

Compensation & Incentives for Student Administrators

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Abstract

Universities could not function without the students that work alongside administrators to manage the day-to-day running. From programming and marketing to mental health support and cleaning, these so-called ‘students administrators’ are partners in providing their own education. This paper uses quantitative and qualitative information from student administrators to assess the conditions in which they work and their attitudes to them. The research finds that beyond many on-campus roles being financially inaccessible for students from low-income backgrounds, students frequently do crucial university work without pay and when students are paid through stipends, they earn fractions of the minimum wage for their labor and feel undervalued. In students eyes, over financial remuneration, they want transcript recognition and administrative and faculty understanding for the work that they do.

Watch the documentary at: <http://bit.ly/CompensationDocumentary>

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. A. Bedford", is written over a white rectangular background.

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Introduction

There's a common two-party rift in the practice of American higher education which isn't quite true. Professors who were previously the sole proprietors of university operations work in siloed tandem with a host of siloed administrators who now focus on crafting the student experience. The day-to-day running of the university, for all intents and purposes, has been ceded to the administrators: the deans, resources offices, and non-academic services whilst professors focus solely on their research, individual classes, and sometimes departmental activities. However, these two groups could not run any HEI by themselves. In every HEI, there exists a continually renewing army of student workers helping to run and support everything from catering to healthcare, event programming to advising, disciplinary action, and university media, admissions, and more. Beyond providing a relevant-perspective to decision-making, students provide a mountain of administrative and extra-administrative work without which HEIs could not run.

Most students at Harvard aren't just students, especially if they're poor. The Student Employment Office (SEO) reports that during their time at Harvard, 78% of students hold at least one part-time job. Of those roughly 5,255 undergraduates with part time jobs, 39% of College Seniors (roughly 2,000) report starting work during their first year at the College.

In recent times, Harvard has come under criticism. In 2016, Harvard was accused of underpaying 750 HUDS workers (Aramayo, 2017) leading to a 22-day strike. In April 2018, after being accused of failing to provide a full list of eligible voters 6 months earlier, Harvard Graduate Student Union won the vote to unionize close to 5,000 graduate and undergraduate teaching staff, student research assistants, and student course staff with goals to combat what underpaid student workers (Harvard Graduate Students Union - United Auto Workers, 2018). In November 2018, it was reported that Harvard had allegedly underpaid close to 300 part-time temps according to analysis by Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW) as reported (McCafferty, 2018).

With question marks hanging over the compensation of graduate, part-time, and full-time employees at Harvard, little to no ascertainable research has been conducted on the Harvard undergraduate population. Indeed, despite being only 17-18 years old when they start College, undergraduates frequently occupy roles without which the College couldn't function; roles which if not filled by students would have to be replaced by full-time Harvard administrators to maintain the renowned level of teaching and student support that the

College offers. This is the population of so-called ‘student administrators’ on campus. Students administrators program College events, serve as paid advisors, are fully trained to complement mental health counselling, serve as emergency medical technicians (EMTs) to staff all Harvard events, work as teaching fellows and course assistants, and are present in almost every office of every department from the Office of the President to the students cleaning housing at Dorm Crew. Student administrators fulfil these roles alongside full-time and part-time Harvard administrators whilst also balancing the coursework of one of the most prestigious and elite universities in the world.

Positionality and Motivations

As a student-administrator, myself, I work for CS50 as a teaching fellow (Harvard College: CS50, Harvard Law School: CS50 for Law, Harvard Business School: Harvard Business Analytics Program), as a tutor at the BSC, for the DSO as the Co-Chair of the FYRE Program, with the APO as a Peer Advising Fellow, as a House Advising Fellow in Cabot House, as a member of the Student-Faculty Committee on Undergraduate Education, as a member of the University Commission on Rights and Responsibilities, with an advisor for the Roosevelt Foundation, as a student ambassador for the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Initiative, and as a Research Assistant in the Eggan Lab.

In this variety of paid (stipend and wage) and unpaid roles, I work between Student Life, Support, Teaching, and Research roles. My motivation is in studying the other students committing their time to serve the College and understanding whether or not my experience is representative of the student body, whether students are being fairly paid, and whether there are problems and potential solutions that would ensure students are valued for their work either monetarily or through alternative means.

Literature Review

Very little research has ever looked towards undergraduate workers at universities, nevermind the critical undergraduate workers at elite Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Harvard. Tangential research in forming student leaders has been conducted, however.

