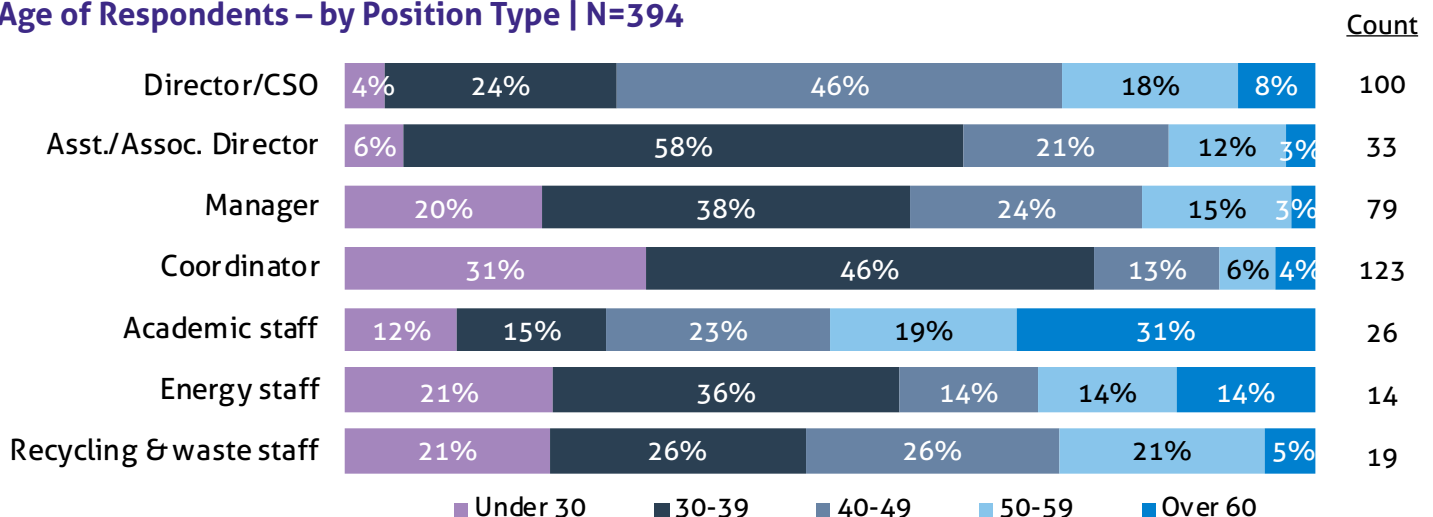
The majority of survey respondents (57%) were under age 40. About seven percent of respondents were 60 years of age or older. The amount of respondents aged 30-49 increased in 2020 as compared to previous years, while the amount of respondents under 30 was lower in 2020. This highlights the continued maturation of the field, a trend also noted in the 2017 report.

Of the various position types, Sustainability Directors had the lowest proportion of respondents under age 30 (4%), while Sustainability Coordinator positions had the highest proportion under age 30 (31%). The academic staff position had the highest proportion of respondents that were 50 and older.

## Age of Respondents | N = 439



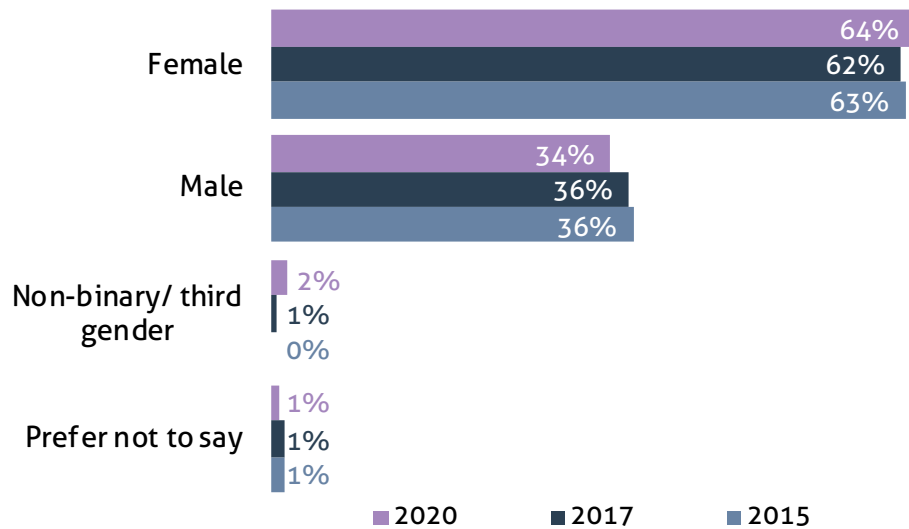
## Age of Respondents – by Position Type | N=394



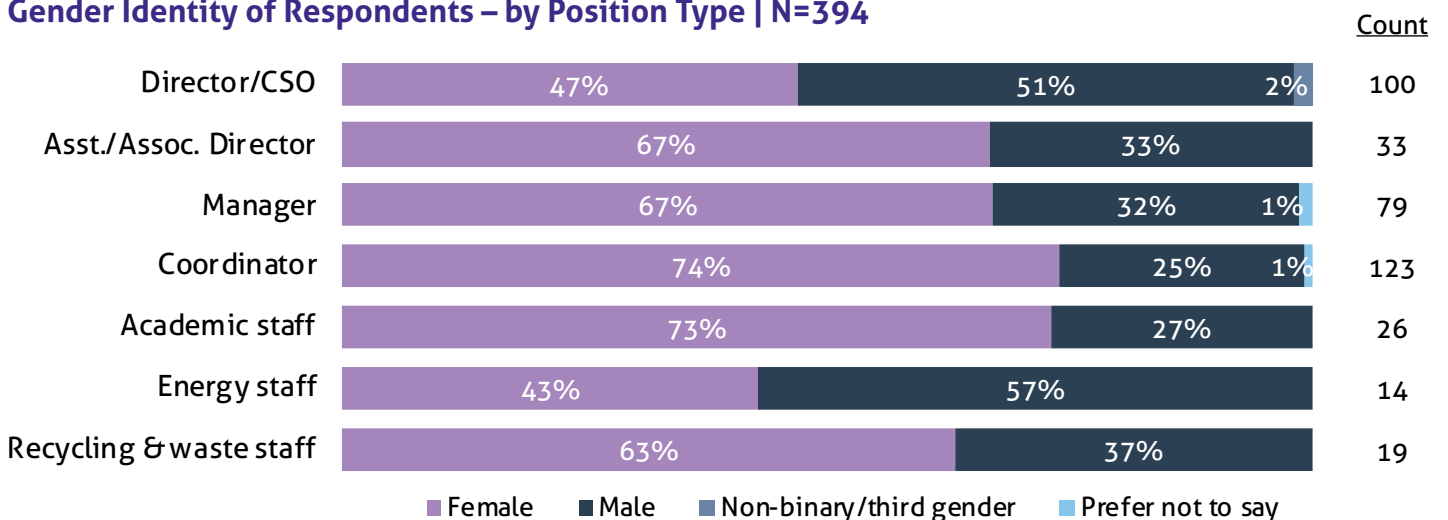
# Gender Identity

While almost two thirds of all respondents (64%) identified as female, the Sustainability Director and energy management staff position types skewed male. Comparing this year's results to those from previous years suggests the profession as a whole is becoming increasingly female over time. The number of respondents identifying as non-binary or third gender also increased from 2017 to 2020.

## Gender Identity of Respondents | N=439



## Gender Identity of Respondents – by Position Type | N=394



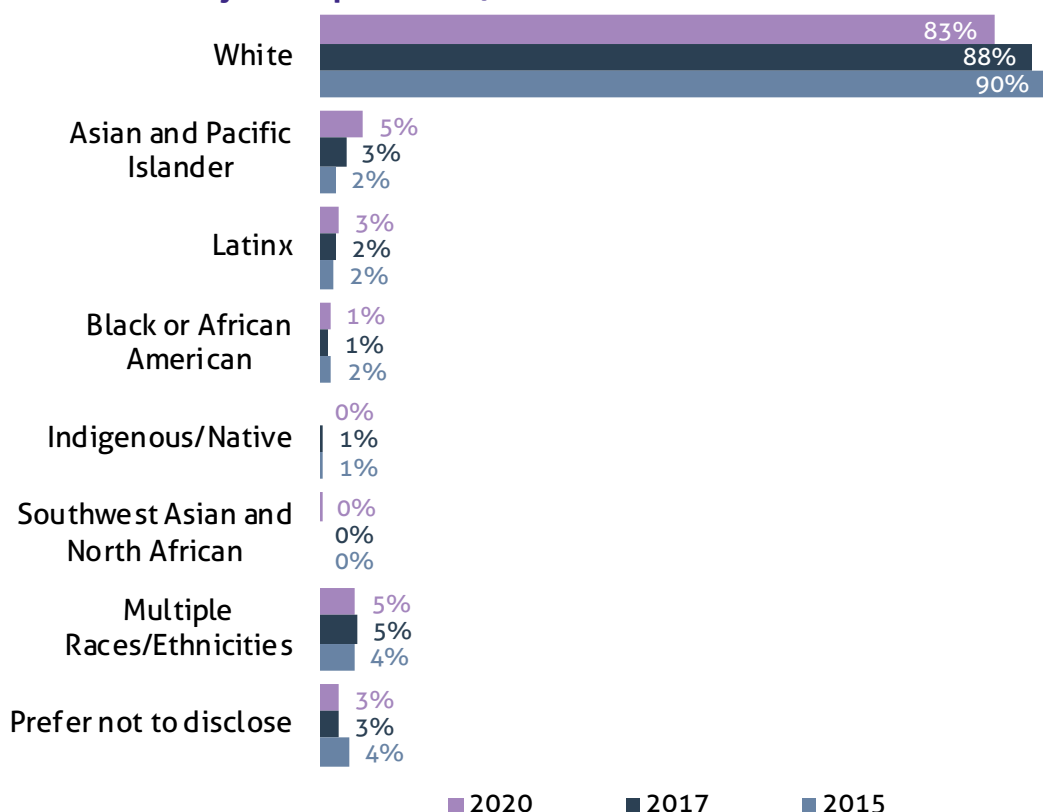
# Race & Ethnicity



The UC Santa Cruz Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program (DICP) educates staff, faculty, and graduate students on how to build a stronger and more inclusive UC Santa Cruz community.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) identified as “White” in 2020. This number is gradually shrinking (from 88% in 2017 and 90% in 2015). There was a notable increase in responses from respondents that identified as “Asian and Pacific Islander” compared to past years. Although there is indication that higher education sustainability positions are becoming more diverse, these figures show that higher education sustainability is still largely white. In reviewing identities based on position type, the academic staff position type was found to be most diverse, with 27% of respondents identifying as something other than “White” or referenced multiple races/ethnicities. The Sustainability Director position type was found to be least diverse, with 91% of respondents identifying as “White”.

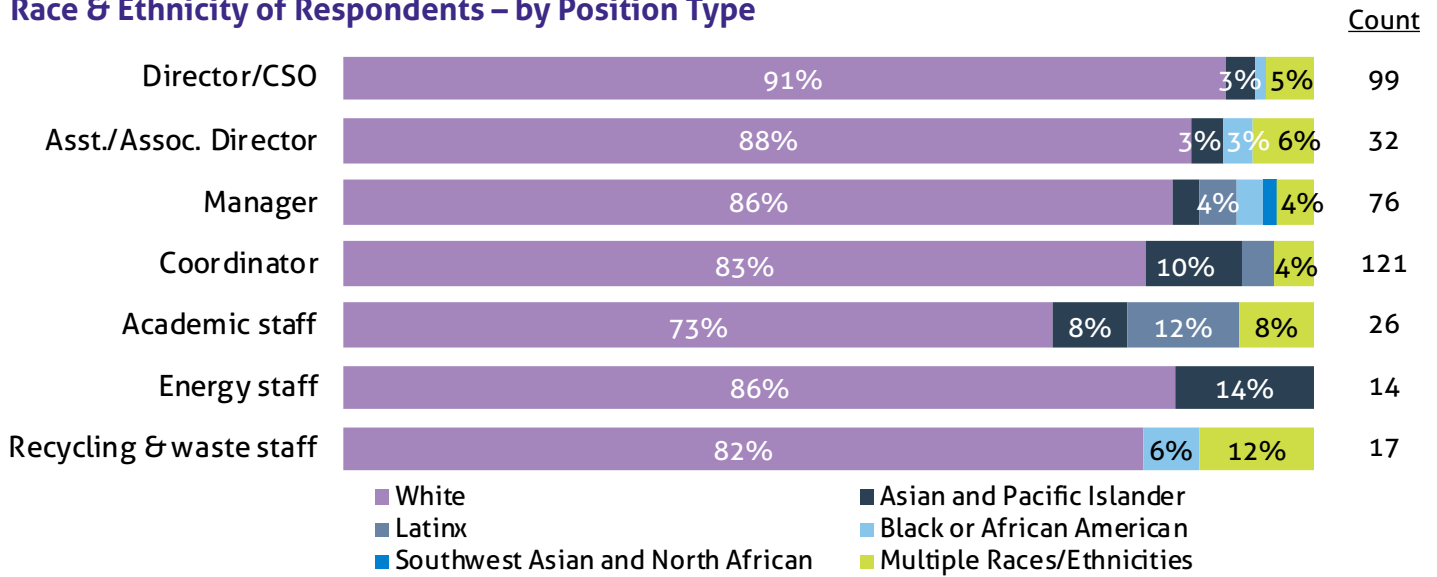
## Race & Ethnicity of Respondents | N = 439





# Race & Ethnicity

## Race & Ethnicity of Respondents – by Position Type



University of Calgary faculty, students, staff and community members join UCalgary for ii' taa'poh'to'p's 2018 progress event. Photo credit: Riley Brandt

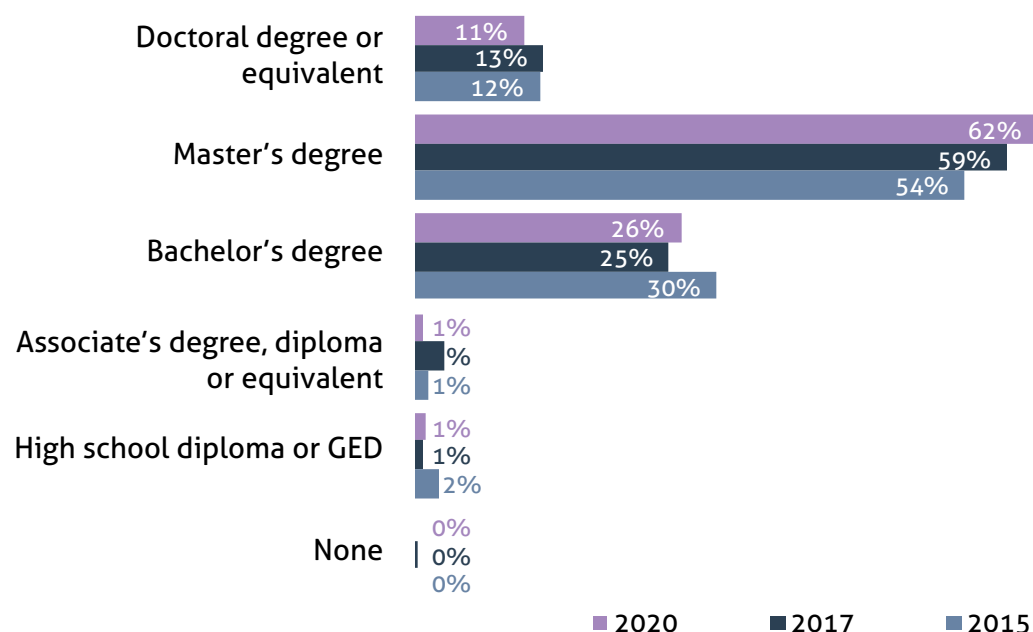


# Education Level

A Master's degree appears to be increasingly integral for sustainability professionals in higher education. Ninety-eight percent of respondents held at least a Bachelor's degree and 72% held at least a Master's degree. This was a notable increase in Master's degrees held by sustainability staff in 2020 in comparison to 2017 and 2015.

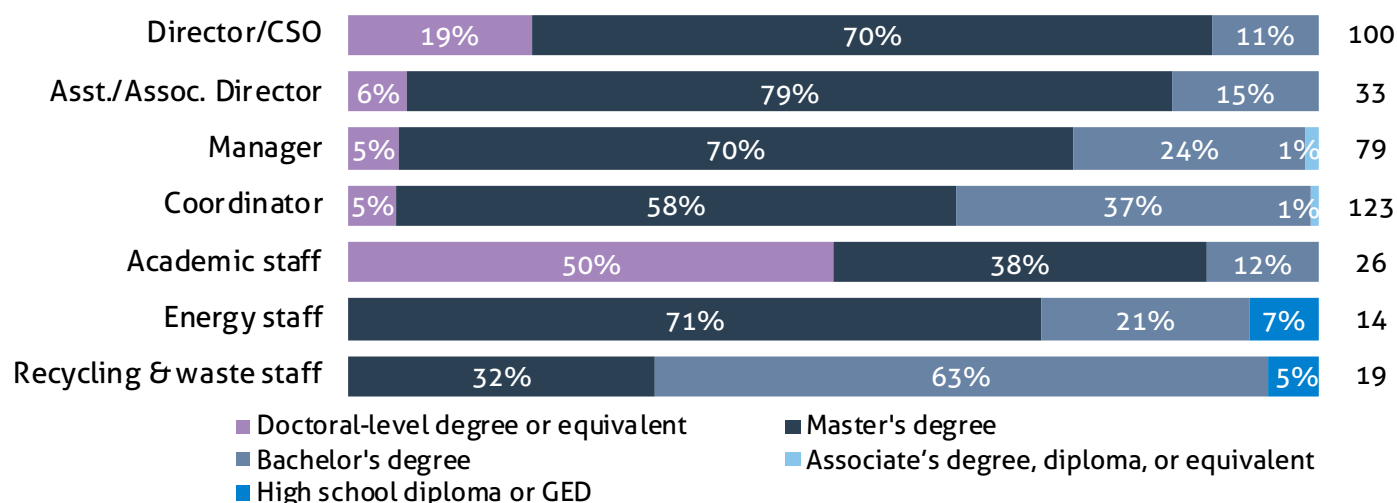
By position type, academic staff had the highest percentage of respondents with Doctoral degrees (50%). Sustainability Directors had the highest percentage of respondents with Master's degrees or higher (89%). Sustainability Coordinators and recycling & waste staff had lower percentages of respondents with Master's degrees or higher (all 58% or lower).

## Highest Level of Education Completed | N=439



## Highest Level of Education Completed – By Position Type | N=394

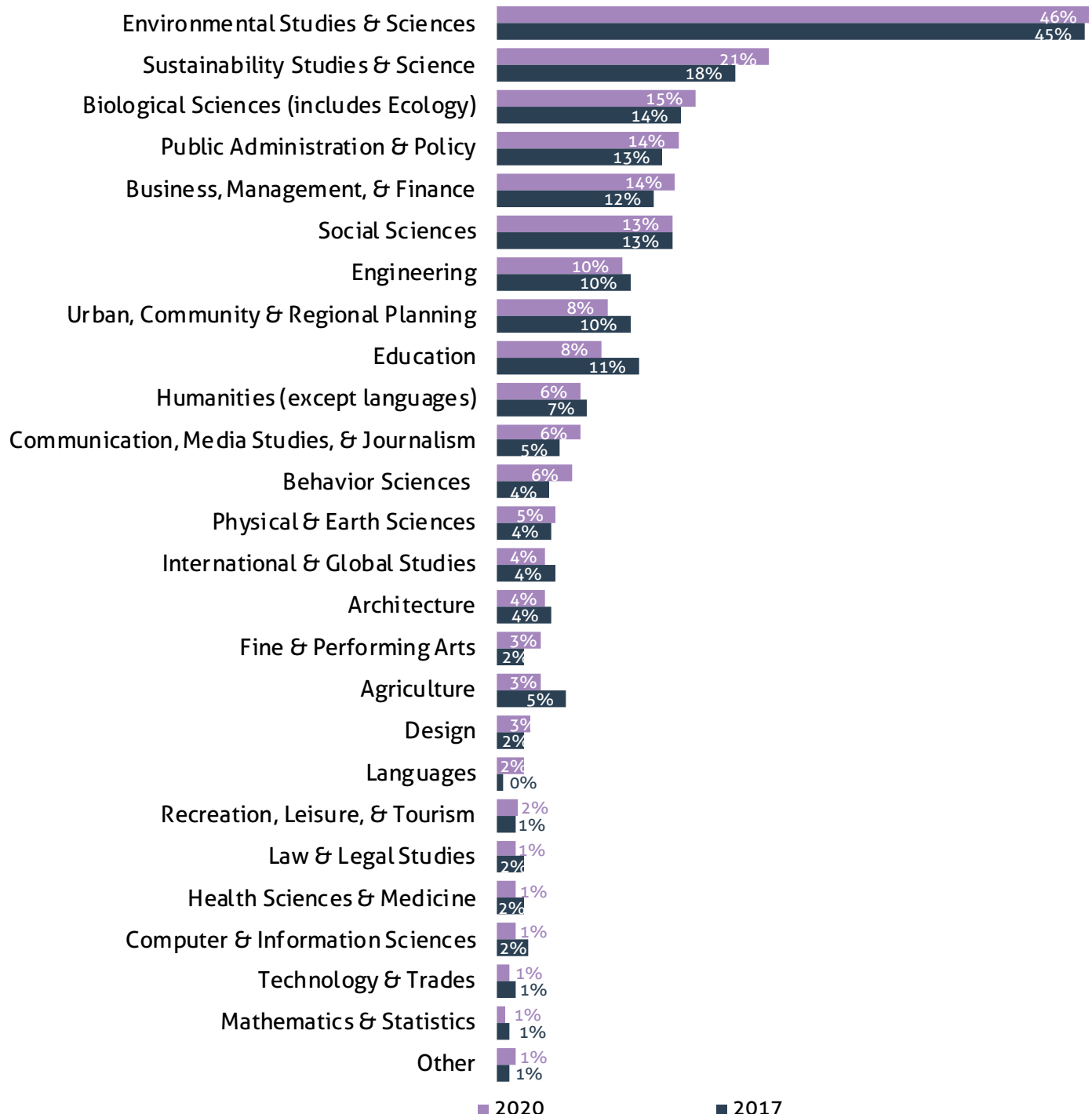
Count



# Academic Background

Responses for academic background were broadly similar to responses in 2017. Nearly half of all respondents (46%) had a background in environmental studies/sciences. The sustainability studies & science discipline is increasingly common among sustainability practitioners, likely a reflection of the growth of the number of programs in this field.

## Academic Background of Respondents | N = 439; Total Responses = 873





# Institution Information



Staff members at the Towson University office of Sustainability quiz students on their eco-knowledge during Campus Sustainability Week in 2019. Photo credit: Patricia Watson



# Country

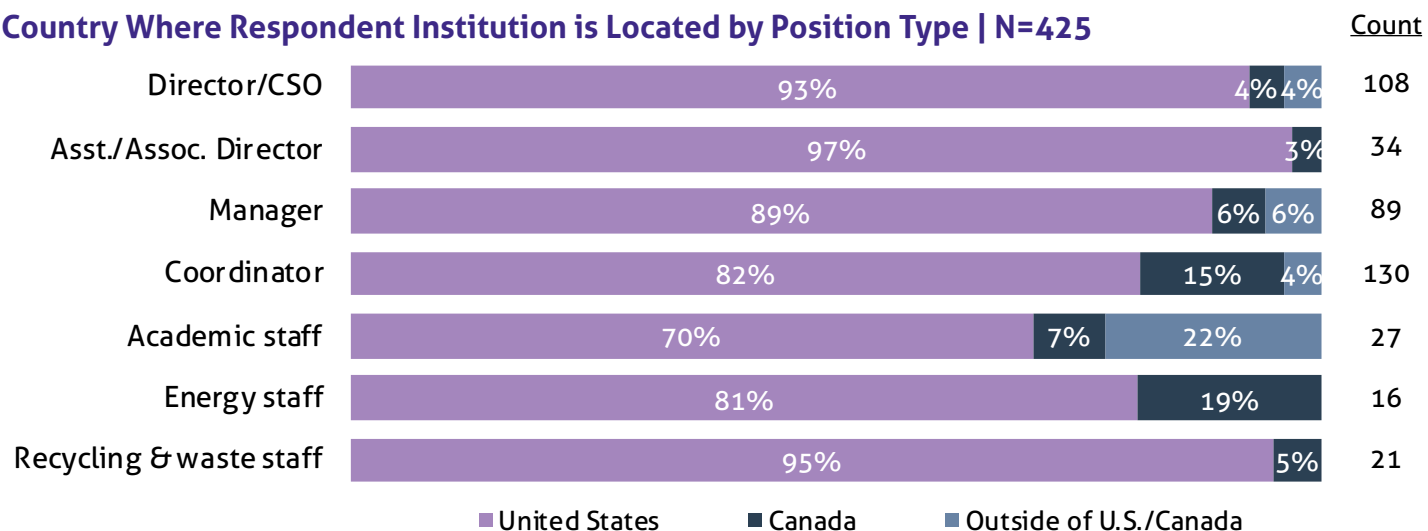
The 2020 survey saw a significant increase in respondents outside of the United States and Canada (21 respondents in 2020 versus 4 in 2017). Correspondingly, there was a decrease in the proportion of U.S. respondents (87% in 2020 versus 91% in 2017). Unfortunately, responses from countries outside of the U.S. and Canada were too few to enable meaningful analysis as separate cohorts. The percentages varied somewhat by position type, with academic staff having the highest proportion of non-U.S. respondents (30%).