Developing leadership qualities in students has become increasingly a topic of interest for educational sociologists. As Jacoby describes, “*In the space of few short years, the field of service learning has evolved from viewing students only as participants in and beneficiaries of service learning to viewing them as partners in and co-creators of all aspects of the service learning enterprise as well.*” (Jacoby, 2012) Since then, multiple papers ((Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014); (Moorosi, 2014); (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2013)) have looked at methods for forming leadership qualities in students as remedy to an perceived lack of skilled students by employers. Many combinations of how to foster student leadership have been found (i.e. mixing students with high leadership skills and low leadership skills does not give positive results (Zorina, et al., 2018)), but little has been done to research them in their working relationship with the HEI itself.

In 2015, the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce published a report (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015) on *Learning While Earning* which characterized the more commonplace practice of hiring students on campus. The report demonstrated that so-called ‘working learners’ didn’t only attend specific HEIs (public or private) and weren’t only from a specific low-income or high-income background.

Fisher and Wilson expanded the focus by looking directly at students partnering with administrators and the relationship that ensues in the realm of service-learning engagements (Fisher & Wilson, 2003). They remarked that “*practitioners are too prone to “act upon” students and regard them as less knowledgeable, less able, less worthy of trust in the context of service-learning partnerships.*”. On musing on the attitude that administrators should bring towards successful partnerships, they say “*Administrators and faculty should view students as vital and essential partners, not token representatives, in visioning, planning, managing, and evaluating service-learning programs and courses*”, calling the students complementing administrators “*paraprofessional roles*”; however, no quantitative research was referenced to assess whether or not this was being followed through at HEIs.

Although a fair few pieces have been written about service-learning projects, these activities are often seen as volunteer work outside of university operations or treated as temporary roles for students. This doesn't speak directly to the year-long administrative positions which many students hold at various HEI.s. Indeed, each HEI runs student administrative positions differently. At the College of the Ozarks, students mandatorily work minimum 15-hours per week to directly discount their tuition; working two 40-hour weeks either end of the semester, these student administrators can fully pay off their tuition of \$18,900 per year (College of the Ozarks, n.d.). At Berea College, *“all students hold a labor position in which they work 10-12 hours per week in all areas of the College”* (Berea College, 2017).

Both Berea College and College of the Ozarks are part of the federally recognised Title 34 classification of 'Work Colleges' which are:

“distinctive liberal arts colleges that promote the purposeful integration of work, learning, and service. Work Colleges are federally designated institutions that have "comprehensive work-learning-service" programs as an essential and core component of their educational programs. All resident students are required to work including one-half of all students who are enrolled on a full-time basis regardless of their academic program or their financial need.” (US Government Publishing Office, 2018)

The new formation of these Work Colleges, now numbering at 9, has yet to be well evaluated and, in the meantime, students are still occupying many of these roles informally in most HEIs. Some HEIs have gone so far to award transcript recognition on students' transcript upon the completion of set hours of student-worker engagement with the university (Fisher & Wilson, 2003).

Beyond this, though, no previous quantitative or qualitative studies could be found on the roles of students crucial to the running of the university or complementing administrators in multiple fields. Furthermore, little to no research has been done on how such student administrators are compensated or incentivized for their work on campus or how different roles compare for students.

The Administration

Understanding the scale of any problem and understanding the worth of student administrators to the campus is primary to determining the relevancy of this research. Alongside a student survey which fielded input from student administrators, a survey was sent to resource offices asking two questions: 1) *‘How many students do you employ?’* and 2) *‘What does working with students do for your office that other administrators couldn’t?’*

Whilst more than 45 resource offices that employ students will be represented in the student survey, a sample of 10 administrators who hire students were reached for the administrative perspective.

These 10 representative resource offices alone (selected at random) quoted hiring over 1,256 students per year, cumulatively. Numbers ranged from 3-21 students to 200-800 but around one quarter of the entire Harvard College student body with part-time jobs (78% of all 6,699 students) was represented by these offices taken together.

From the responses, which may be viewed in full in the appendix, 5 main themes emerged.

1) Staying Relevant on Campus

Administrators repeated the idea that, in order for their offices to continue programming and supporting students accurately, employing students was a key way both to reach students and keep a finger on the pulse. Without students administrators to guide the office, administrators implied that programming may not be on-topic or relevant to the student body.

Administrators stated, *“Through our student employees, we are more able to ensure that our work is relevant and timely to the current student body”*, *“Students in our office help us keep a pulse on what issues/topics students are engaging with on campus”*, *“the most obvious {benefit} is that students know the student experience better than anyone else”*, or *“We hire students to ensure that the programming and services we are providing are a good match to students’ own needs, interests, and concerns.”*

2) Staying Attractive on Campus

For administrators in the Admissions Office or Advising Offices, the benefit of students’ access to others students was clear. Multiple times, the offices inferred that their

programming would be qualitatively less successful without having students work for them.