## Country Where Respondent Institution is Located | N=475

Country	2020 Count	2020 %	2017 Count	2017 %
Australia	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
Canada	41	8.7%	37	8.2%
Colombia	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Ecuador	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Egypt	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Greece	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Hong Kong	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
Ireland	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
Malaysia	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Mexico	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
New Zealand	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Saudi Arabia	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
South Africa	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Sweden	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Switzerland	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Uganda	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
United Arab Emirates	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
United Kingdom	4	0.8%	0	0.0%
United States	413	87.0%	411	90.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# Country

## Country Where Respondent Institution is Located by Position Type | N=425



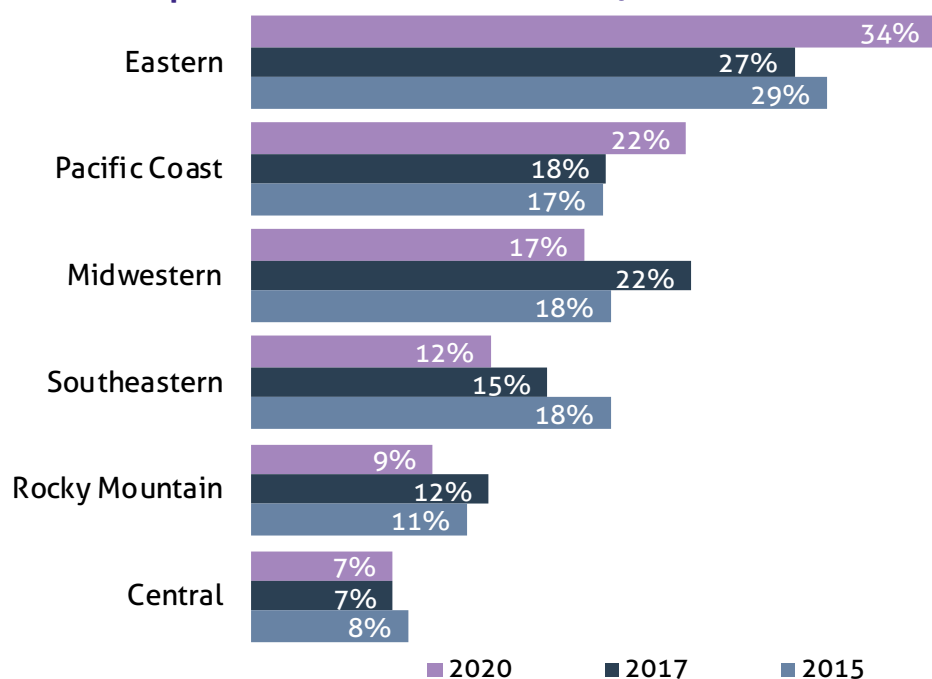
In 2019, students, faculty and staff at American University in Cairo joined institutions across the globe in Earth Day-related programming and events. Photo credit: AUC Office of Sustainability Team



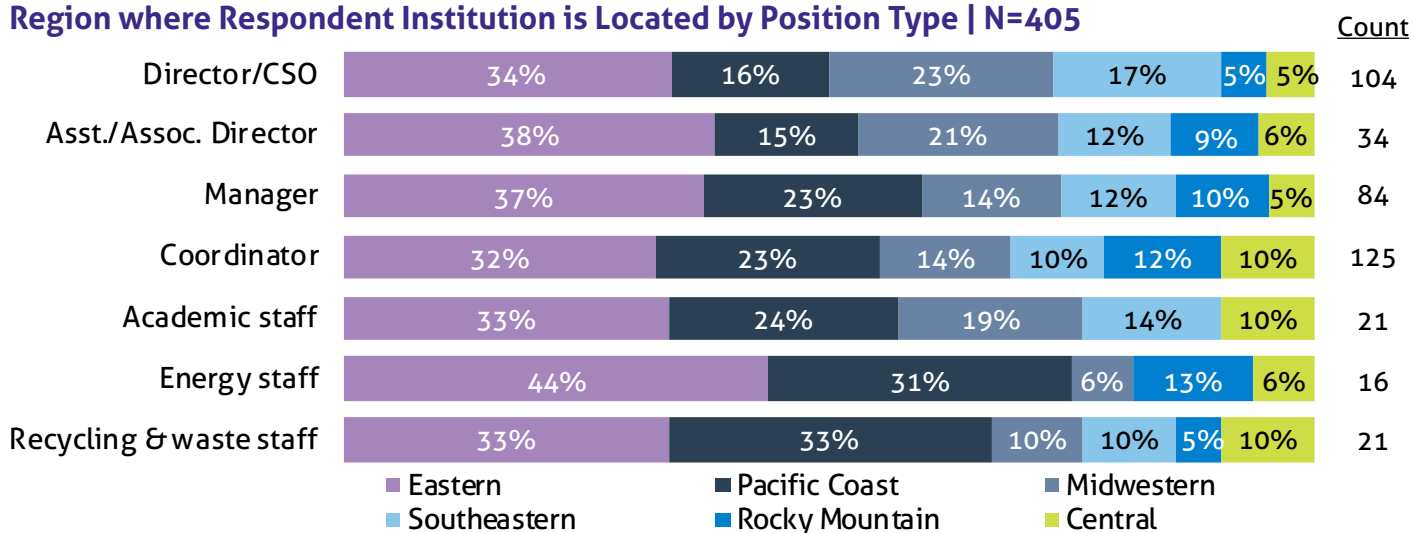
# Region

Respondents were asked in which province, territory or state the institution or system office was located. This report references geographical regions across Canada and the U.S. defined by [APPA, Leadership in Educational Facilities](#). Among U.S. and Canadian respondents, the largest proportion (34%) came from institutions in the Eastern region of the U.S. and Canada – with the lowest proportion (7%) coming from the Central region. In comparison to 2017, there was a higher proportion of respondents from the Eastern and Pacific Coast regions, and a lower proportion of respondents from the Midwestern, Southeastern, and Rocky Mountain regions. Responses varied by position type, with a high proportion of energy staff from the Eastern and Pacific Coast regions.

## Region where Respondent Institution is Located | N=454



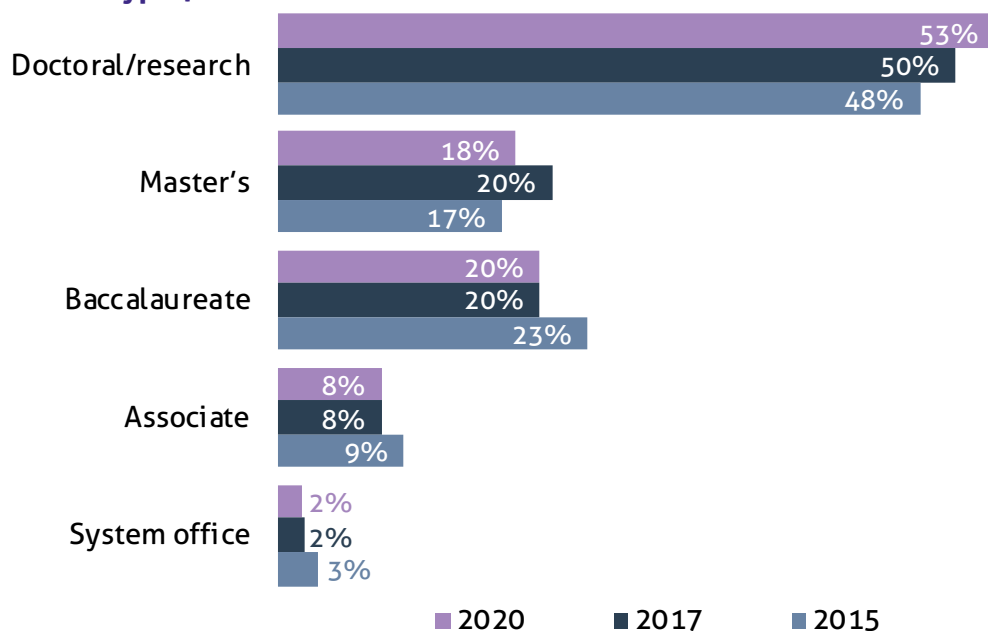
## Region where Respondent Institution is Located by Position Type | N=405



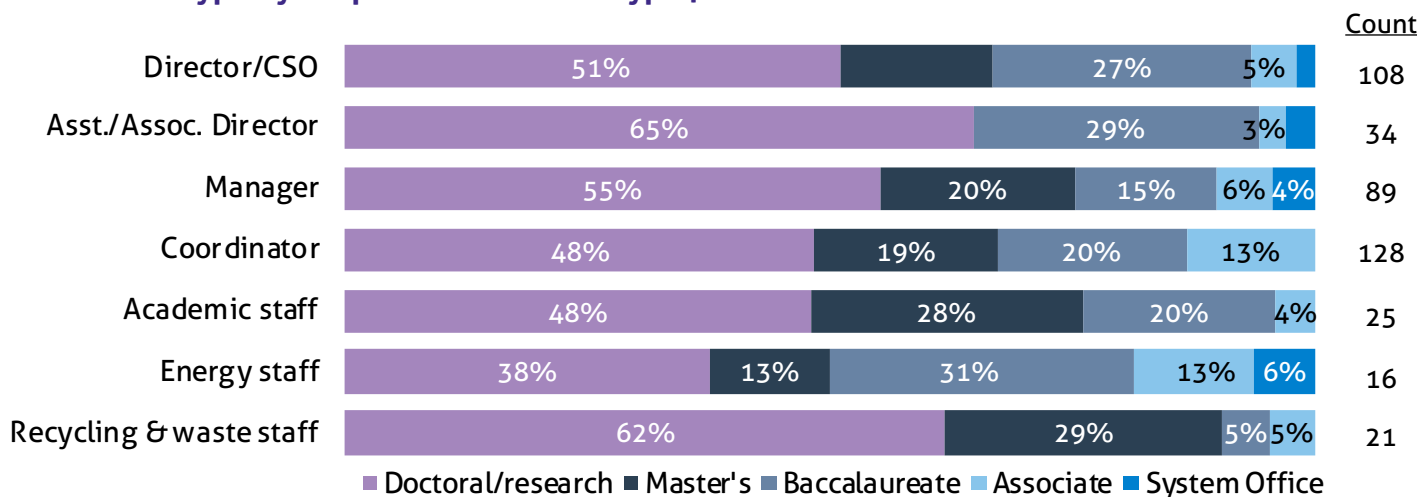
# Institution Type

The institution type question is adapted from the [Carnegie Classification](#) used in the United States. Over half of all respondents were from Doctoral/research institutions, and the proportion of respondents from such institutions increased incrementally since 2015. The percentage of respondents from Master's institutions decreased in comparison to 2017. By position type, the proportion of respondents from Doctoral/research institutions was highest (65%) for Assistant or Associate Sustainability Directors and recycling & waste staff.

## Institution type | N=454



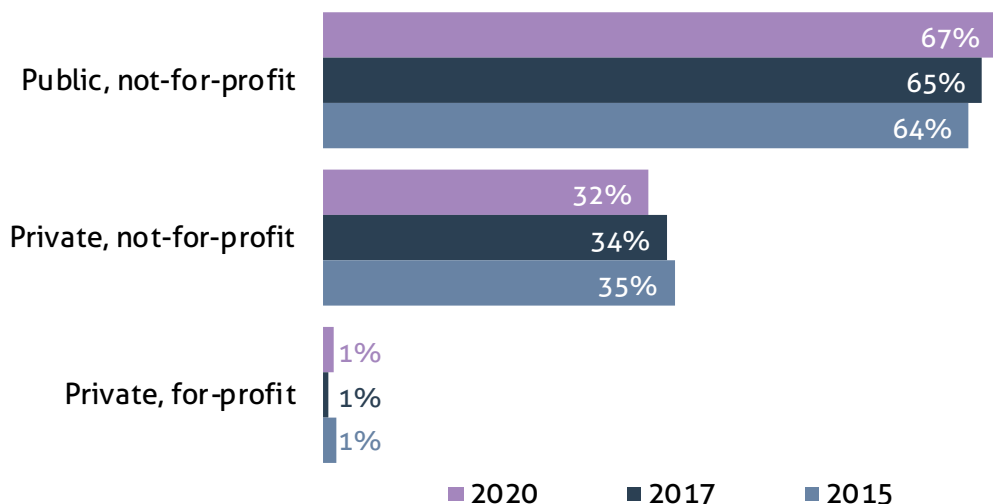
## Institution Type by Respondent Position Type | N=454



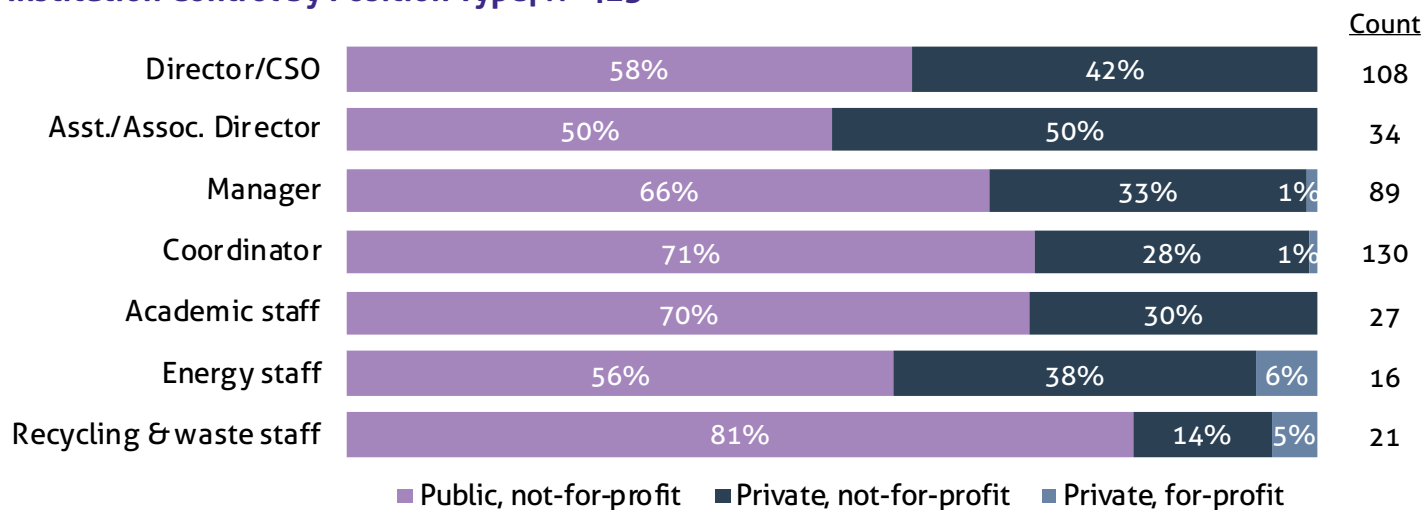
# Institution Control

Two-thirds of respondents were affiliated with publicly controlled institutions while one-third were with privately controlled institutions. The percentage of respondents from public institutions increased slightly since 2012, from 64% to 67%.

## Institution Control | N=474



## Institution Control by Position Type | N=425

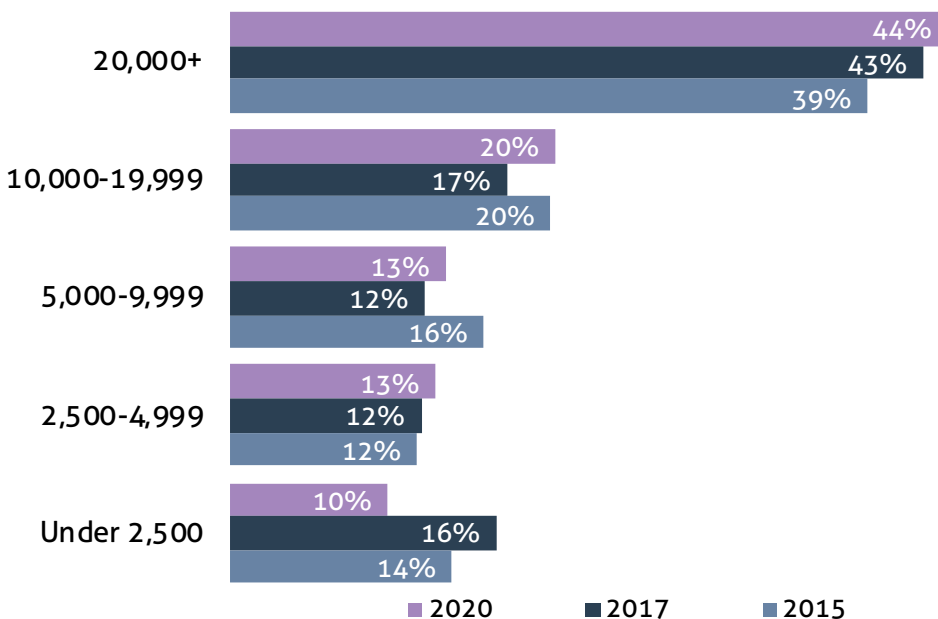




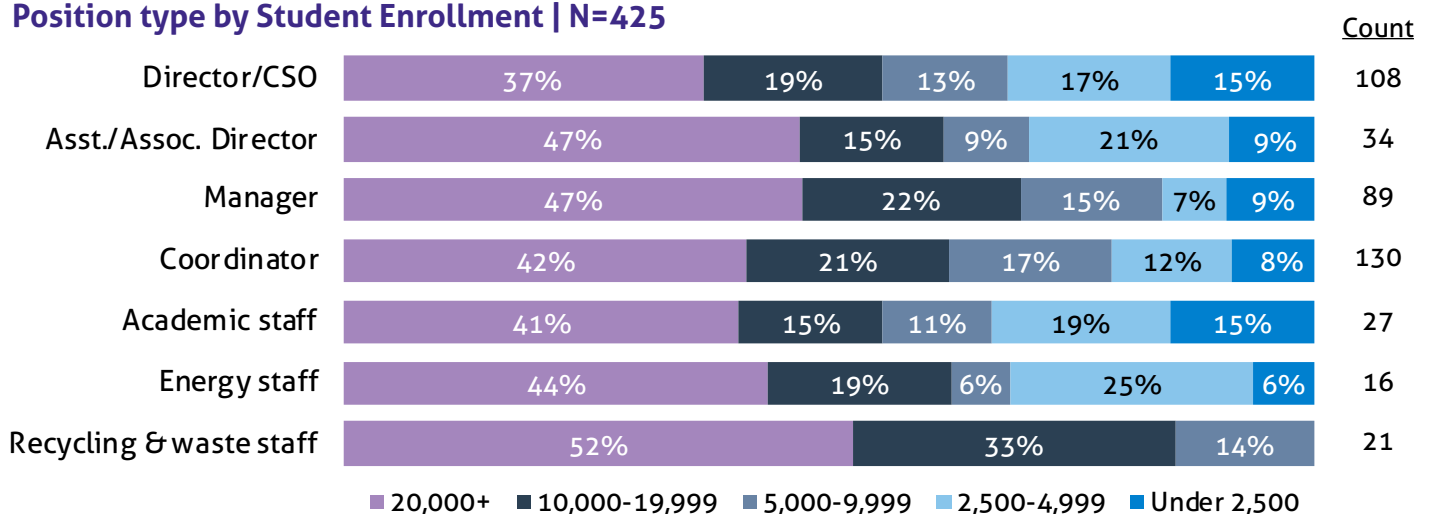
# Student Enrollment

The majority of respondents (44%) were from institutions that enrolled 20,000 or more students, an increase since 2015 (39%). The proportion of respondents from smaller institutions of 2,500 students or less was significantly lower in 2020 as compared to previous surveys. Positions with relatively higher proportions of respondents from small institutions included academic staff, Sustainability Director or similar positions, and energy staff.

## Student Enrollment | N=474



## Position type by Student Enrollment | N=425





# Nature of Position



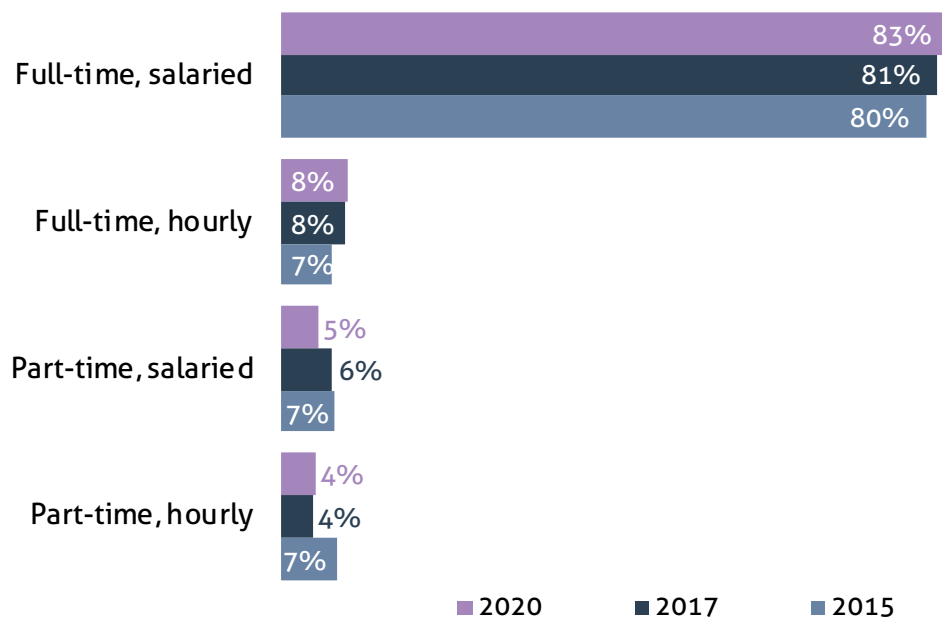
A group of higher education sustainability professionals prepare for an icebreaker activity to kick off the 2018 Sustainability Professionals Retreat at Swarthmore College near Philadelphia, PA.



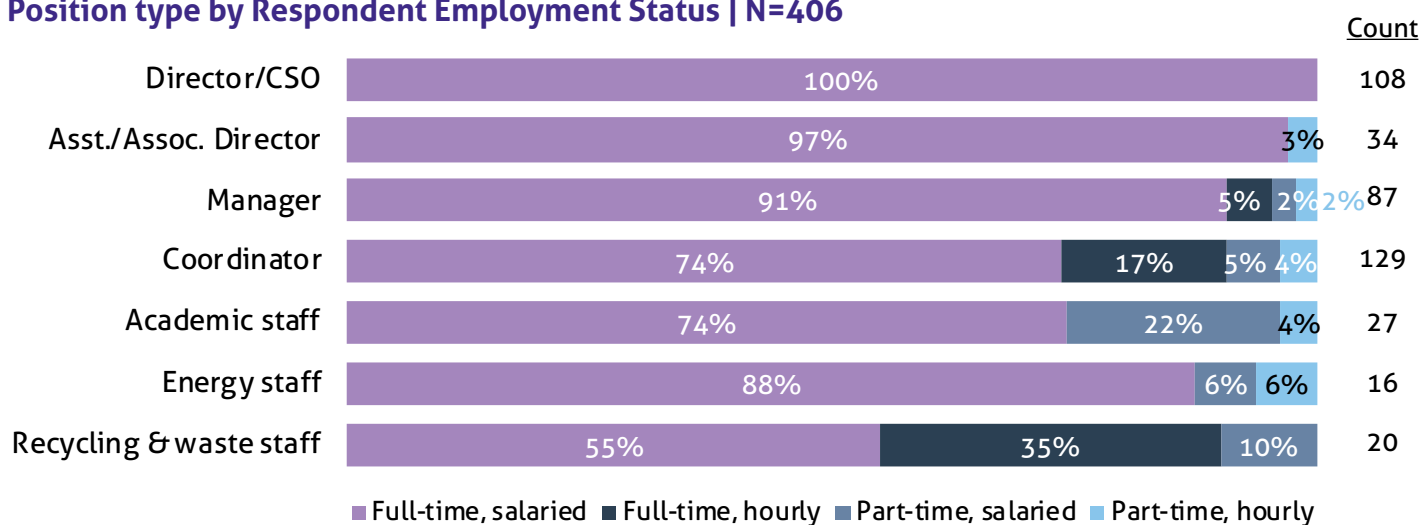
# Employment Status

The vast majority of respondents' positions (91%) were full-time, and most of these were in salaried rather than hourly positions (83%). The proportion of respondents in full-time positions increased by five percent since 2015. For the first time, 100% of Sustainability Directors reported having full-time, salaried positions.

## Employment Status of Respondents | N=470



## Position type by Respondent Employment Status | N=406

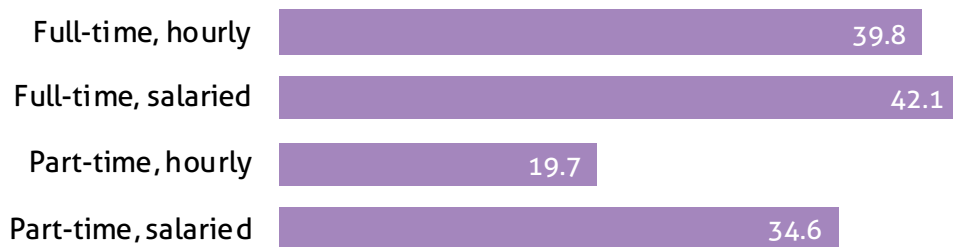




# Hours Worked

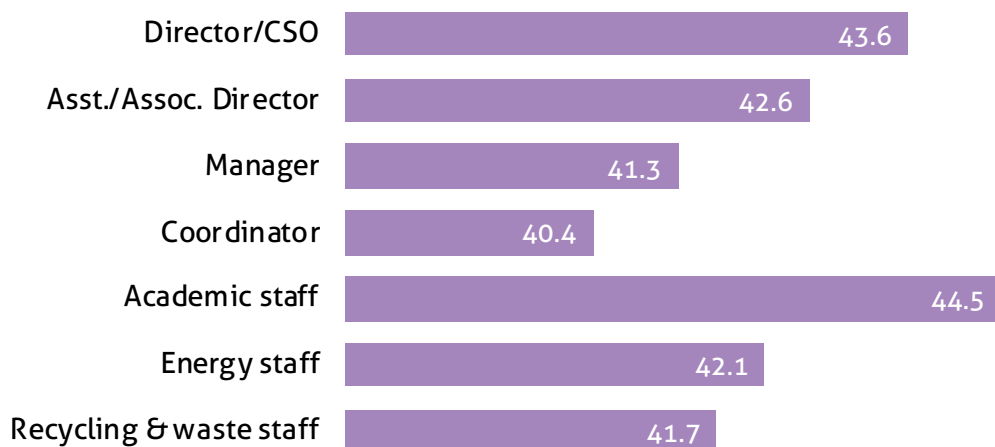
A follow-up to the employment status question was included in 2020 for the first time, asking respondents to indicate, "How many hours do you work in a typical week?" Average responses are outlined below for full-time and part-time salaried and hourly positions. On average, salaried employees worked more hours than hourly employees, with full-time salaried employees working slightly more than 40 hours per week.

## Average Hours Worked in a Typical Week | N=470



In analyzing responses by position type, we determined that the sample of part-time employees was too small for meaningful analysis. Responses for full-time positions are presented below. Full time academic staff and Sustainability Directors reported the greatest number of average hours worked in a typical week.

## Average Hours Worked in a Typical Week by Position Type for Full-time Employees | N=427

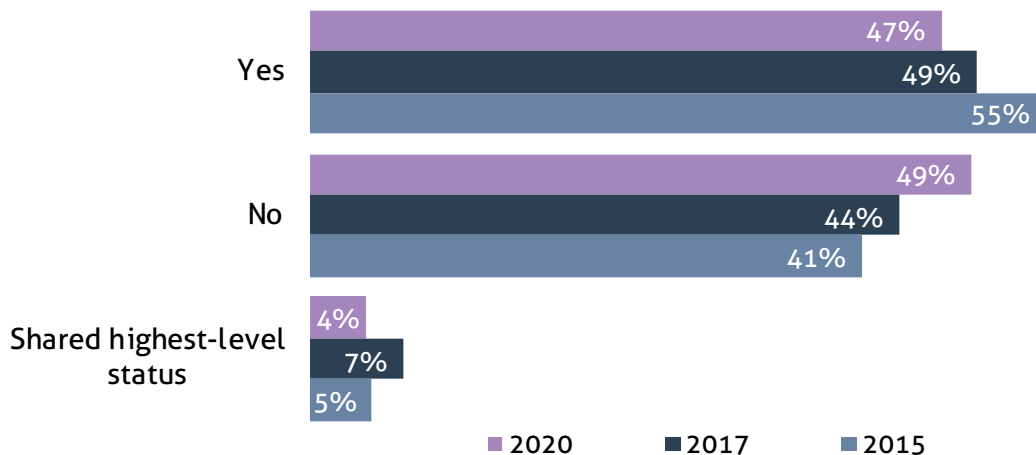


# Highest Level Positions

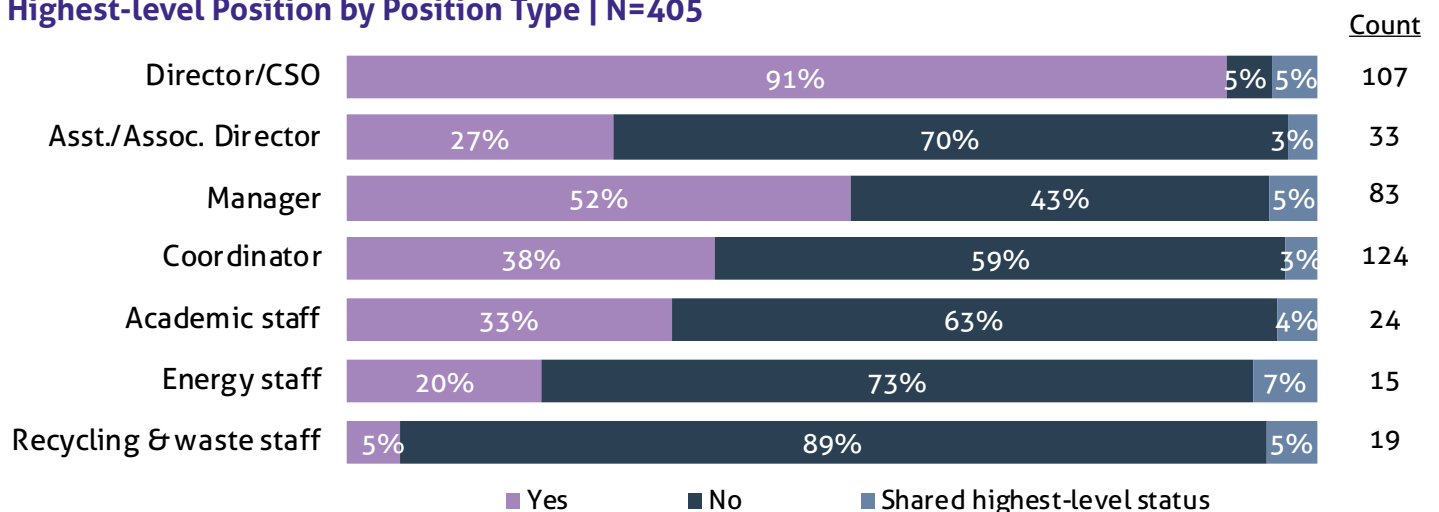
To gain insight into leadership roles for various sustainability positions, respondents were asked, "Is your position the highest-level sustainability position at your institution or organization?" Answer choices included "Yes", "No", "Not sure" and "My position shares highest-level status with one or more other positions." In 2020, 51% of respondents indicated that their position was the highest level sustainability position (or shared highest-level status), a reduction of eight percent since 2015. A growing proportion of positions that are not highest level may indicate growth in new and lower level positions.

Responses varied by position type. Sustainability Director positions were the most likely to be the highest-level sustainability positions at the institution (91%). Specialized positions, particularly recycling & waste staff, were less likely to be the highest-level position at the institution.

## Highest Level Position | N=453



## Highest-level Position by Position Type | N=405

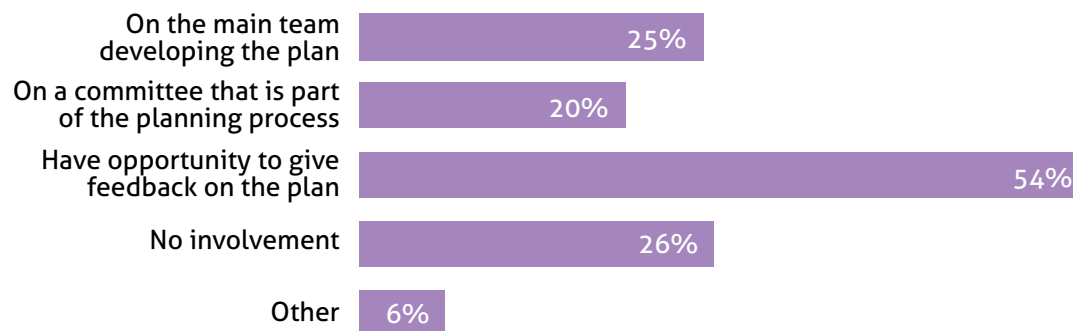


# Involvement in Strategic Planning

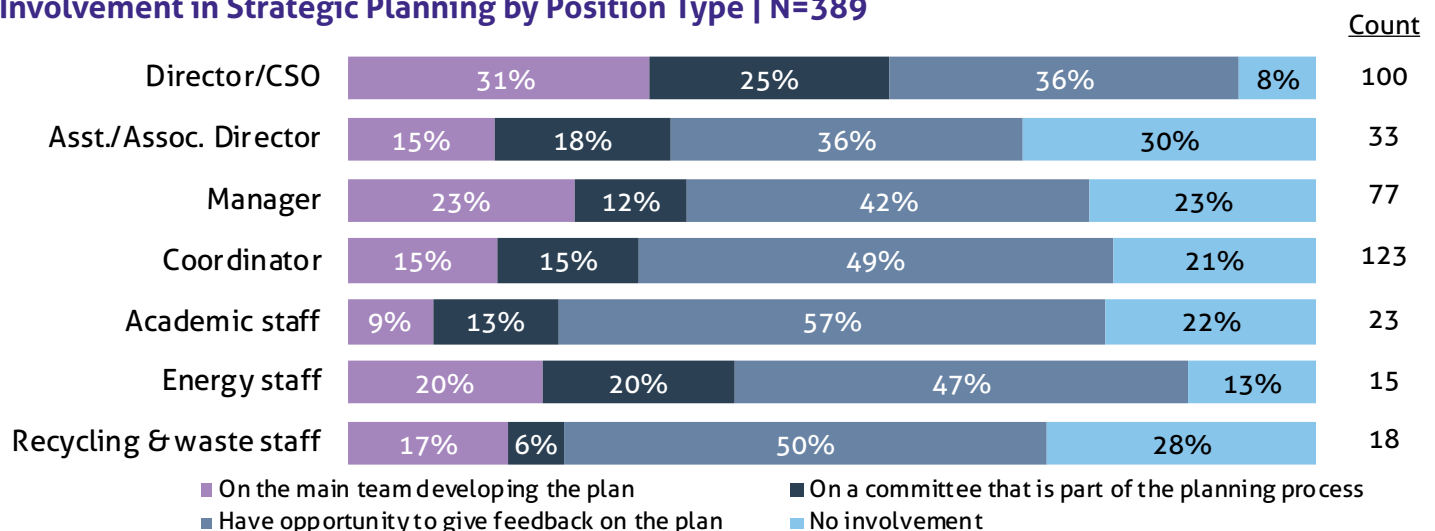
A new question was asked in 2020 pertaining to involvement in strategic planning: "To what extent are you engaged in the planning process for your institution-wide strategic plan (or similar high-level guiding document)?"

Overall, the majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they have had the opportunity to give feedback on the highest-level institutional plan. About one-quarter of respondents indicated they were on the main team that had developed the plan. Another quarter of respondents indicated that they had no involvement. By position type, Sustainability Directors and similar positions had the greatest role in strategic planning efforts, followed by energy management positions. Academic staff had the lowest level of involvement in strategic planning.

## Involvement in Strategic Planning | N=455



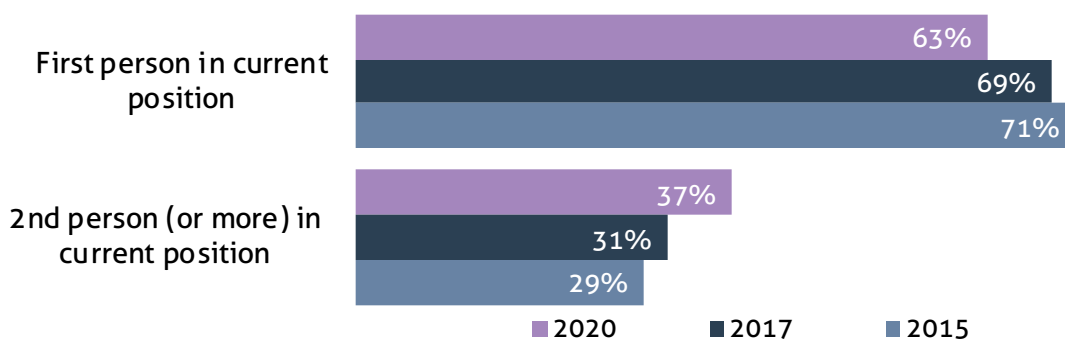
## Involvement in Strategic Planning by Position Type | N=389



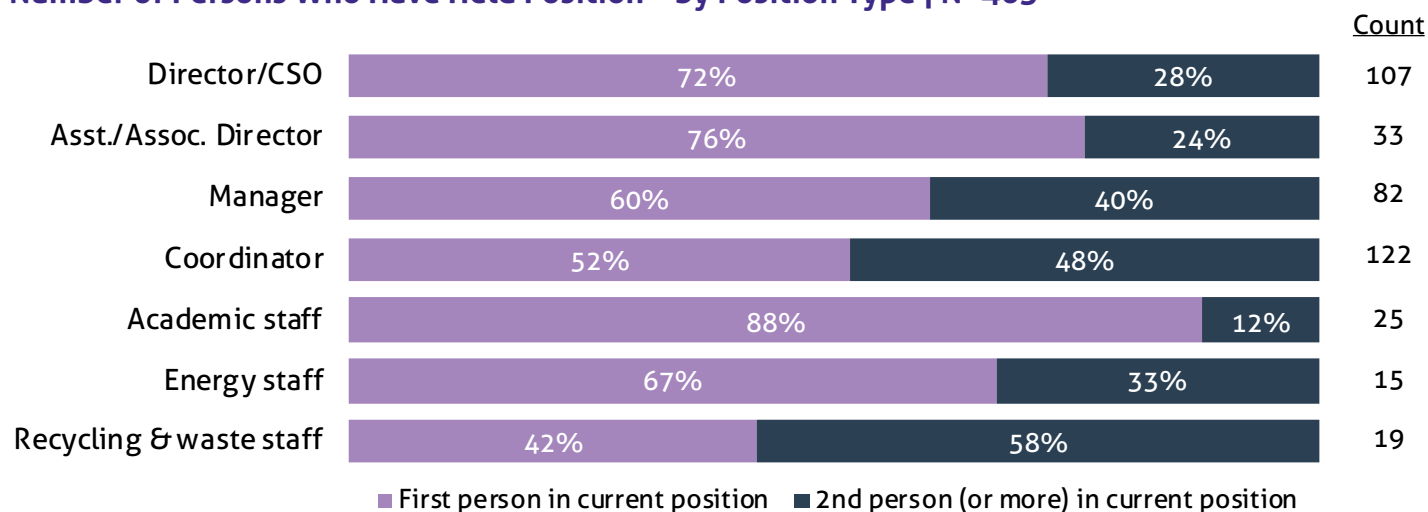
# Number who have held Position

To help determine the creation of new sustainability positions, respondents were asked to indicate if they were the first person to hold their position at its current rank or level. The majority of respondents (63%) were the first person to hold their current position. In another indication of the maturation of the field, this number has decreased steadily since 2015. By position type, notably larger percentages of academic staff were the first to hold their positions.

## Number of Persons Who Have Held Position | N=447



## Number of Persons Who Have Held Position – by Position Type | N=403

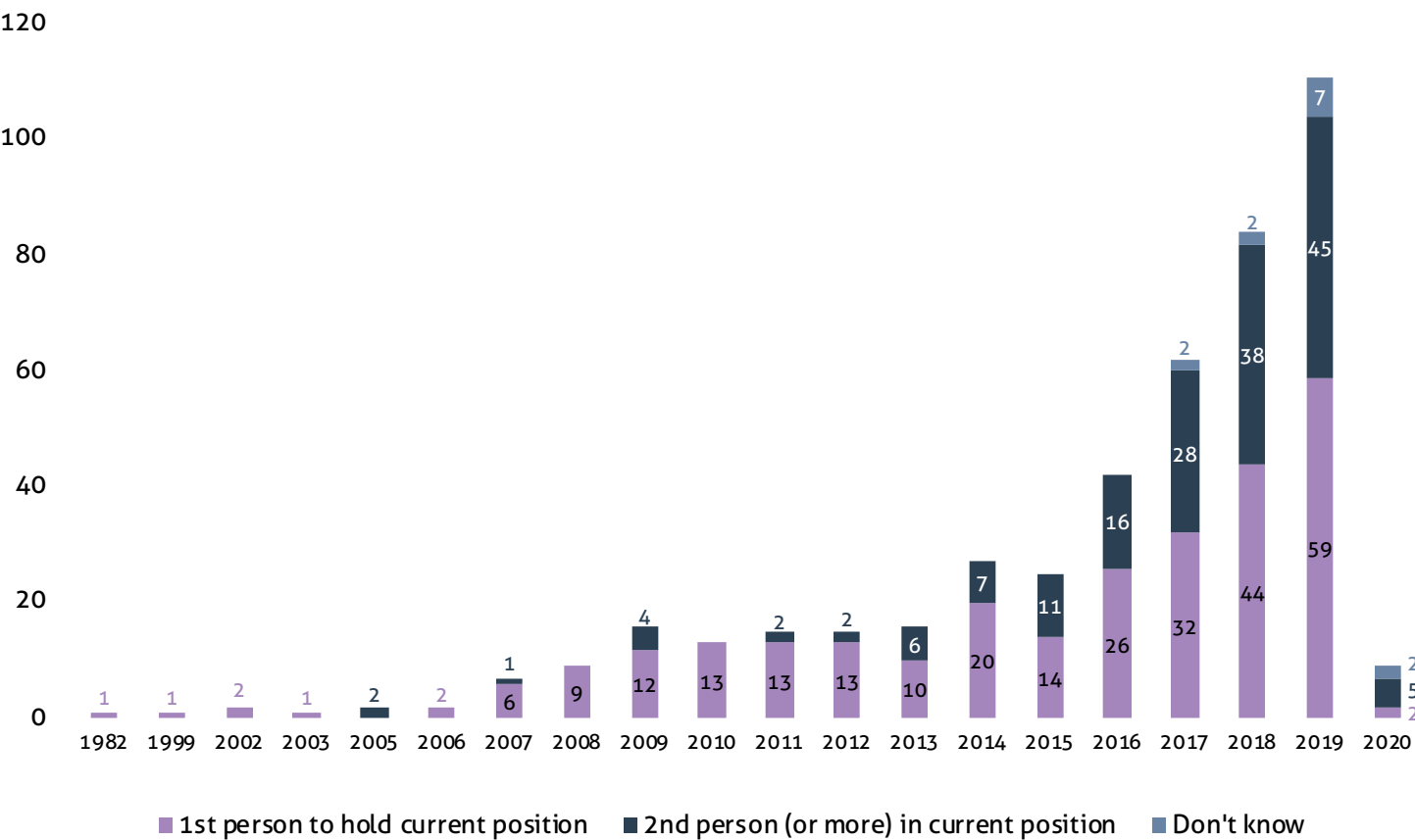




# Year Work Began

To provide insight into the history and recent growth of campus sustainability positions, respondents were asked to answer the question, "In what year did you begin working in higher education sustainability overall?" By filtering results of this question with respondents who indicated that they were the first person to hold their position at its current rank/level (see preceding section), the number of new annual positions in campus sustainability each year can be estimated. The 2020 survey shows steady growth of positions in recent years, with a balance of new positions and positions that have been refilled. While these findings suggest continued growth in new sustainability positions, they also may be indicative of turnover in existing positions.

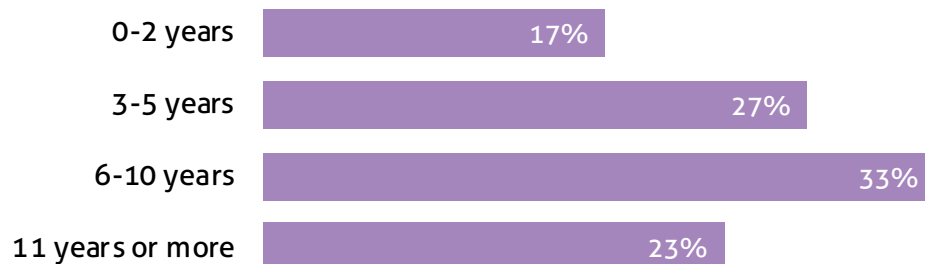
Year when Higher Education Sustainability Work Began | N=460



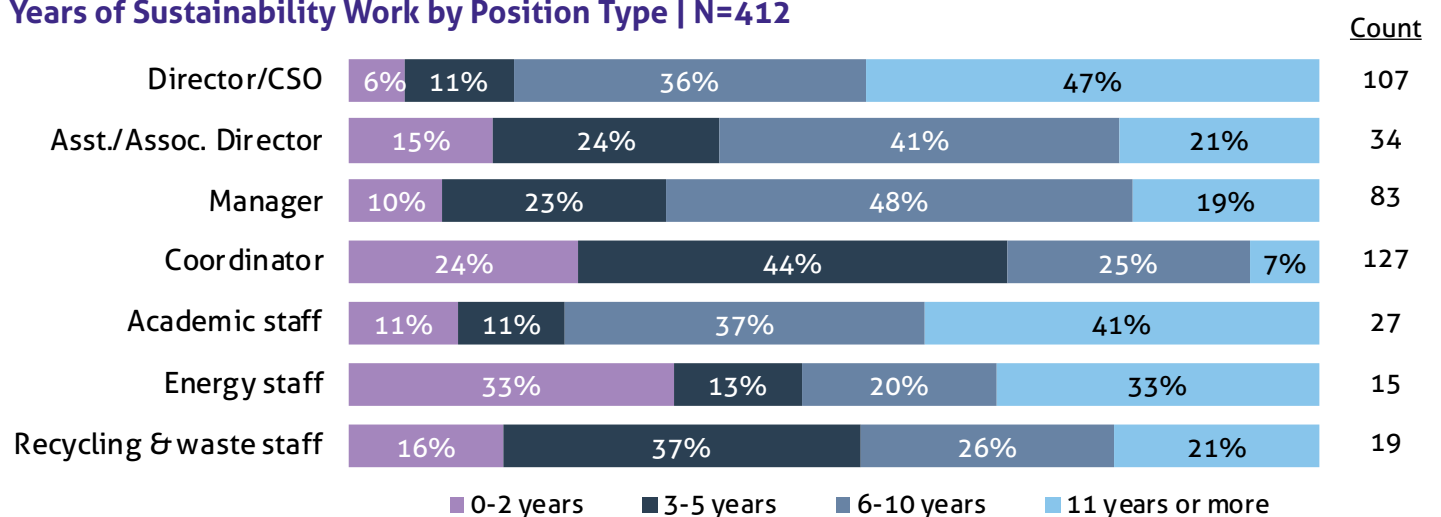
# Years of Sustainability Work

A question similar to the one described above asked respondents, "In total, for how many years have you worked in higher education sustainability?" This question was asked differently in past surveys, so responses are not comparable to previous years' results. By position type, Sustainability Coordinators had the fewest years of experience on average while Sustainability Directors and academic staff had the most years of experience.

## Years of Sustainability Work | N=447



## Years of Sustainability Work by Position Type | N=412

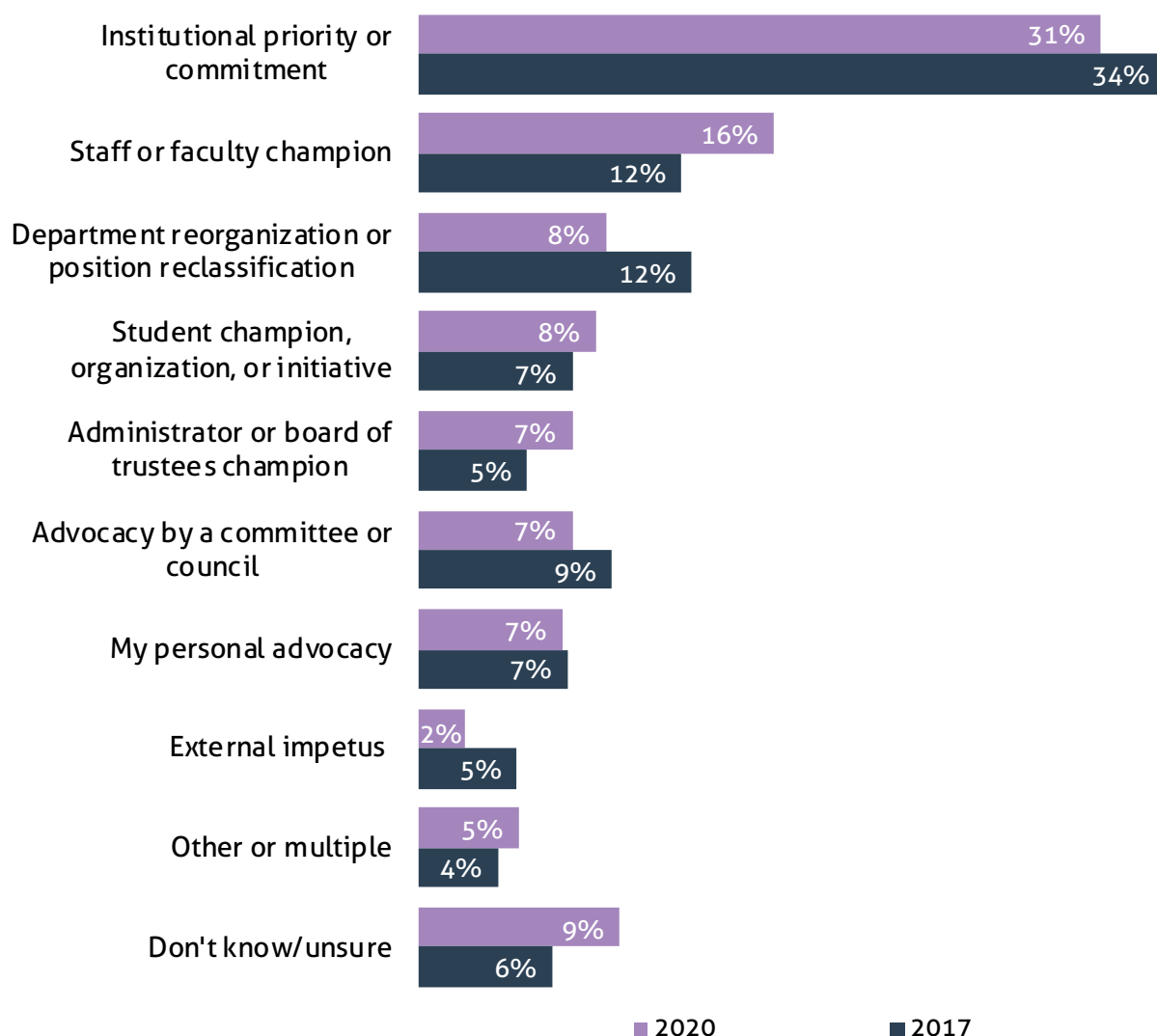


# Main Driver for Position Creation

Respondents were asked to indicate the main driver for the creation of their current positions (only one driver could be selected). Responses were fairly consistent with 2017 results. The most common option identified was “institutional priority”, with nearly one-third of respondents indicating that this was the main driver.

A follow-up question asked, “What are the primary drivers supporting the *continuation* of your current position?” Responses were similar to the main drivers listed in the preceding question. Additional drivers referenced by respondents included climate commitments and plans, participation in STARS, and cost-saving measures as a result of sustainability efforts.

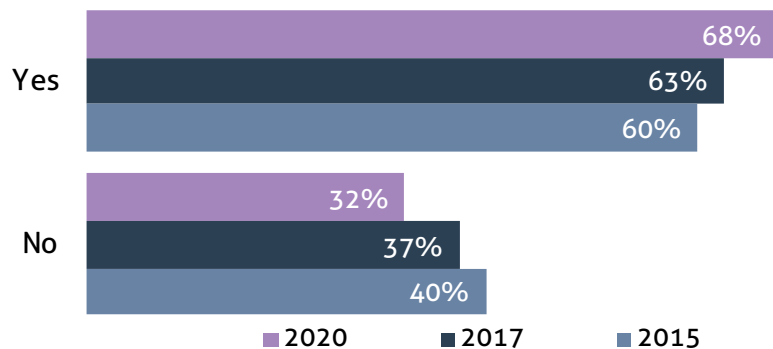
## Main Driver for Position Creation | N=459



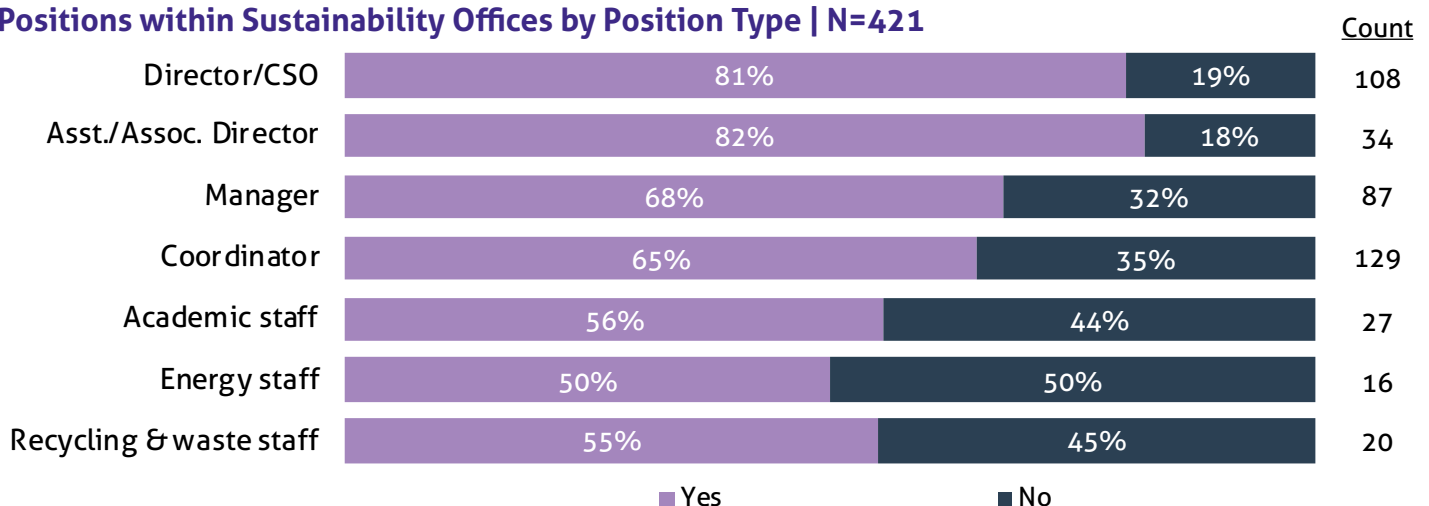
# Positions housed in Sustainability Offices

The 2020 survey asked respondents, "Is your position housed in a sustainability office, unit, center, or institute with "sustainability" in its name?" Sixty-eight percent of respondents said their position was housed in an office or unit with sustainability in its name, compared to 63% in 2017 and 60% in 2015. By position type, Sustainability Directors and Assistant or Associate Directors were most likely to be housed in sustainability offices, while specialized staff positions were much less likely to be housed in sustainability offices.

## Positions housed within Sustainability Offices | N=469



## Positions within Sustainability Offices by Position Type | N=421

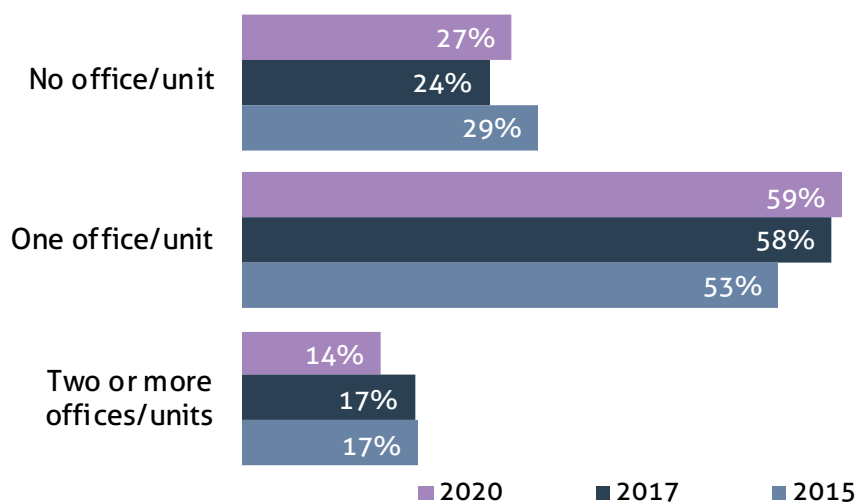




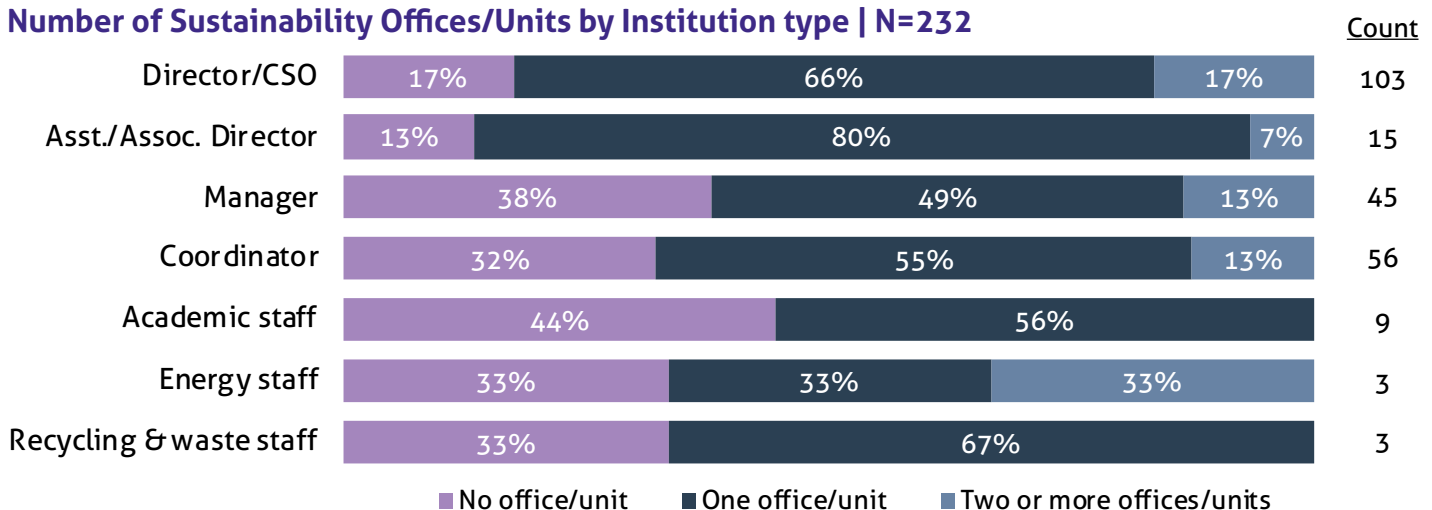
# Number of Sustainability Offices

Self-identified sustainability points of contact (one per institution) were asked whether sustainability efforts at their institution/system office were centralized in an office, unit, center, or institute with "sustainability" in its name. Overall, 73% of institutions reported having at least one office, center, or institute with "sustainability" in its name, compared to 76% in 2015 and 71% in 2015. Master's and Associate institutions were least likely to have an office, unit, or center with "sustainability" in its name (about one-third did not). At the same time, Master's institutions were also most likely to have two or more offices, units or centers.

## Number of Sustainability Offices/Units | N=239



## Number of Sustainability Offices/Units by Institution type | N=232

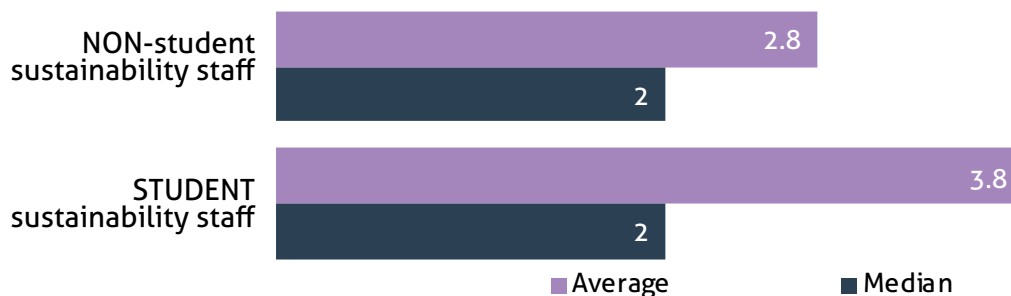


# Number of Sustainability Staff

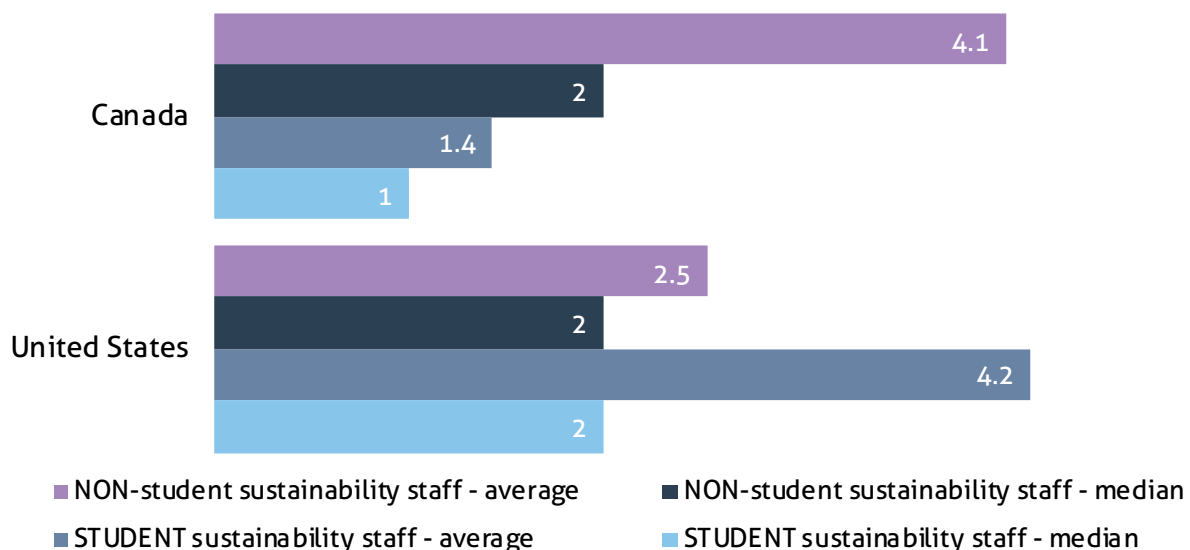
Self-identified sustainability points of contact (one per institution) were asked to indicate the number of paid sustainability staff - both non-student and student. This question has been modified from previous years so results are not comparable. The charts below include average and median student and non-student sustainability staff counts overall, and based on country, institution type, and student enrollment.

On average, there were 2.8 non-student sustainability staff and 3.8 student staff overall, while median amounts were 2 for both. U.S. institutions tended to have a higher number of student sustainability staff in comparison to Canadian institutions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Doctoral/research institutions and institutions with relatively large FTE enrollments had the highest number of student and non-student sustainability staff.

## Average and Median Number of Sustainability Staff | N=239



## Average and Median Number of Sustainability Staff by Country | N=239

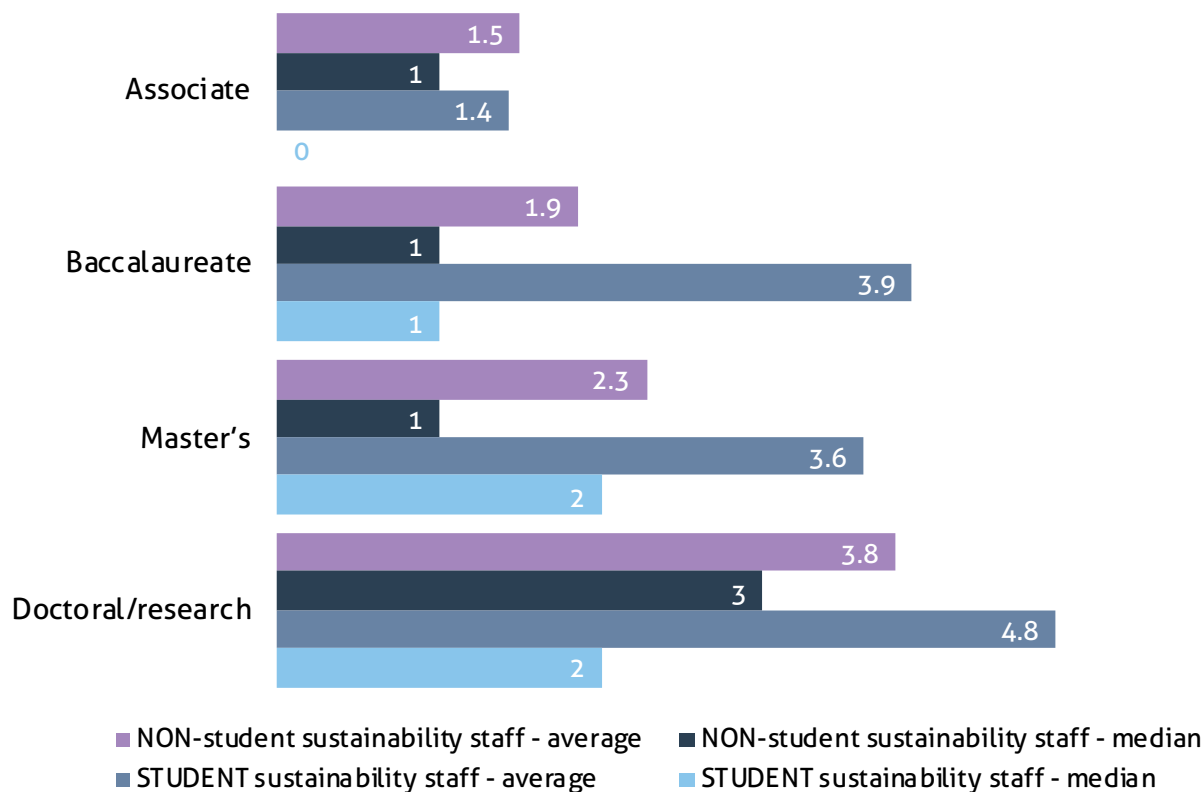


# Number of Sustainability Staff



Ribbon cutting ceremony for the UMass Lowell Urban Agriculture Program, a partnership program between the Lowell Office of Sustainability Mill City Grows, a local food justice organization. Photo credit: Ed Brennen

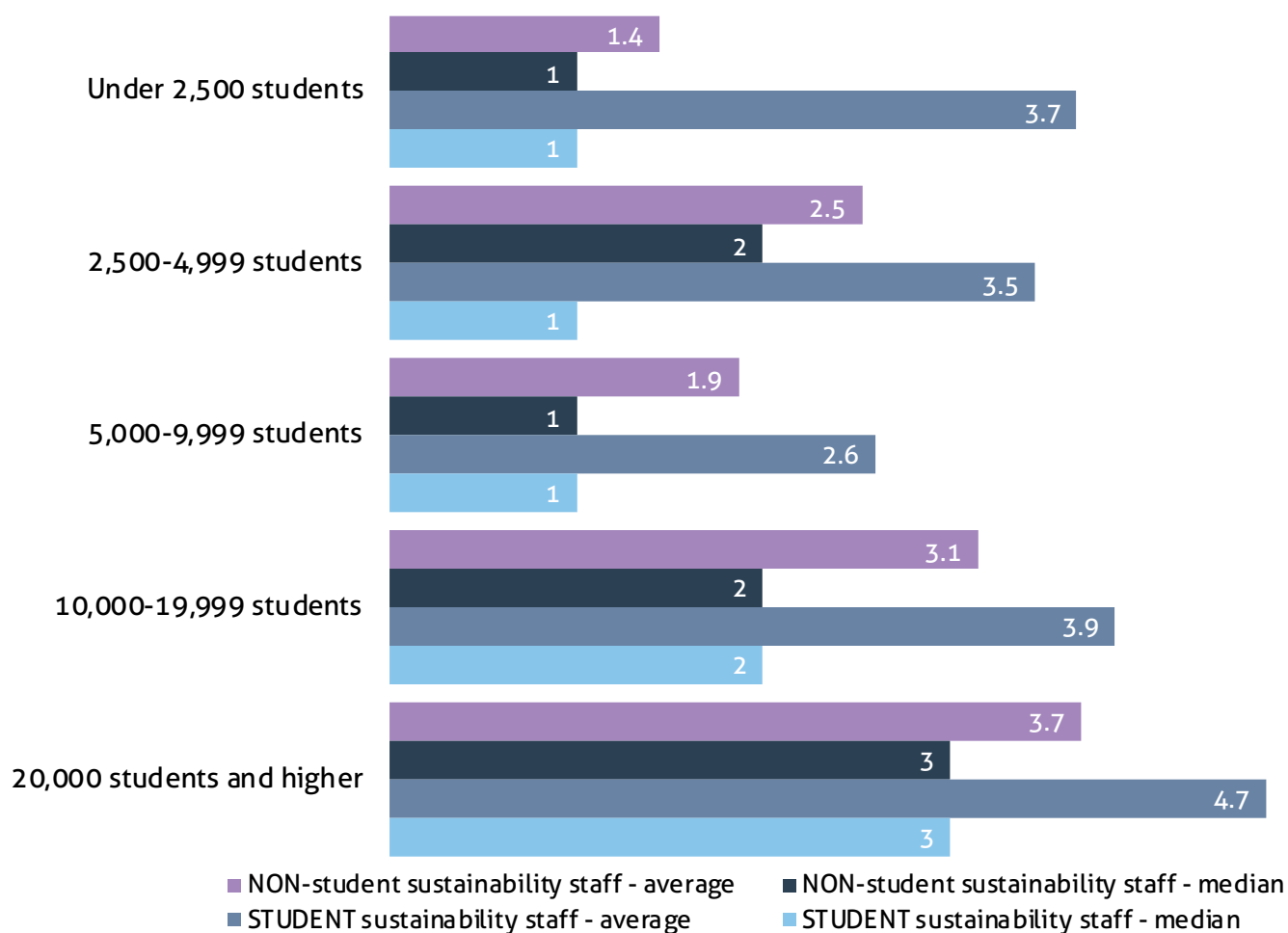
## Average and Median Number of Sustainability Staff by Institution Type | N=232





# Number of Sustainability Staff

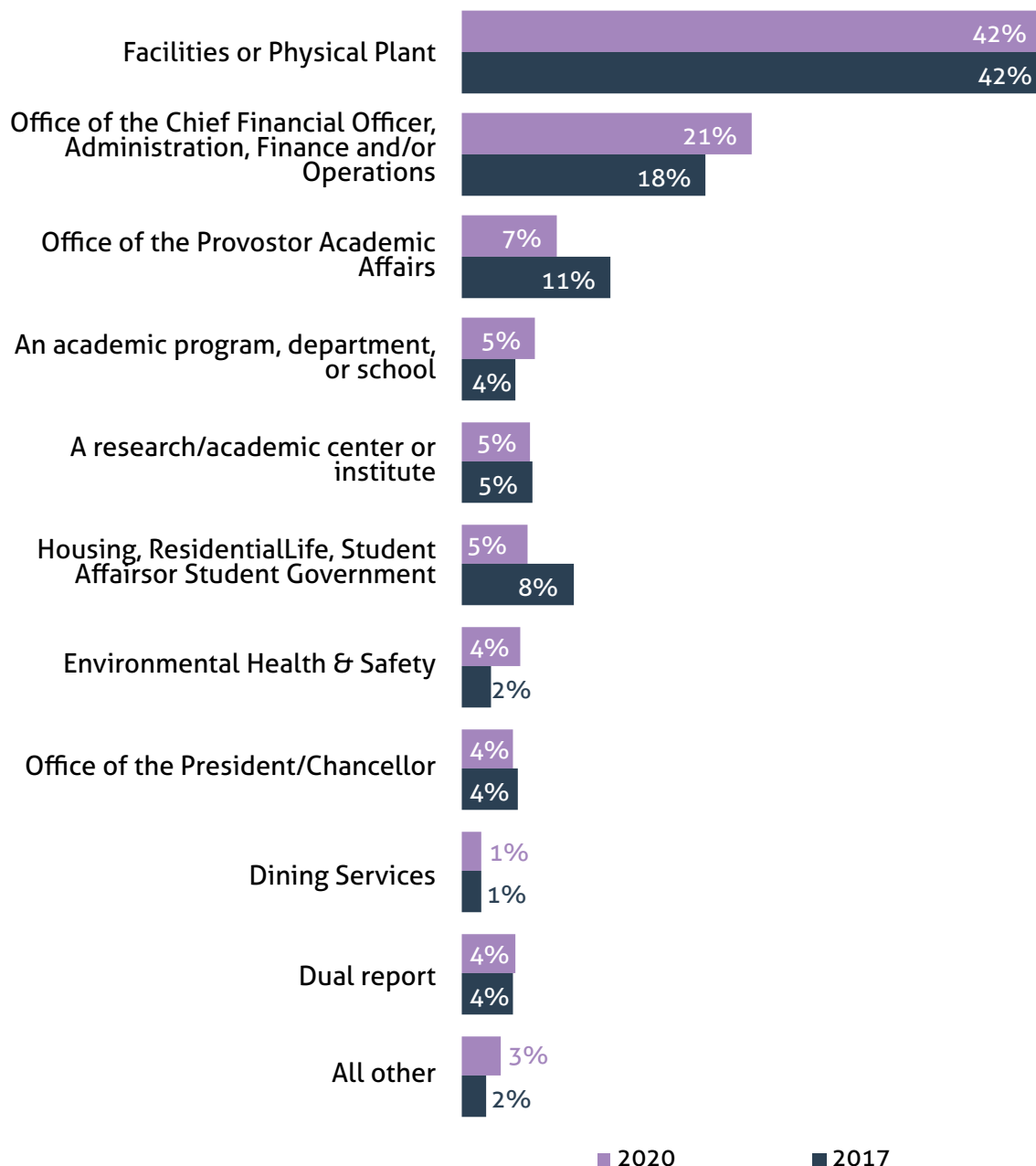
Average and Median Number of Sustainability Staff by Student Enrollment | N=239



# Where Position/Office is Housed

Respondents were asked to provide an indication of where their sustainability position, office, and/or unit is housed organizationally. Responses were broadly similar to 2017 results, with an increase in respondents based in finance/administration and a decline in those based in academic affairs. By far, the largest number of positions and offices were housed in “facilities, physical plant or similar”. Seventeen respondents indicated that their position was housed within the Office of the President/Chancellor.

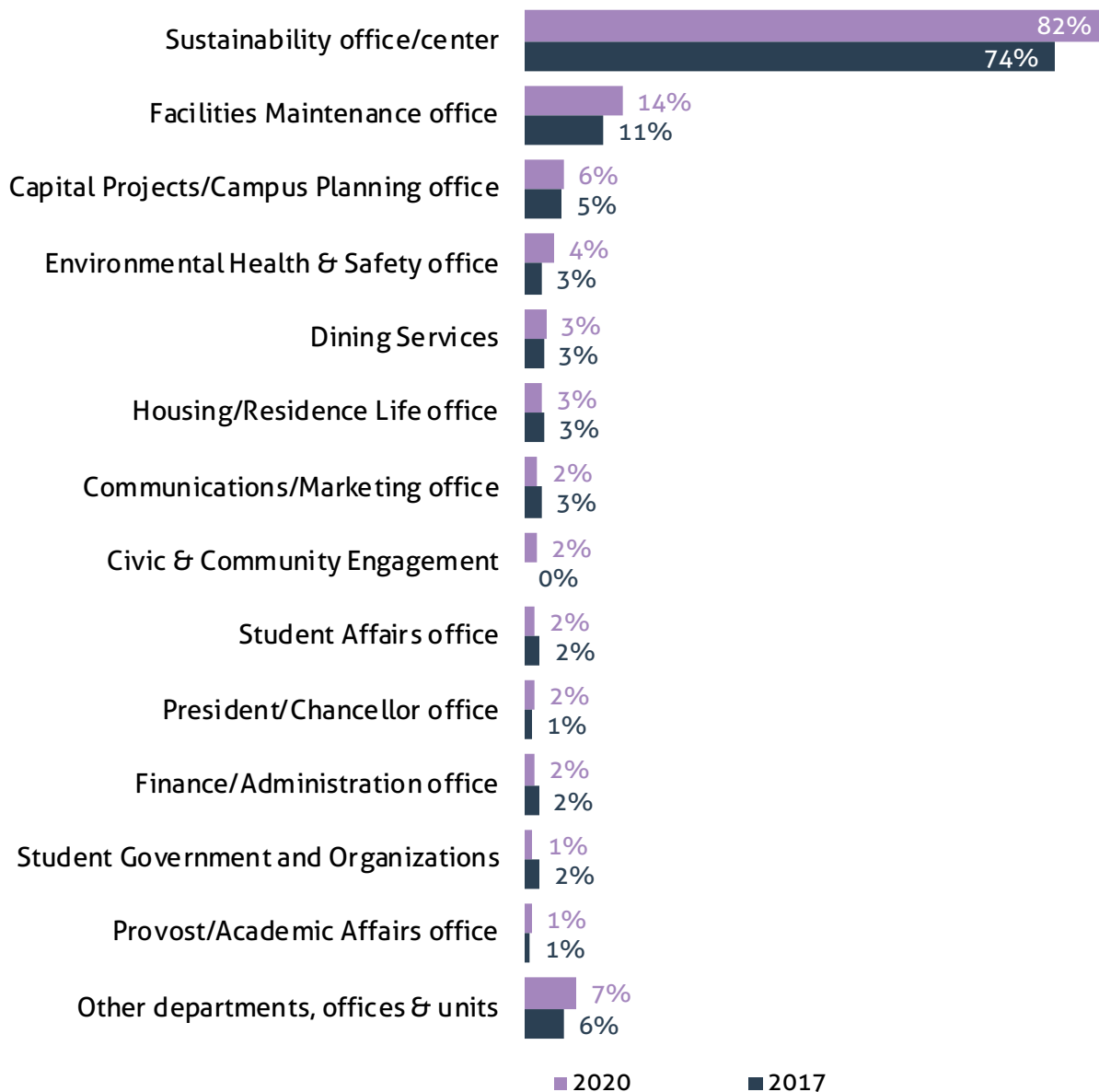
## Where Sustainability Positions are Housed | N=458; Total Responses = 520



# Level of Responsibility

Respondents were asked about the level of responsibility and engagement with offices, divisions and departments across the institution. A similar question was asked in 2017, though two new answer choices were added in 2020. As in 2017, direct responsibility for a sustainability office and/or center was cited most frequently by a significant margin. Responsibility for a sustainability office or center increased from 74% in 2017 to 82% in 2020. The next highest categories were facilities and capital projects, where direct responsibility was much less common (14% and 6% respectively).

## Level of Responsibility | N=444

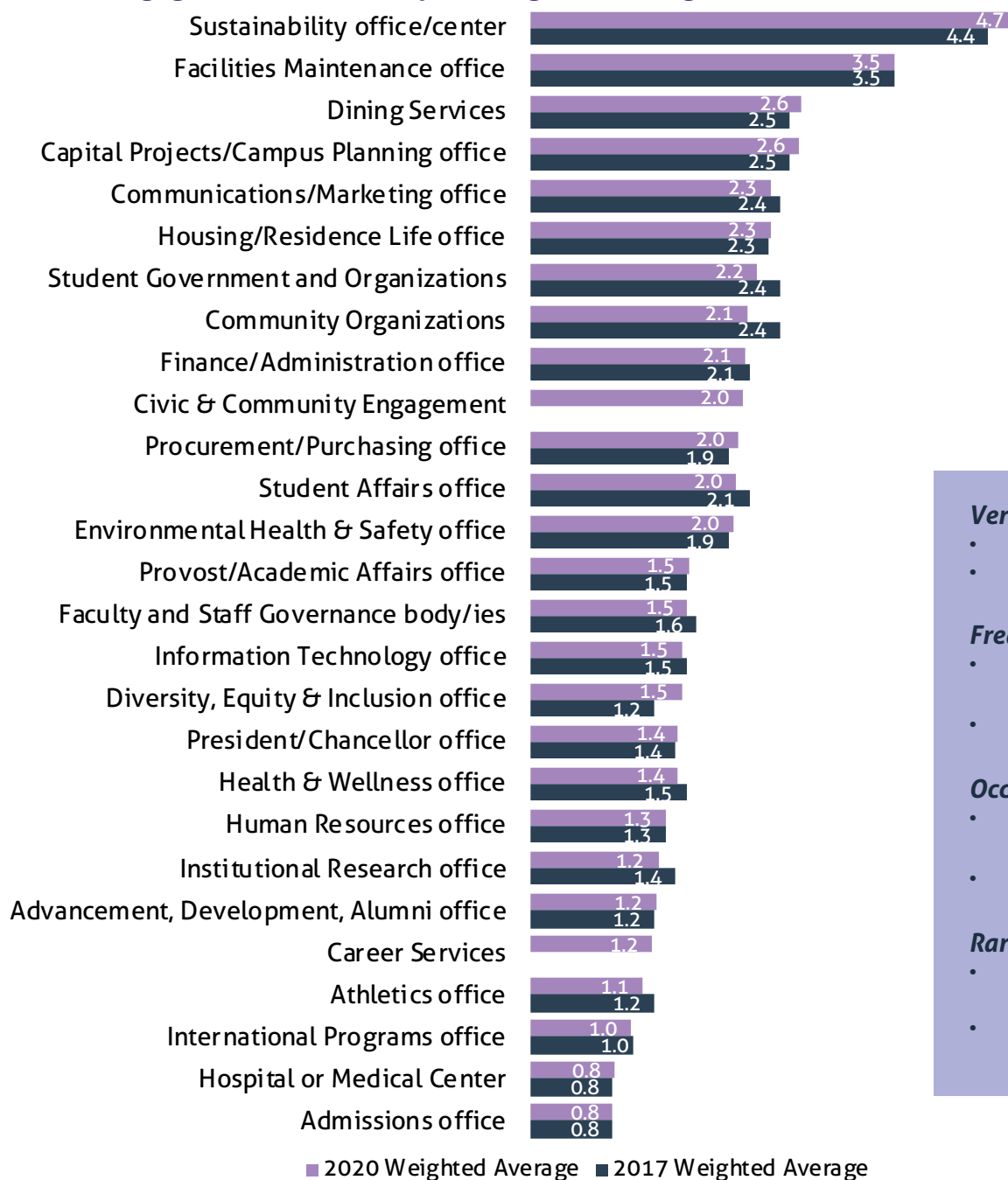




# Level of Campus Engagement

The level of engagement that sustainability positions had with other offices and departments varied extensively and in ways that largely matched 2017 results. As expected, regular engagement with a sustainability office was cited most frequently. Respondents in 2020 and in 2017 were also highly engaged with facilities (several interactions per month). Areas with the least amount of engagement included Admissions, Hospitals/medical centers and International programs. Engagement with Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) offices, an area of recent interest within higher education sustainability, increased slightly.

## Level of Engagement across Campus, Weighted Average | N=460



### Very Engaged

- Almost daily interaction
- 3.6 and higher

### Frequently Engaged

- Several interactions per month
- 2.6 - 3.5

### Occasionally Engaged

- Several interactions per quarter
- 1.6 - 2.5

### Rarely Engaged

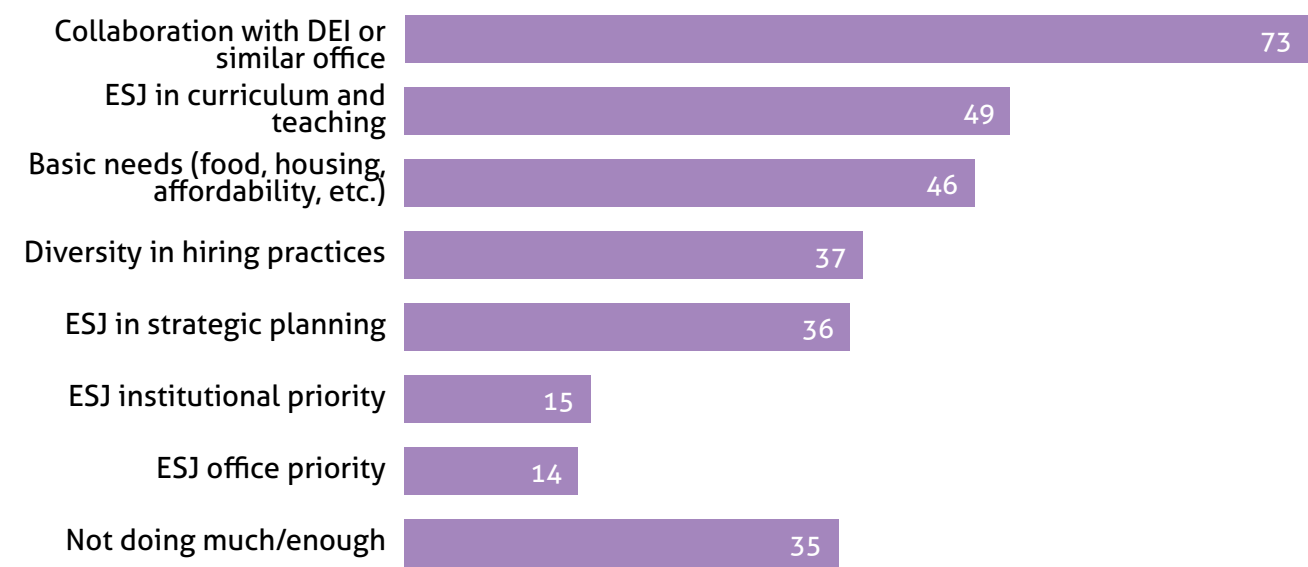
- A few interactions per year
- 1.5 and below

# Advancing Equity & Social Justice

A new, open-ended question was included in 2020 that asked respondents to describe how they are advancing equity and social justice in their work. Responses were coded to identify key themes and best practices.

The responses included a mix of what respondents themselves were doing as well as what their institutions were doing to advance equity and social justice. Collaboration with an institution's DEI (or similar) office was the most common practice referenced. Supporting individuals' basic needs was another common practice, with the majority of references related to food security (32). Some respondents indicated that this type of work is centralized in a DEI office and is therefore not needed in the Sustainability position. Other respondents (including those already doing something to advance equity and social justice) indicated that more can and should be done within their office.

## Equity & Social Justice Themes | N=323



# Advancing Equity & Social Justice



Some specific examples of the actions taken by higher education sustainability professionals to advance equity and social justice are found below.

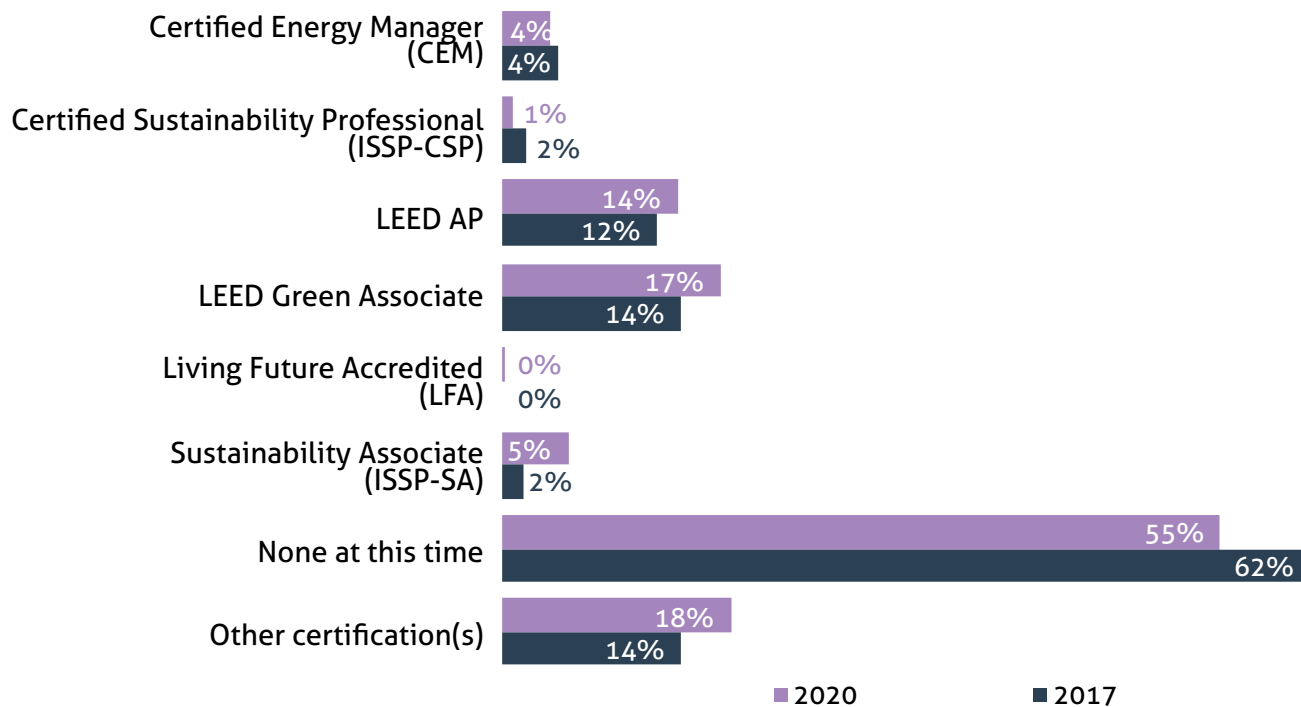
- “Developed interactive simulation activity showing the links between sustainability and social justice that is facilitated regularly.”
- “Organized a book club for faculty and staff on ESJ”
- “Created a campus award to recognize those who do this well.”
- “Am part of a team of Staff Equity Advisors, who are appointed to staff searches to ensure that search committees recognize and address hiring biases.”
- “Consult with University Indigenous community on mitigation, adaptation and reconciliation measures.”
- “Facilitate a workshop on unpacking whiteness”
- “We hired an equity & sustainability specialist and utilize Critical Race Theory in decision-making.”
- “Facilitate teaching sustainability faculty learning communities with a focus on equity and social justice.”
- “Co-host monthly after-work meetup events for staff and faculty of color at my institution.”
- “I’ve assisted with creating hiring questions around equity and social justice.”
- “We recently brought a new scholar in residence with a very strong background in ESJ into our center.”
- “We consulted with the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives in developing a decolonization walk.”
- “The Sustainability Office holds an annual Sustainability & Social Justice Inter-Organizational Retreat.”
- “We’re hiring a sustainability and social justice FTE to be housed in the Sustainability Office.”
- “All Sustainability Office staff are required to complete the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program.”
- “Our sustainability office employs four students to focus specifically on equity and justice programming.”
- “We just hired a student employee to begin building out multi-cultural engagement from the Office of Sustainability across university cultural centers, including the creation and integration of a diversity & inclusion statement and a Native Lands acknowledgment statement.”

The 2020 survey closed just before a rise in protests calling for racial equity, so the work that higher education sustainability professionals are doing to advance equity and social justice may have changed in response to these events.

# Professional Certifications

The 2020 staffing survey asked, “Which of the following accreditations or certifications do you hold?” Respondents could select any or all that applied. Results are not perfectly comparable between years because answer choices varied slightly from 2017, and the question was optional in 2020 versus required in 2017. Overall, the majority of respondents did not have any certifications, though this number has decreased since 2017. A number of other

## Professional Certifications | N=391

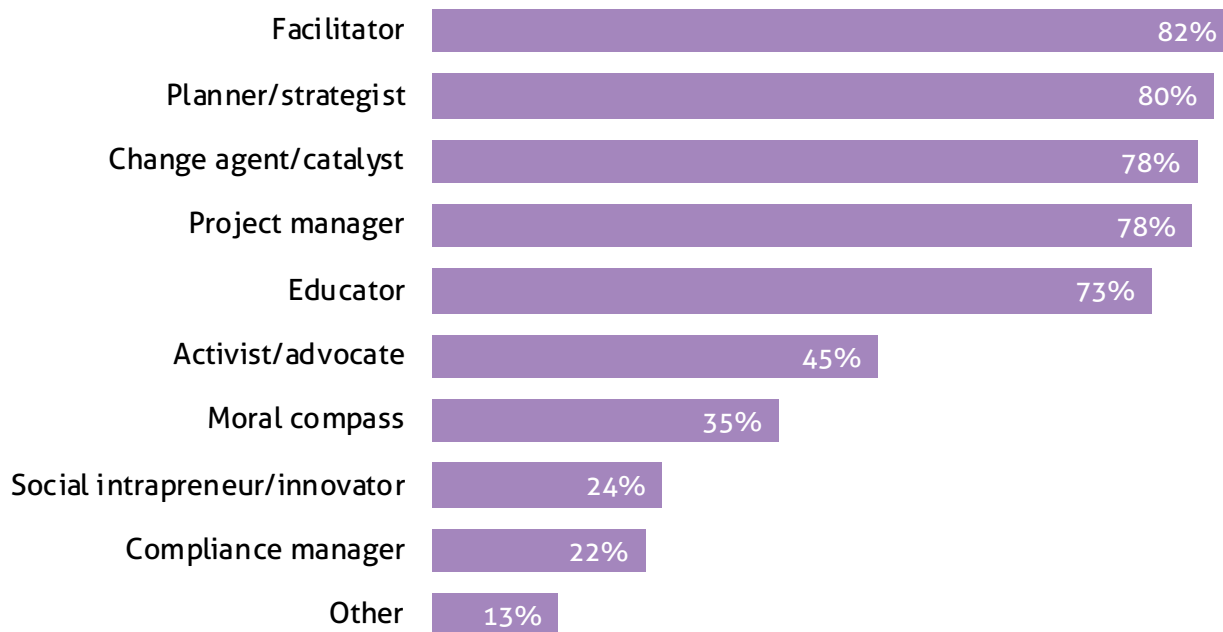




# Sustainability Work Identities

A new question was included in 2020 asking respondents, “With which of the following labels do you identify in your sustainability work?” Overall, the Facilitator label was most common, followed closely by Planner/strategist, Change agent/catalyst, and Project manager. Work identities that were referenced less frequently include Compliance manager, Social intrapreneur, Moral compass, and Activist/advocate.

## Sustainability Work Identities | N=391



# Salary & Benefits



University of Alberta Campus Sustainability Leadership Awards presented in the new Agriculture-Forestry atrium. Photo credit: Trevor Chow-Fraser



# Salary Data

The box and whisker plot below summarizes the salary range and salary quartiles for each position type, while the table below provides details. As expected, Sustainability Directors and similar positions had the highest individual salary (\$200,000) and highest median salary (\$89,000). Low outliers represent part-time salaries - part-time & hourly workers were asked to enter the amount they would earn annually based on the number of hours they were working.

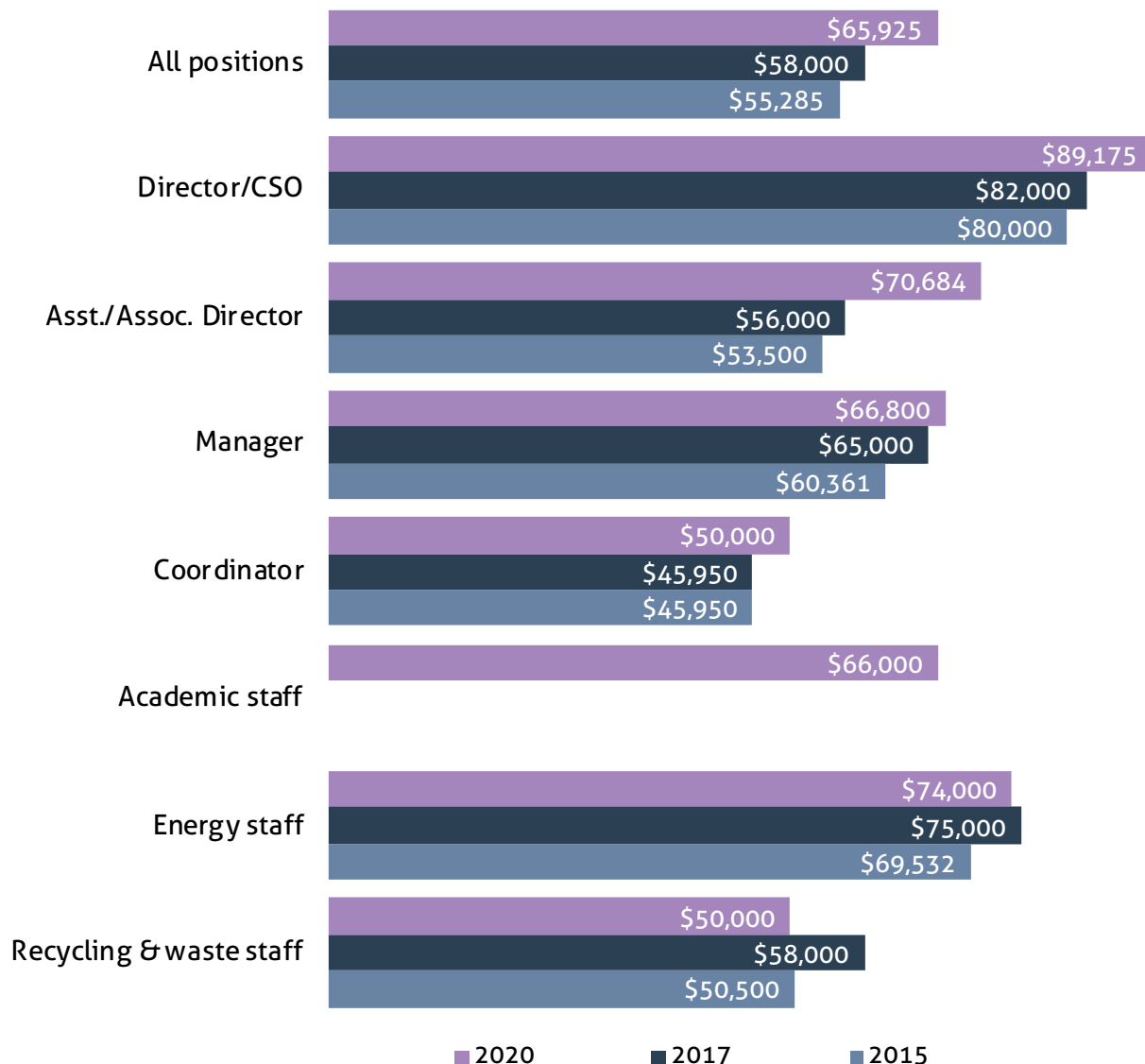
## Salary Range & Percentiles by Position Type | N=419



# Salary Change across Multiple Surveys

Comparison of 2020 salary data with 2017 and 2015 salary data shows an incremental increase in median salaries overall and across virtually all position types. On average across all positions, salaries increased by 14% since 2017 and by 19% since 2015 (academic staff were not analyzed separately in 2015 and 2017). Because this is not a longitudinal survey, comparisons over time for certain positions should be interpreted cautiously.

## Median Salary Change across Multiple Surveys | N=468





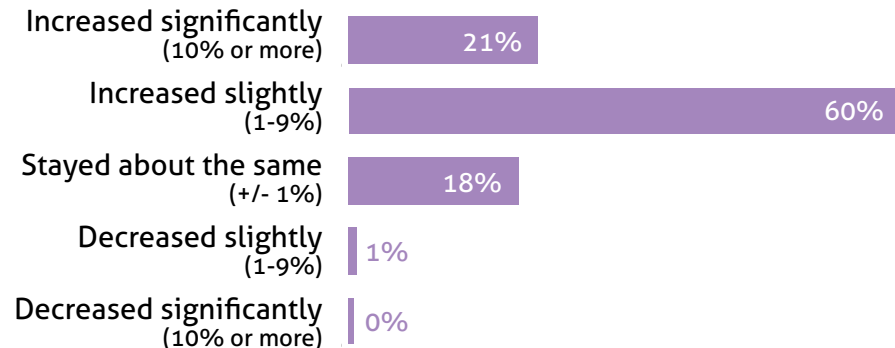
# Salary Change in Last 3 Years

A new question was included in the 2020 survey asking respondents to indicate whether their salaries increased, decreased, or stayed the same since the last staffing survey three years ago. Respondents could select Not Applicable if they were new to higher education sustainability. While similar to the previous comparison of median salaries for respondents in 2020, 2017 and 2015, this question focuses on 2020 respondents only. In combination, these analyses can provide a sense of how salaries are changing for higher education sustainability positions.

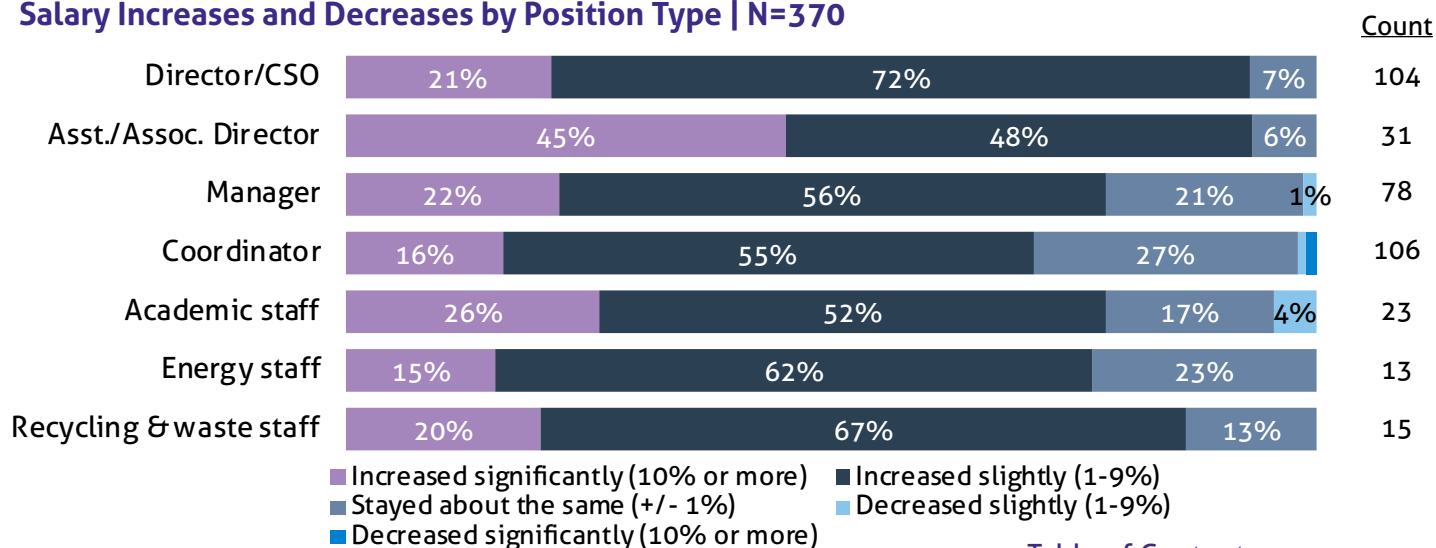
Eighty percent of respondents indicated that their salary increased slightly or significantly over the last three years, while 18% indicated that there was minimal change. Just over one percent of respondents indicated that their salary decreased significantly or slightly. Reasons for salary decreases included switching to a different position, moving to an area where cost of living was lower, and voluntary reduction in hours. Common reasons for salary increases included merit increases, cost of living increases, and promotions.

Changes in salary over time varied by position type. Assistant or Associate Sustainability Director positions were most likely to experience salary increases (nearly 45%), though the lower sample size for this position type should be considered (31 respondents). Sustainability Director positions also had a significant proportion of salary increases. Academic staff were most likely to experience salary decreases.

## Salary Increases and Decreases | N=409



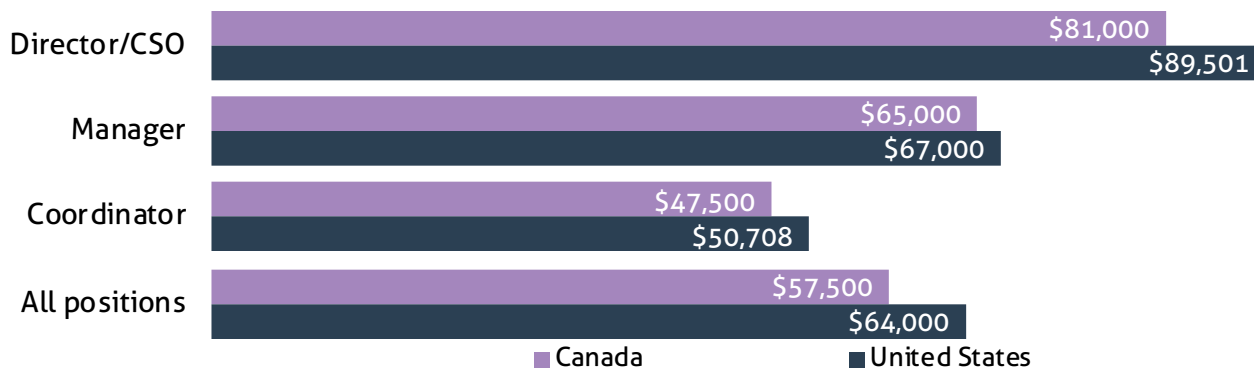
## Salary Increases and Decreases by Position Type | N=370



# Salary by Country

The 2020 survey asked respondents to enter their salary in U.S. dollars, regardless of country of origin. The table below shows median salaries by country for all U.S. and Canadian respondents, and for the three most common position types. Due to low response rates, results are not included for respondents outside of the U.S. and Canada, Assistant or Associate Sustainability Director positions, academic staff, energy management staff, and recycling & waste staff.

## Median Salary by Country | N=468

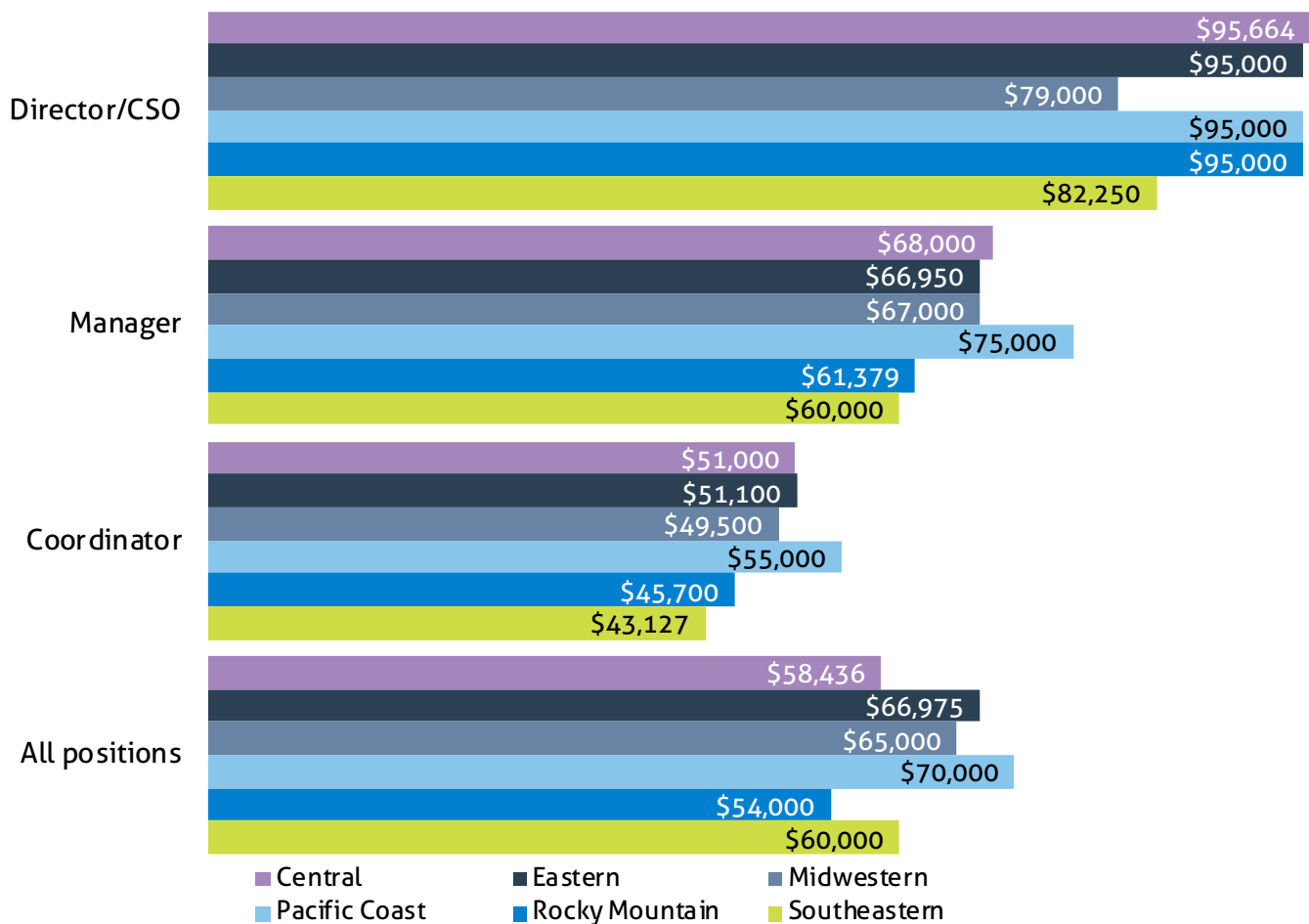


A group of higher education sustainability professionals participate in a break-out activity at the 2018 Sustainability Professionals Retreat at Swarthmore College near Philadelphia, PA.

# Salary by Region

The table below shows median salaries by region for all U.S. and Canadian respondents and for the three most common position types. Overall, respondents in the Pacific Coast region reported highest median salaries, followed by respondents in the Eastern Region. The Southeastern region had the lowest median salaries for each of the three most common sustainability staff positions.

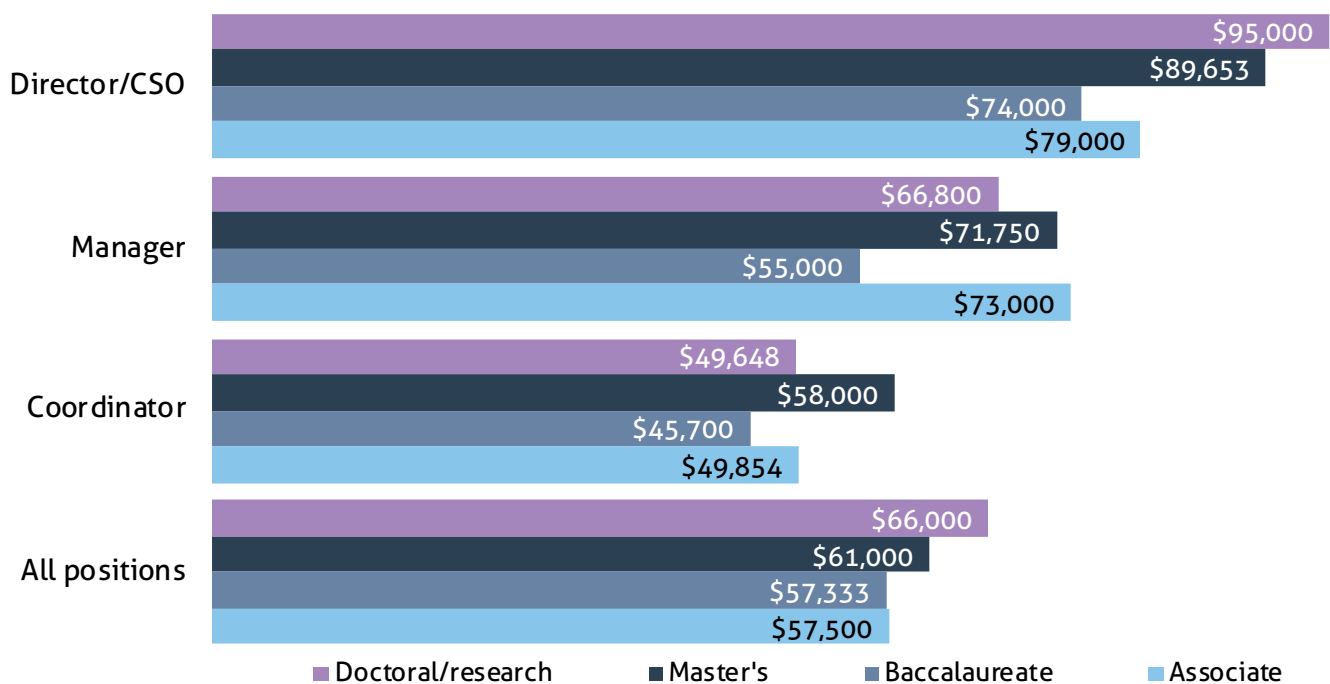
## Median Salary by Region | N=447



# Salary by Institution Type

The bar graph below shows median salary by institution type for all respondents and for the three most common positions. Salaries were highest at Doctoral/research institutions for all positions and for Directors, while Associate institutions had higher median salaries for Managers, and Master's institutions had higher salaries for Coordinators.

## Median Salary by Institution Type | N=455

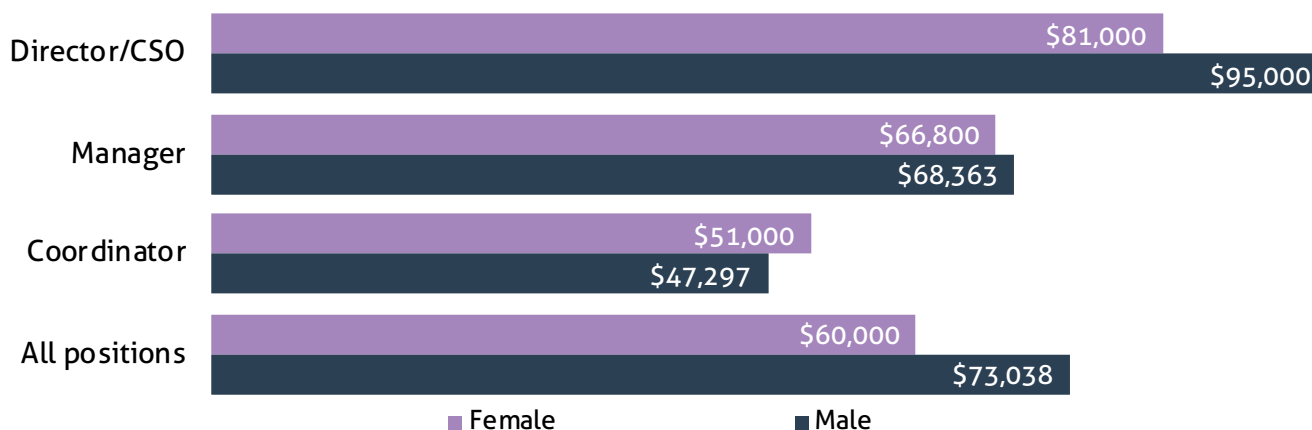




# Salary by Gender Identity

The bar graph below shows median salary by gender identity for all respondents and for the three most common position types. Average salaries were significantly higher for males in Director positions and all positions, with female respondents earning 85 cents and 82 cents to the dollar respectively compared to male counterparts. For the Sustainability Coordinator position however, female respondents earned \$1.08 to the dollar in comparison to males (women also out-numbered men in these positions more than two-fold). For all respondents overall, the gender wage gap was similar to that found in 2017 and 2015.

## Median Salary by Gender Identity | N=427

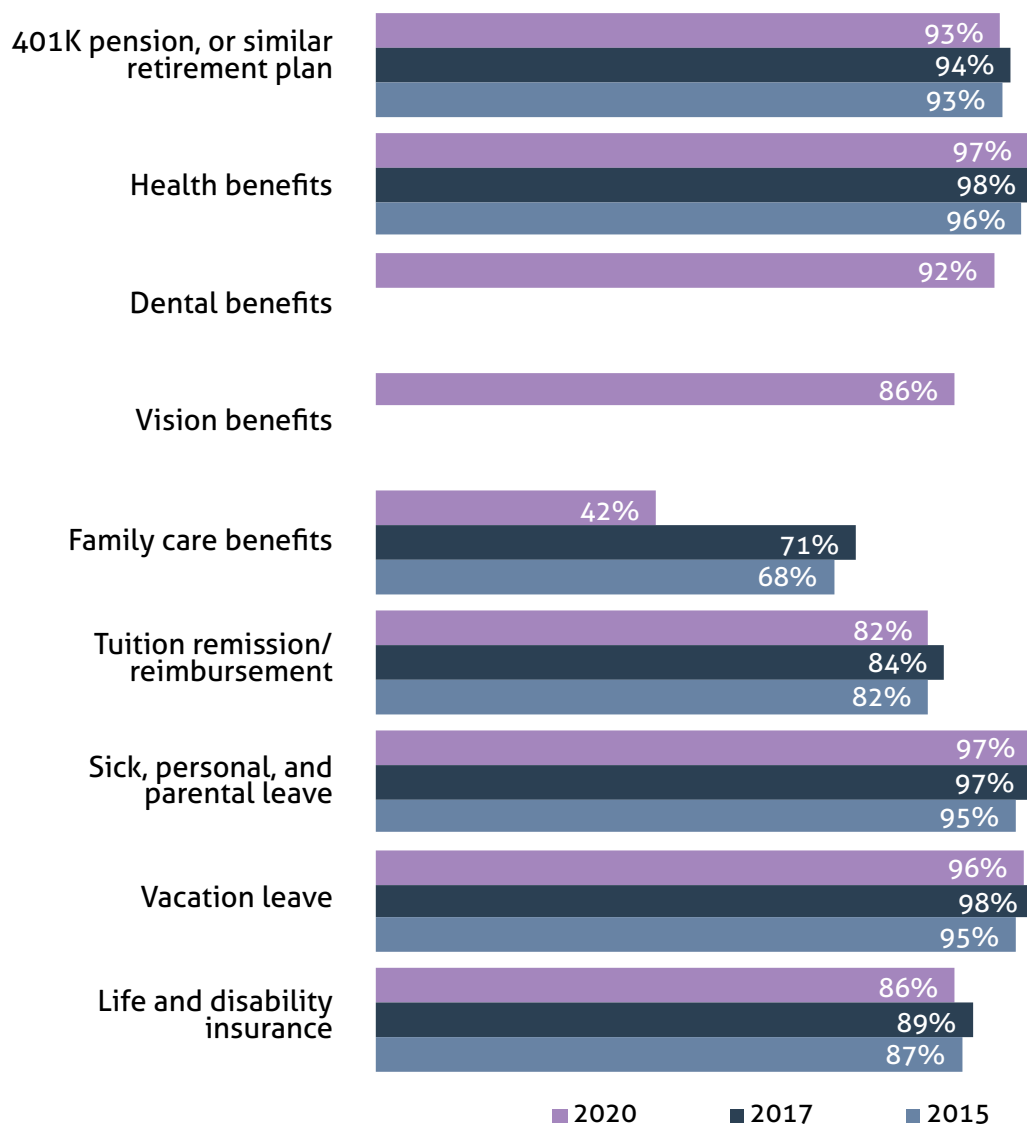


University at Buffalo Sustainability partnered with Blackstone Launchpad UB and International Student & Scholar Services to bring together six teams that shared their world changing ideas. The first place team, ElevateHER, developed a career training program for women in developing countries.

# Employee Benefits

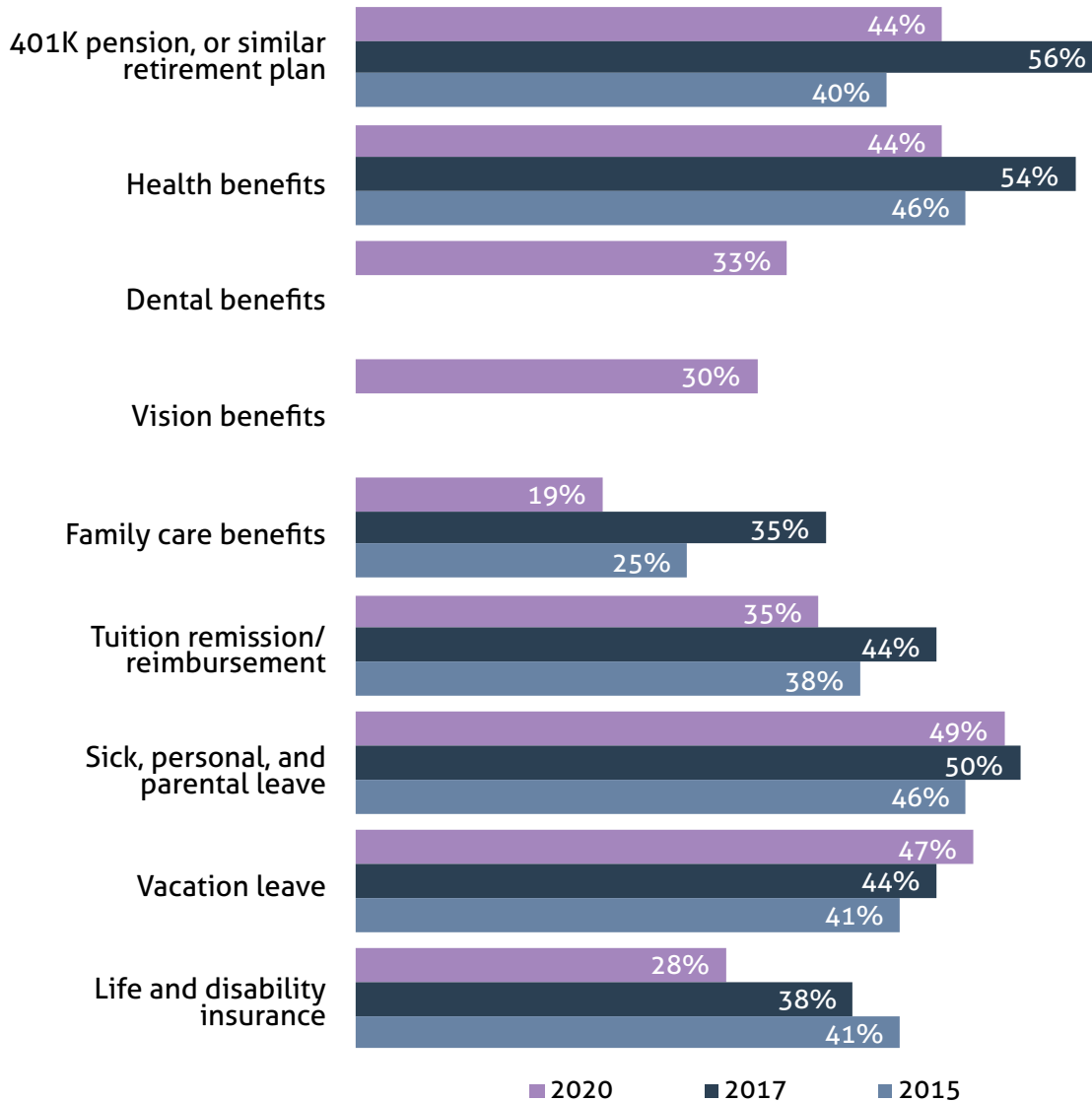
The 2020 staffing survey asked about the types of employee benefits that respondents receive through their sustainability positions. Dental and vision benefits were included in the 2020 survey for the first time. The vast majority of full-time respondents (over 90%) receive retirement, health insurance, dental insurance, sick leave, and vacation benefits. However, these types of benefits were offered to fewer than half of part-time respondents. A reduction in family care benefits was somewhat surprising among full-time respondents. Benefit rates were significantly lower for part-time employees.

## Full-time Employee Benefits | N=427



# Employee Benefits

## Part-time Employee Benefits | N=43





# Budgets & Funding



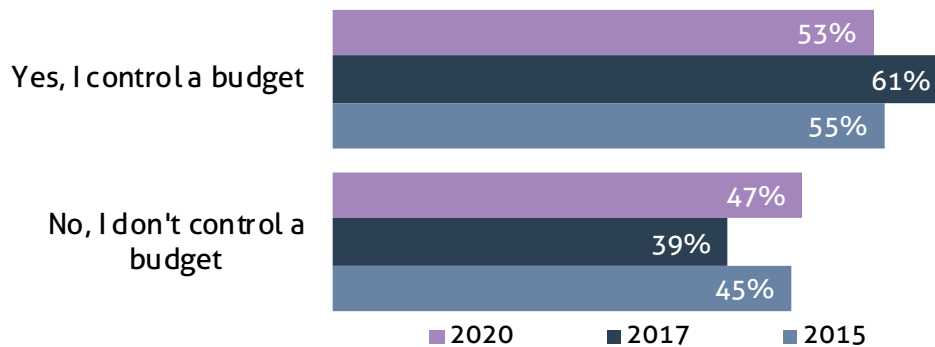
Solar Powered Umbrellas at University of Northern Colorado were made possible with support from the Student Leadership for Environmental Action Fund (Student LEAF). Photo credit: Katie Fletcher



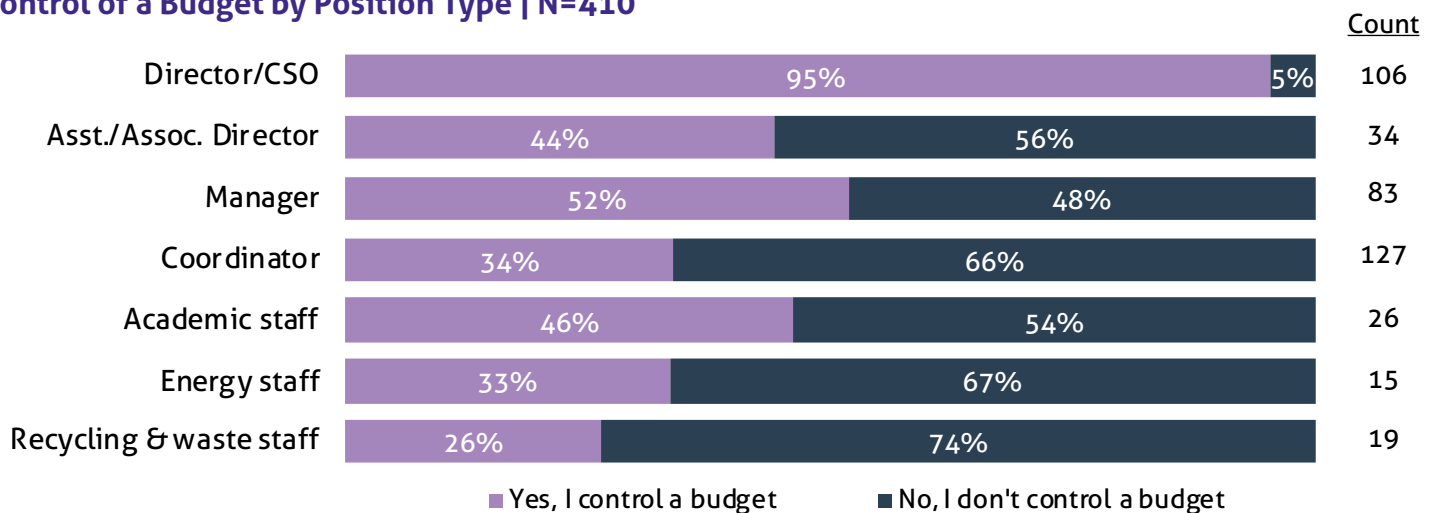
# Control of a Budget

Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that they personally control a budget in their sustainability positions (down from 61% in 2017). As might be expected, Sustainability Director positions were most likely to control a budget, with 95% answering yes.

## Control of a Budget | N=458



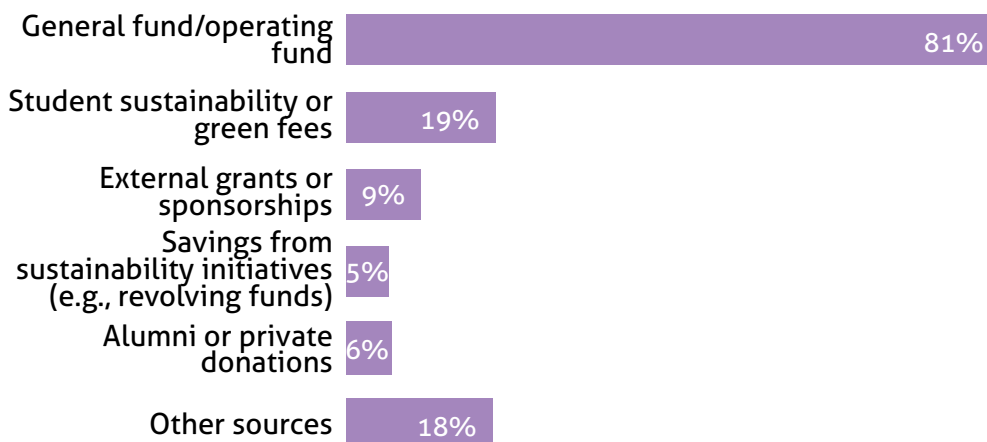
## Control of a Budget by Position Type | N=410



# Sources of Funding

Respondents indicating “Yes” to personally controlling a budget were asked a series of follow-up questions related to their budgets. One of these follow-up questions asked, “What is the source of your TOTAL annual budget funding?” and listed six potential fund source categories. This question was revised in 2020, so responses are not comparable with past years’ results. The majority of funding came from institutions’ general/operating funds. Funding from student fees and other sources was also somewhat common.

## Sources of Funding by Average Percentage | N=201



The University of Memphis Green Fee was initiated by students to support projects and practices that make the campus more energy efficient, environmentally friendly and sustainable. Events such as a Thanksgiving food recovery drive are made possible through the green fee. Photo credit: Kelse Matthews

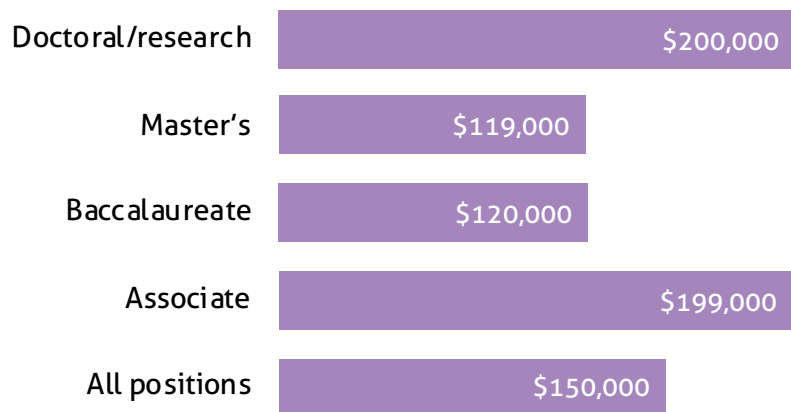
# Sustainability Budgets

Respondents indicating that they controlled a budget were asked a series of questions related to the size of their total annual budgets and the breakdown for staffing, programming, discretionary expenses, and training. This section of the survey was reformatted, so responses are not comparable to past years' results.

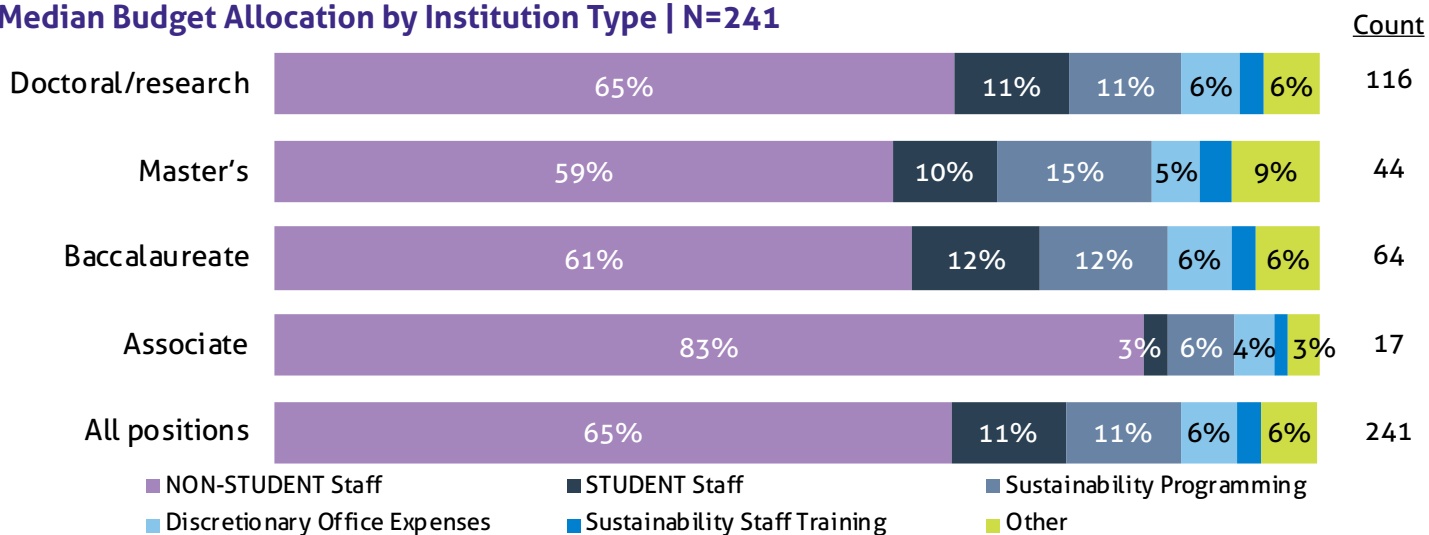
Findings were most informative when filtered by institution type and student enrollment size, and are included for all respondents and for the three most common position types. Total annual budgets were highest among larger institutions and Doctoral/research institutions. While total annual budgets were surprisingly high for Associate institutions, this may in part be explained by the relatively low sample size.

Budget allocation varied based on institution type and enrollment size. Overall, about 65% of budgets were allocated toward non-student staff salaries. A higher proportion among Associate institutions may be explained in part due to the low sample size of respondents in this group. Budget allocation was smallest for sustainability staff training.

## Median Total Annual Budget by Institution Type | N=241

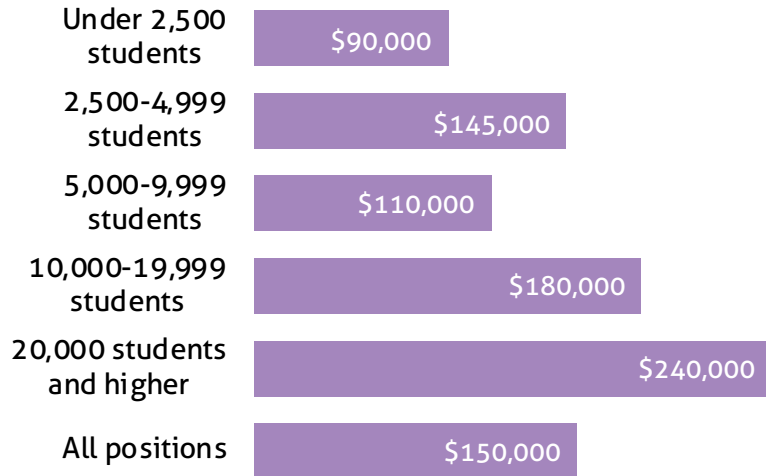


## Median Budget Allocation by Institution Type | N=241

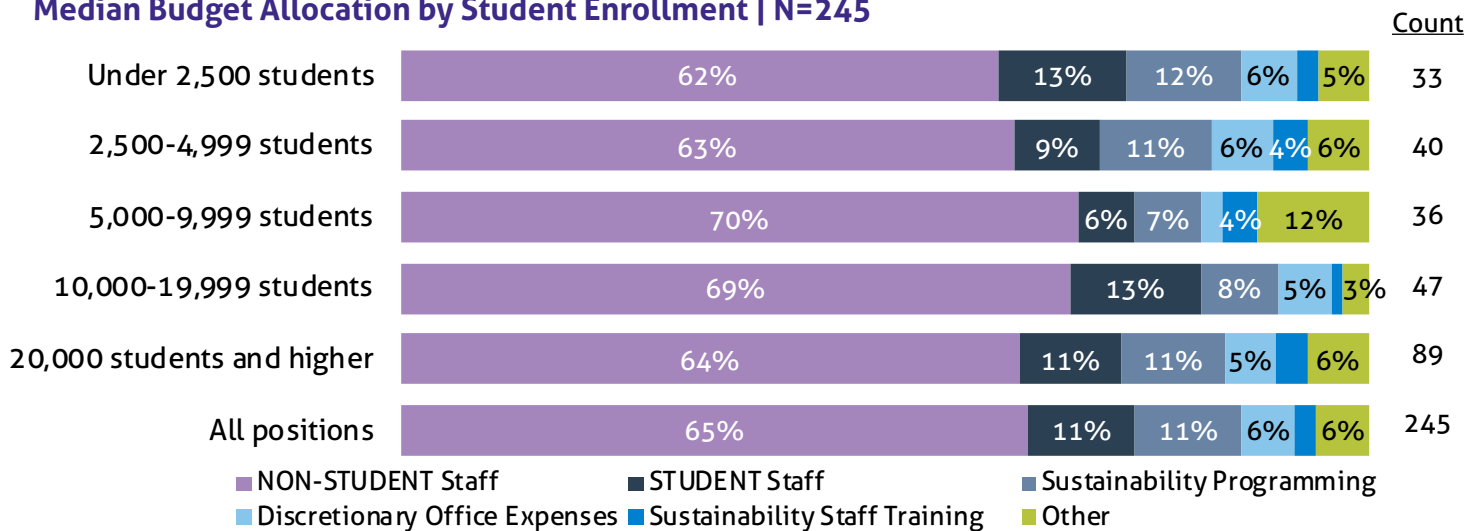


# Sustainability Budgets

## Median Total Annual Budget by Student Enrollment | N=245



## Median Budget Allocation by Student Enrollment | N=245

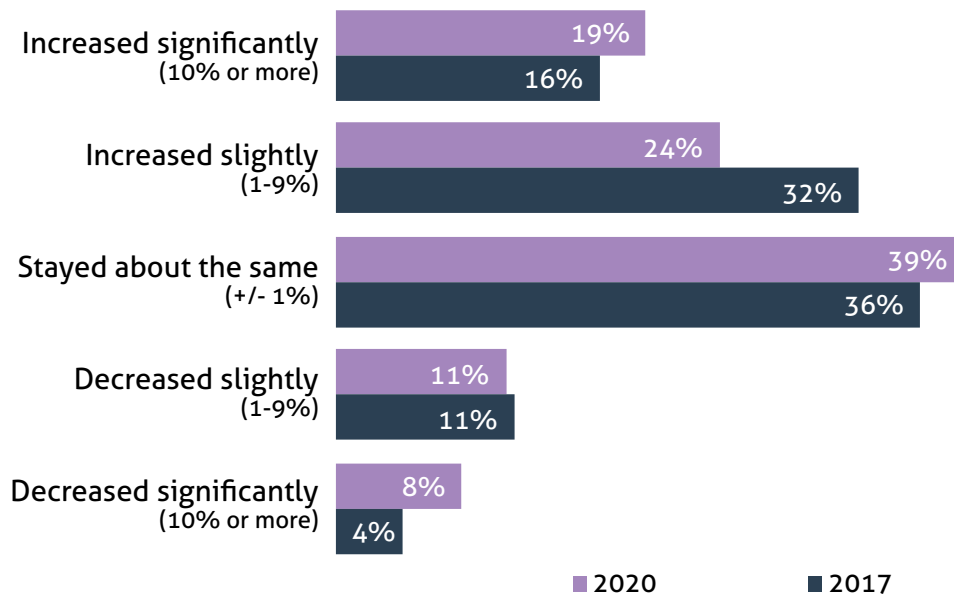




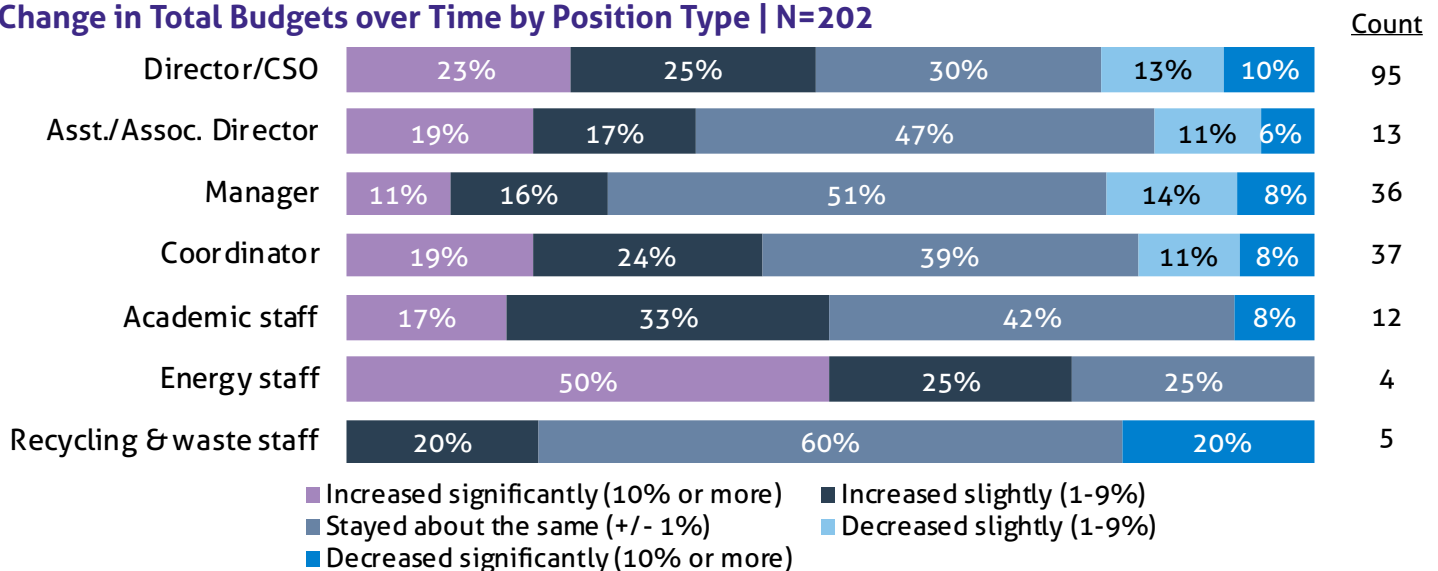
# Changes in Budget over Time

A question in the funding section of the survey asked, "Over the last three years (since the February 2017 staffing survey), how has your TOTAL annual budget changed? A similar question was asked in 2017. Choices included "Increased significantly (10% or more)", "Increased slightly (1-9%)", "Stayed the same (+/- 1%)", "Decreased slightly (1-9%)" and "Decreased significantly (10% or more)". Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that total annual budgets increased slightly or significantly, a slight reduction in comparison to 2017 respondents (49%). Results are displayed below by position type for the three most common positions and all positions. The position with the greatest likelihood for budget increases was Sustainability Director, while the position with the greatest likelihood for budget decreases was Sustainability Coordinator.

## Change in Total Budgets over Time | N=219



## Change in Total Budgets over Time by Position Type | N=202





# Supervision



Student Sustainability Committee officers harvest produce grown by Johnson County Community College Sustainable Agriculture Students. Photo credit: JCCC

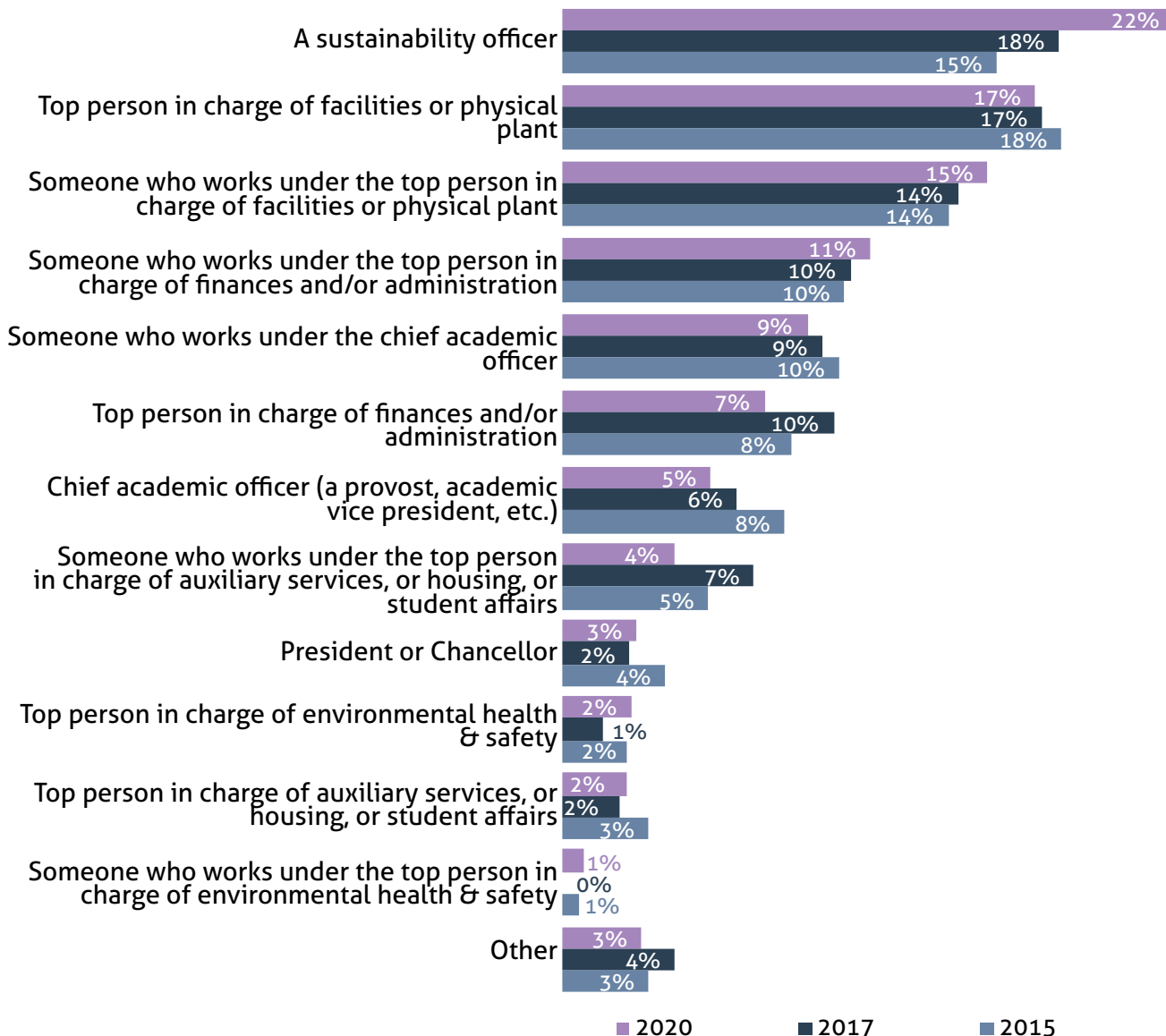


# To Whom Position Reports

When asked, "To whom do you report directly?", respondents could select up to two direct supervisors. Direct reports to a "sustainability officer" was the category most commonly referenced in recent surveys, with an increase from 18% in 2017 to 22% in 2020. While there has been a gradual reduction in direct reports to the top person in facilities or physical plant, a steady increase can be seen in direct reports to someone under the top person in facilities or physical plant.

Dual reports were frequently listed by respondents not because they reported to two different individuals, but rather because their supervisor fulfilled multiple roles. Future versions of this question will be revised to better capture intent, which is to provide a single best role for each direct supervisor. Responses under "Other" referenced positions in operations, strategy/planning, marketing", and community engagement.

## To Whom Position Reports | N=460; Total Responses = 533

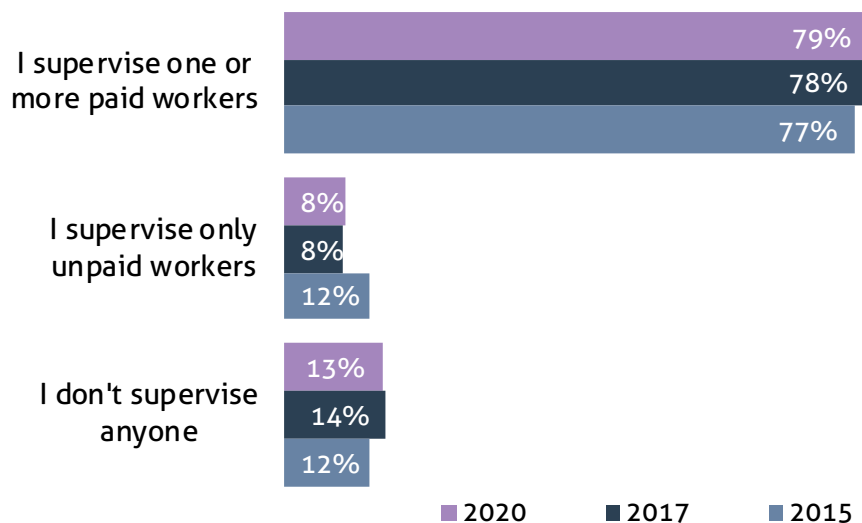


# Staff Supervision

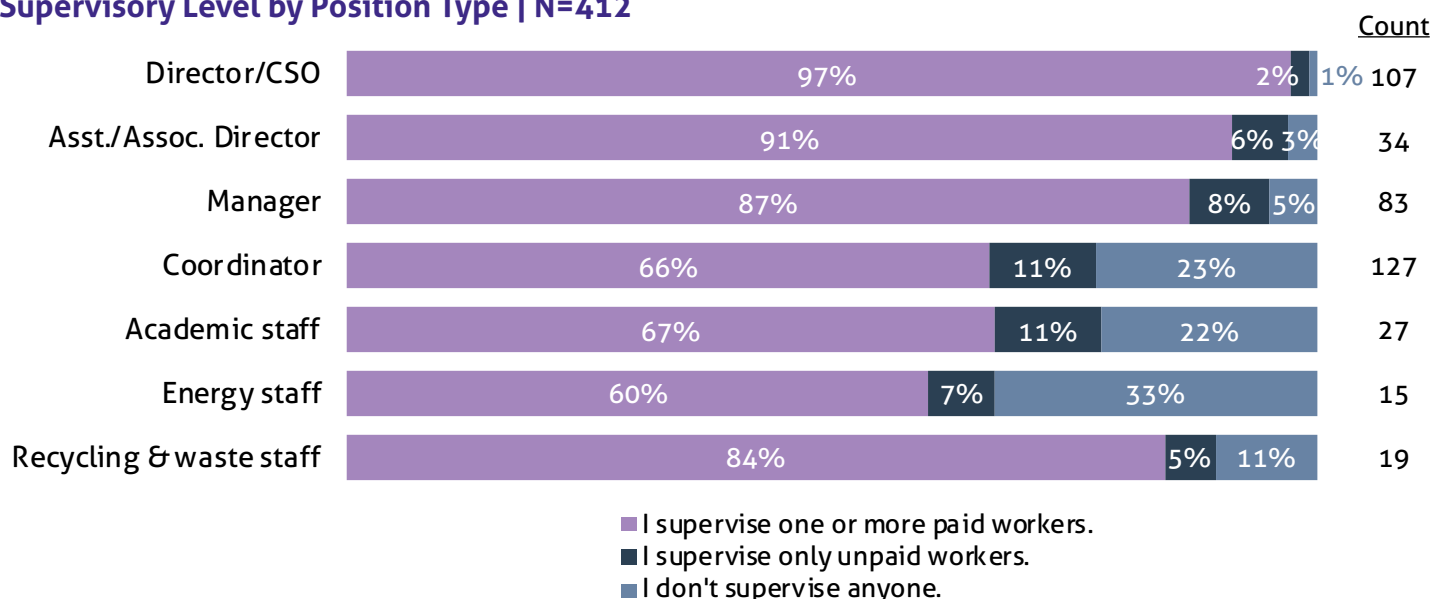
Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they supervise paid or unpaid workers. Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated that they supervise at least one paid non-student or student worker. The proportion of respondents with supervisory responsibilities has seen a modest and gradual increase since 2015.

As expected, the Sustainability Director group had the largest percentage of respondents who supervised paid and unpaid staff (97% in 2020, up from 94% in 2017 and 92% in 2015). Recycling & waste staff were also somewhat likely to supervise workers, whereas energy management staff were least likely to supervise workers.

## Supervisory Level | N=458



## Supervisory Level by Position Type | N=412

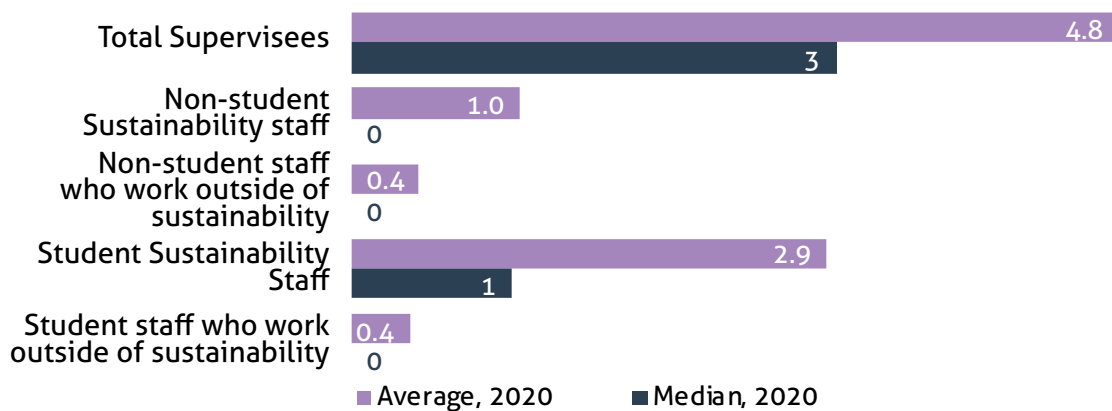




# Number of Paid Staff Supervised

Respondents indicating that they supervise paid workers were asked to indicate the number of staff that they supervise. This question was reformatted, so responses cannot be compared to previous years' results. Results are presented as average and median responses overall and by position type. Overall, very few respondents supervised staff outside of sustainability. It was more common to supervise student staff rather than non-student staff. By position type, Sustainability Directors and Assistant or Associate Directors were most likely to supervise non-student and student sustainability staff.

## Average and Mean Number of Paid Non-student and Student Staff Supervised | N=363

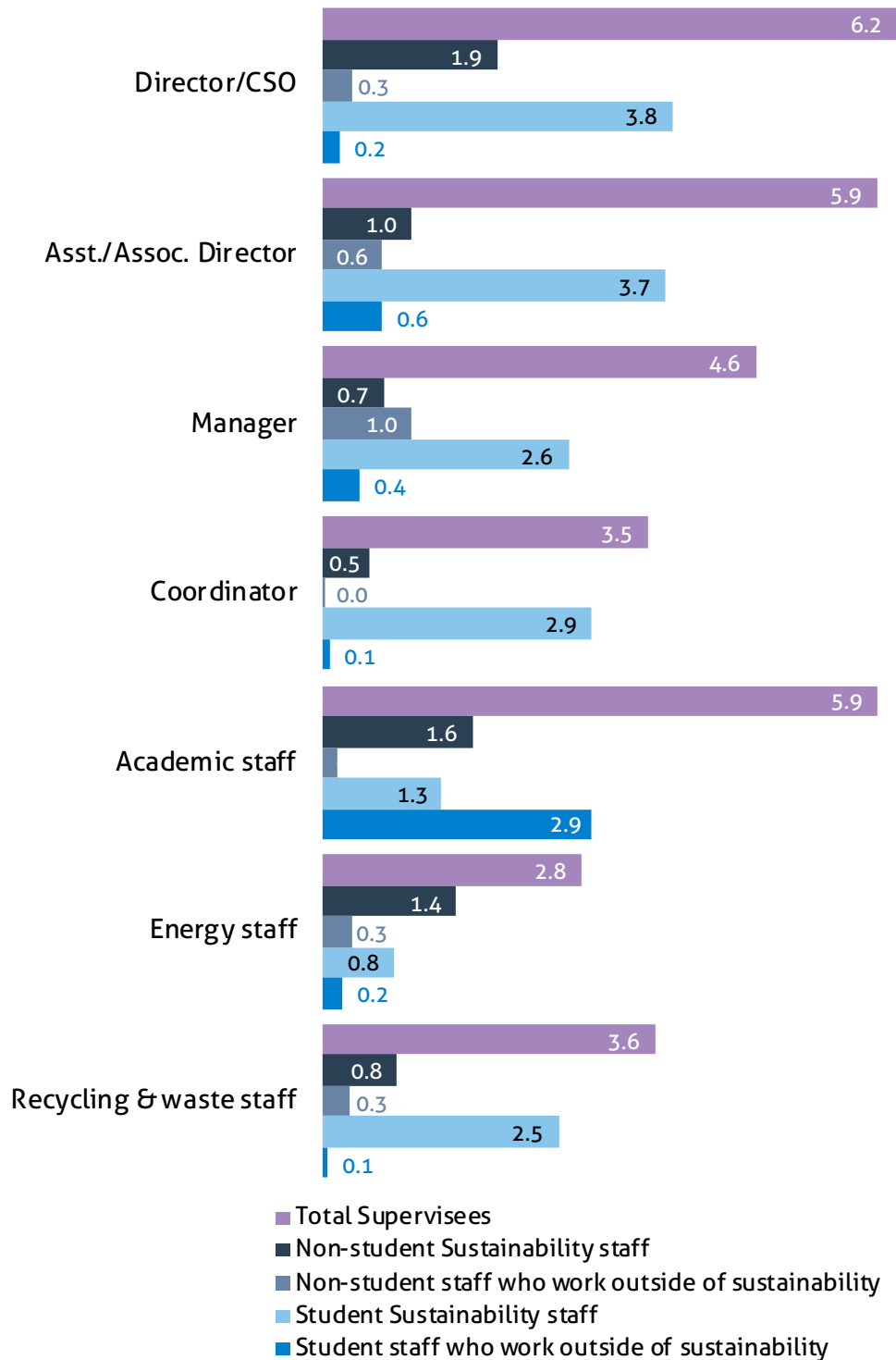


Texas A&M University Office of Sustainability staff members, Kelly Wellman and Ben Kalscheur join members of the TAMU campus community for Earth Day activities in 2018.



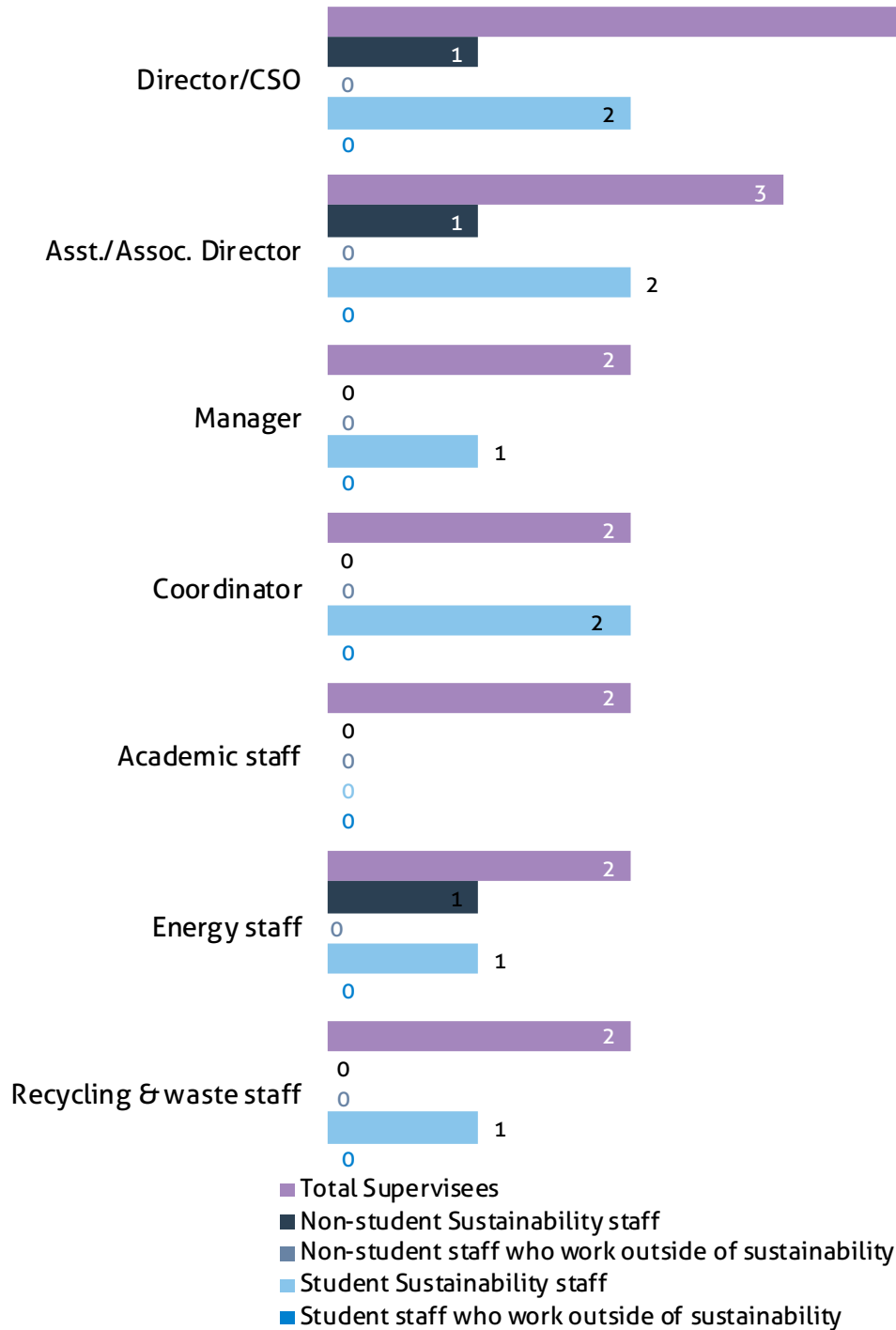
# Number of Paid Staff Supervised

Average Number of Paid Non-student and Student Staff Supervised by Position Type| N=317



# Number of Paid Staff Supervised

Median Number of Paid Non-student and Student Staff Supervised by Position Type | N=317





# Employee Perspectives



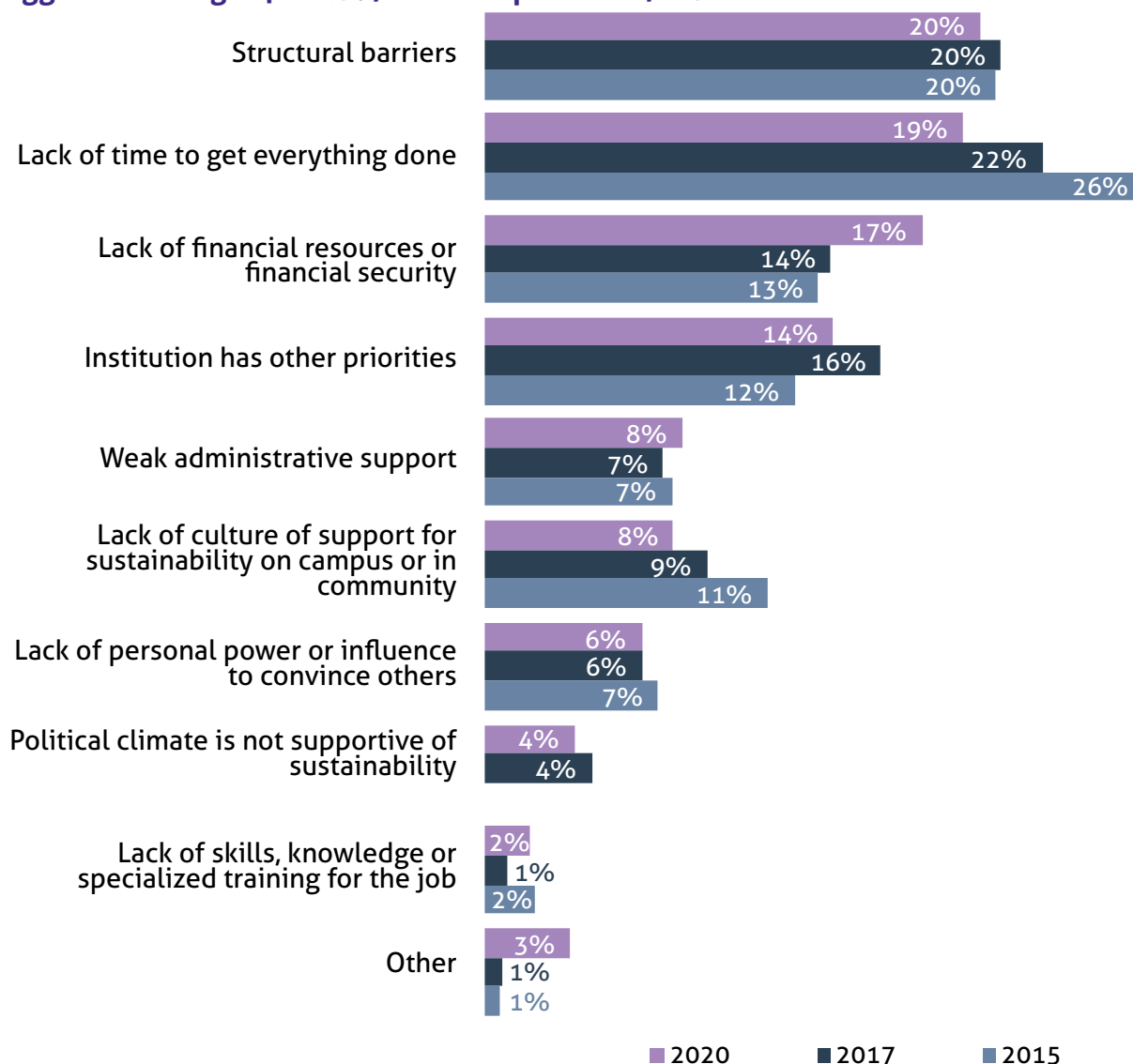
The University of Dayton Energy Team, made up of faculty, students, and facilities management staff, works to identify and implement large-scale clean energy solutions to reduce campus scope 1 and 2 emissions by 26-28% by 2025.



# Biggest Challenges

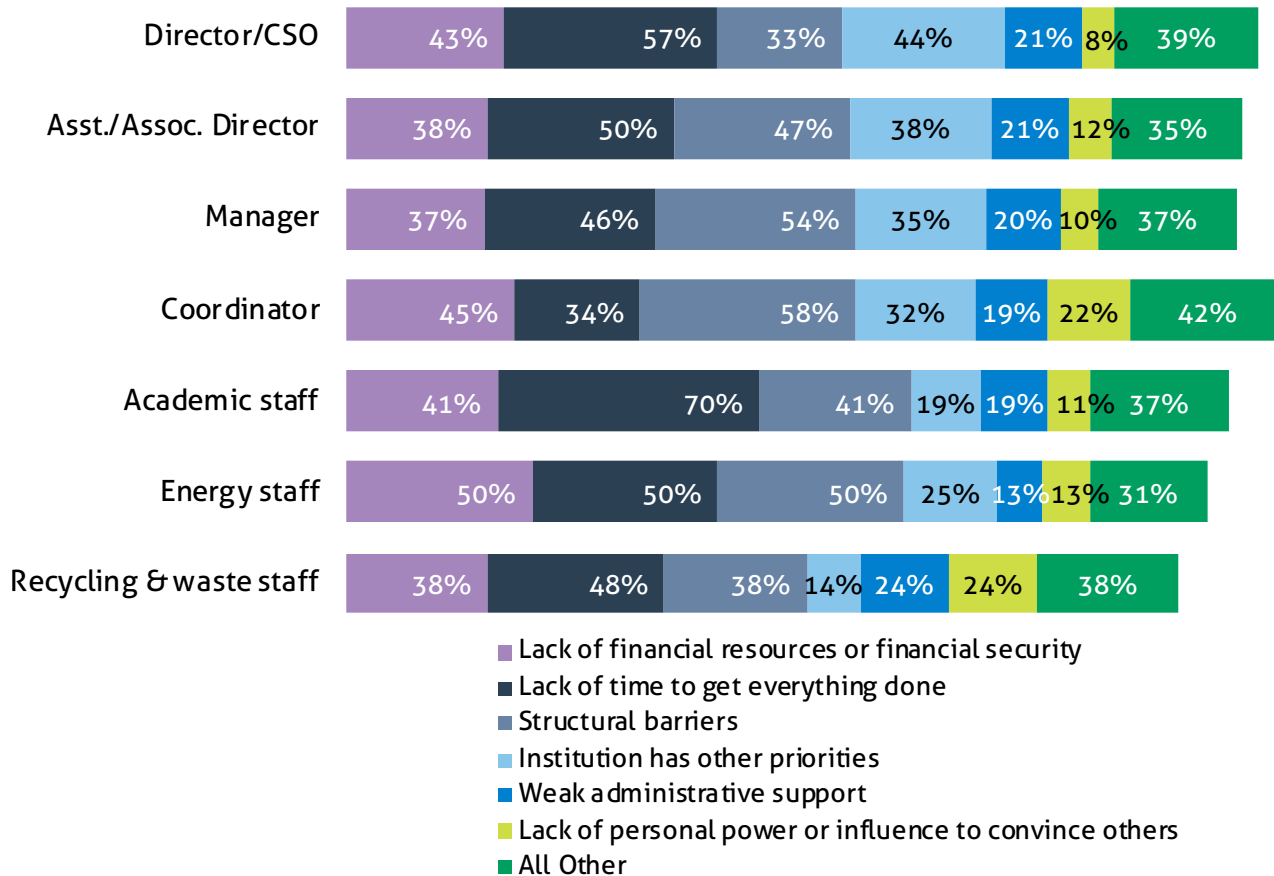
Respondents were asked to indicate the biggest challenges they face in their positions, and were allowed to select multiple options. “Structural barriers (administrative silos, policies, obstructionist individuals/offices, etc)” was cited as the top issue in 2020, whereas “lack of time to get everything done” was a greater challenge among past survey respondents. Results were similar by position type, though a high proportion of academic staff (70%) found that lack of time to get everything done was a significant challenge, and structural barriers were somewhat more prevalent among Sustainability Coordinators (58%).

## Biggest Challenges | N=439; Total Responses=1,143



# Biggest Challenges

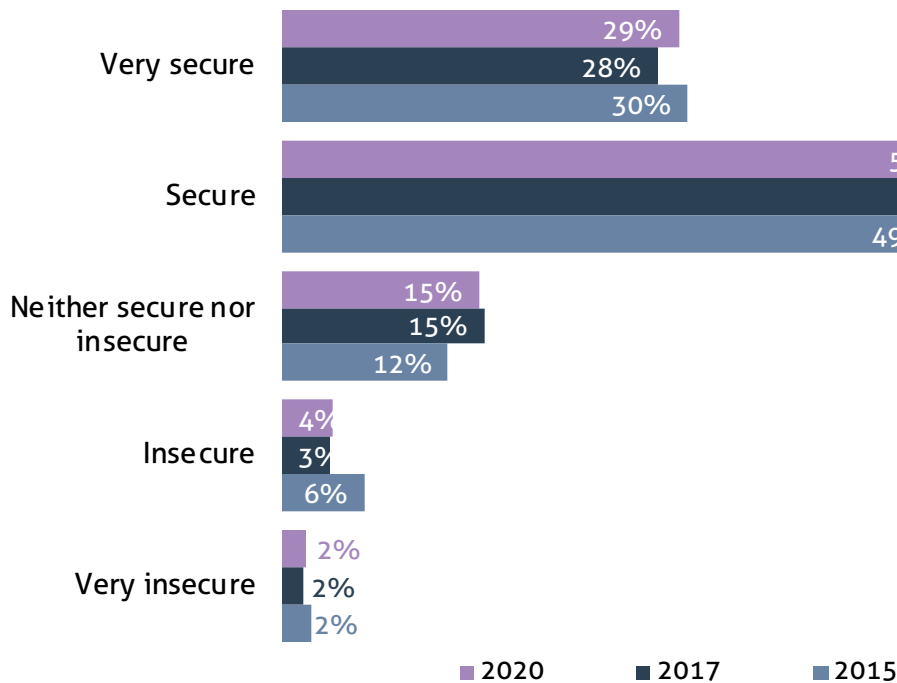
## Biggest Challenges by Position Type | N=425; Total Responses=1,036



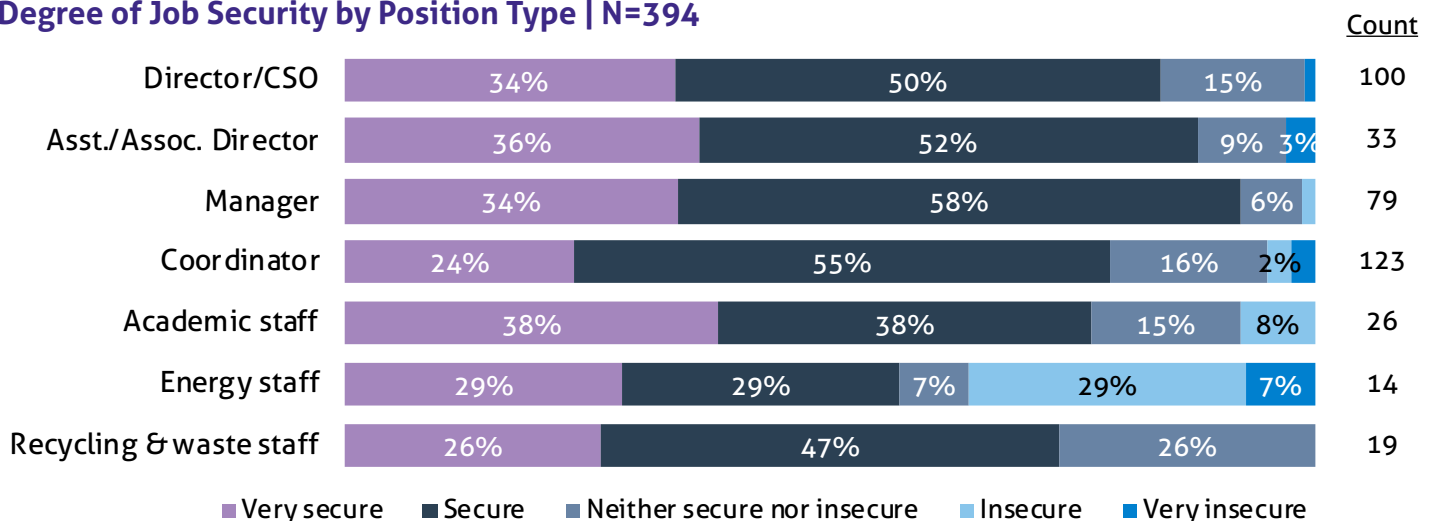
# Job Security

Responses to the question, “How would you rate your degree of job security?” have remained fairly consistent since 2015. Approximately 80% of respondents were either “secure” or “very secure” in their positions for the last three surveys. Because this survey was completed shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic began impacting higher education enrollments and revenues, the results in the next survey may look very different. Of all position types, energy management staff had the highest percentage of respondents who were insecure about their jobs.

## Degree of Job Security | N=439



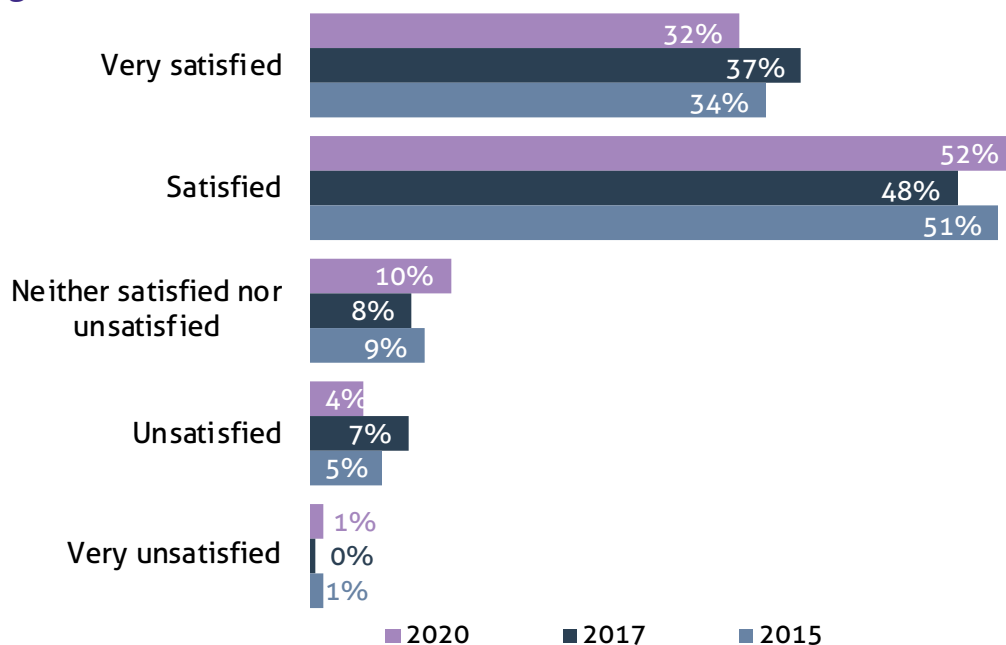
## Degree of Job Security by Position Type | N=394



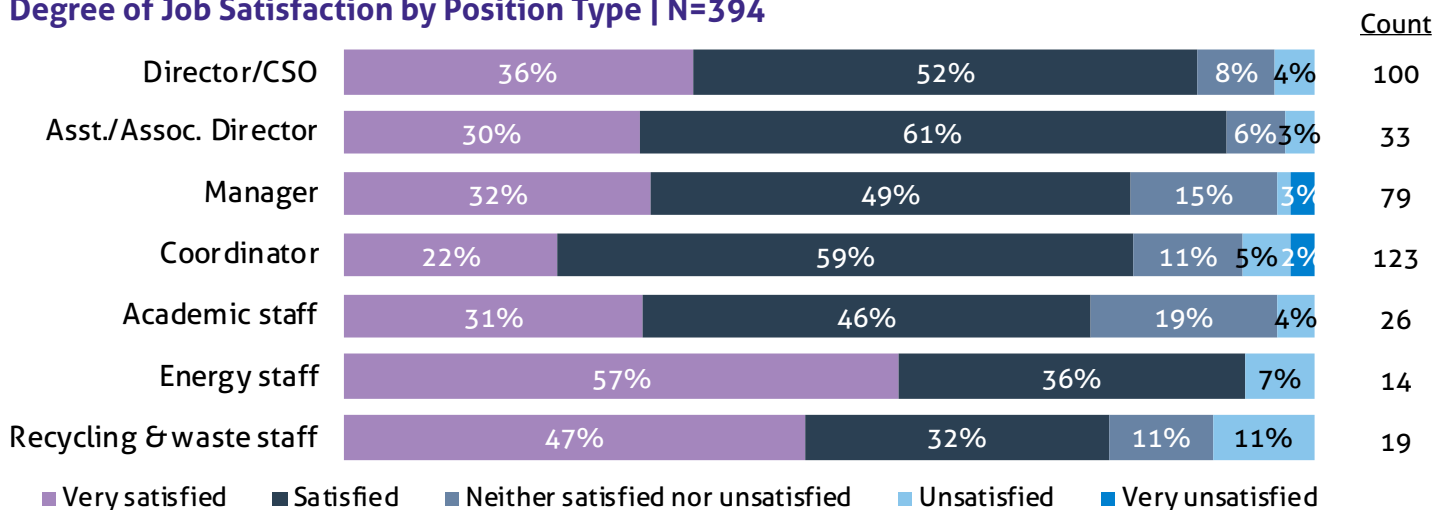
# Job Satisfaction

Responses to the question, "How satisfied are you in your position overall?", have also remained fairly consistent since 2015. Approximately 84% of respondents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" in their positions for the last three surveys. As with the previous question on job security, the COVID-19 pandemic may impact responses to this question in future years. Results varied by position type, with energy management staff expressing the most job satisfaction (93%).

## Degree of Job Satisfaction | N=439



## Degree of Job Satisfaction by Position Type | N=394





# Key Findings

The results of the 2020 survey indicate that campus sustainability positions continue to grow and evolve. Highlights from this year's report include the following:

- The higher education sustainability field appears to be maturing. While the majority of survey respondents (57%) were under age 40, the proportion of respondents over 40 has gradually increased over time.
- Almost two thirds of all respondents (64%) identified as female and the percentage of respondents who identify as male has decreased over time. The percentage of respondents who identify as non-binary or third gender has increased over time.
- While the overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) identified as "White," this number has decreased over time (from 88% in 2017 and 90% in 2015).
- Higher education sustainability is a full time job. A large majority (83%) of respondents were in full-time salaried positions and this number has increased over time.
- Respondents were most commonly housed in facilities departments, though the percentage of respondents housed in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer has increased since 2017.
- Average salaries for sustainability professionals are increasing over time. The average salary across all respondents increased by 14% when compared with respondents to the 2017 survey and by 19% compared to respondents in 2015. This general trend is supported by the 80% of 2020 respondents who reported that their salaries had increased over the last three years and 18% who indicated that there was minimal change.
- The survey provided evidence of a significant gender pay gap in salaries for sustainability directors. On average, male sustainability directors earned \$14,000 more annually than their female counterparts (\$95,000 vs \$81,000).
- A majority (54%) of respondents control a budget, with the general operating fund serving as the primary funding source for such budgets. These budgets seem fairly stable, with most having stayed the same or increased slightly over the past three years.
- There has been an incremental increase in respondents indicating that they supervise at least one paid worker (79% in 2020, 78% in 2017, 77% in 2015).
- "Structural barriers" has replaced "lack of time to get everything done" as the top professional challenge cited by respondents, largely because the percent of respondents citing insufficient time has declined over time. On the other hand, "lack of financial resources or financial security" has increased as a challenge over time.
- Large majorities of respondents felt relatively secure and satisfied in their jobs, a finding that is consistent with past surveys.

We look forward to revisiting these trends in future surveys and hope that the information provided in this report proves useful in establishing and growing sustainability offices and positions. For questions or comments about the survey or methodology, please email [resources@aashe.org](mailto:resources@aashe.org).

# Methodology

AASHE disseminated and publicized a 50-question survey for a four-week period in January and February 2020. Responses from 517 individuals were collected, and 475 of them were included for analysis in this report. Responses increased slightly from the 2017 survey (503 total responses were collected, with 452 included for analysis). Consistent with previous years, partially completed responses and respondents working in sustainability less than 25% of the time were excluded from results.

Most 2020 survey questions were also asked in previous reports, and year-by-year comparisons have been included when results were statistically significant. For readability, graph data labels were rounded to the nearest percent throughout this report, even though bar values are not rounded. As a result, two values both labeled as “4%” may have slightly different bar widths.

The information found in this report is based on a sampling of higher education sustainability professionals. These results provide a comprehensive view of higher education sustainability for U.S. and Canadian audiences, but less so for professionals outside of the U.S. and Canada. Though efforts were made to disseminate the survey widely, we cannot definitively claim to have captured representative samples for any position type. The staffing survey is not longitudinal in nature, so differences between survey years should be interpreted with caution.

# About AASHE

AASHE empowers higher education administrators, faculty, staff and students to be effective change agents and drivers of sustainability innovation. AASHE enables members to translate information into action by offering essential resources and professional development to a diverse, engaged community of sustainability leaders. We work with and for higher education to ensure that our world's future leaders are motivated and equipped to solve sustainability challenges. For more information, visit [www.aashe.org](http://www.aashe.org).



## Thank You!

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*Salaries & Status of Sustainability Professionals in Higher Education*  
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)  
Released August 17, 2020.

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