Administrators said things like, *“Current undergraduates provide a genuine and relatable voice when talking with prospective students”, “Advisers and PAFs can offer the same suggestion, but a first-year student may tend to believe it more when it comes from a PAF!”*, *“The students have great flexibility, generally work with us their whole time at Harvard (we enjoy the continuity), and bring a youthful exuberance and energy.”*

3) Accessing Vital Skills

Administrators mentioned how student administrators, beyond the administrators they could employ full-time, brought skills to the work that administrators simply could not. Rather than implying that students are taking administrative roles, this implies that students are a vital organ in making the administrative work purposeful and effective.

Examples of administrators comments, from clear-cut statements such as *“They provide valuable direct services to other students that is unique compared to our staff”* referencing mental health and, *“The program wouldn’t exist without the students”* to larger-picture comments such as, *“if we want to change the culture at Harvard, students voices must be included in the larger conversations about structural or organizational changes that could be made”*, *“Their enthusiasm about life at the College helps high school students better understand the Harvard experience.”*

4) It’s Altruism

Despite only being asked what students bring to the office, administrators were repeatedly very eager to instead emphasize the benefits that students were receiving from the interaction. The insistence that students benefitted from the arrangement, too, was mentioned time and time again in both the recorded and informal conversations.

Administrators said, *“PAFs tend to say that PAFing is among the most rewarding activities on campus, and often enhances their sense of belonging”*, *“We also know that students learn a lot of valuable skills from planning events, working on a team, writing and designing publications, interacting with visitors, and generally supporting the mission of the DSO”*, *“engaging with them about their academic life and life in general. As a non academic office, it’s a wonderful way of connecting, and providing informal ‘advising’”*

5) **It's Financially Lucrative**

By contrast, one administrator from the 9 who filled out all two questions mentioned that one primary reason for hiring student administrators was financially motivated. For many student administrators, their work may be unpaid or paid by set stipends or wages. This administrator writes, “*Having administrators fill all of these positions would not be financially beneficial to our organization*”, hinting at the fact that student administrators are far less costly and far easier to employ than full-time employees.

The Student Administration Survey

Methods

55 survey responses from student administrators were recorded over a period of roughly two weeks. The survey¹ was sent out on a House mailing list and on a number of other channels including the first-gen students mailing list in order to try and obtain a representative sample of financial aid-eligible students who make up a disproportionate minority on campus. Survey requests were also sent to all offices to attempt to build a sample from every office; fewer than 3 on-campus roles were represented more than once with every other response being a unique role entry.

4 survey responses were deemed as invalid for not meeting the selection criteria of fitting student administrators roles whereby the removal of such a job would require replacement for full university function. Examples of this include Harvard Mountaineering Club, Harvard College Events Board, and CARE organizers (student group roles deemed non-essential), a House Tutor who did not fit the undergraduate population of this study but showed interesting results. For perspective, examples of the remaining 47 roles deemed essential include paid Peer Advising Fellows, HarvardX Teaching Staff, BGLTQ Office interns, CAMHS Peer Counsellors, and Dorm Crew cleaners.

Of the 51 remaining valid surveys, 39 had all questions complete with a further 8 having sufficient partial completion (above 30%) to extract useful aggregate relationships from. Finally, 47 full- and partially-complete surveys were used to conduct all data analysis.

Standardizing Responses

Many students reported their wage as either an hourly wage (“\$14/hour”) or as a stipend (“\$500/semester”) with varying time basis. Students also recorded the number of hours that they worked in the role they responded for. In order to standardize the results for analysis, wage responses were left alone whilst stipend-based pay was converted to an hourly-wage equivalent. This was performed by dividing the total stipend amount by the total number of hours in the semester the student reported working, as given by the number of hours per week

¹ Full dataset available upon request from james_bedford@college.harvard.edu

multiplied by an assumed 13 workable weeks during one semester or 26 during a full academic year.

It is important to note that the number of workable weeks chosen, 13, is likely a slight underestimate of how many weeks students work but it taken from the first day of classes to the last day of class excluding Harvard College Reading Period or Finals Period. The reality is that many students still elect to work within this time and some come back early to begin working before classes commence. The implication is that stipends-based pay levels are likely overestimated as higher hourly wages in this research than in reality.

In order to understand the rough type of jobs that students were performing, they were sometimes collected in aggregate forms. That is, they were converted into one of four classes of student administrator jobs that are Teaching roles, Research roles, Student Life roles, and Support roles. Teaching roles include Teaching Fellows, Facilitators, Peer Study Leaders, or Course Assistants. Research roles include research assistants or other necessary research-related roles that would otherwise need to be replaced. Student Life roles include any roles focused on programming for students or working in a Student Life resource office at Harvard College such as the Dean of Student's Office, Harvard College Women's Center, or programming arm of the Harvard College Admissions Office. Support roles include student administrators supporting a subset of the student population in a supporting manner such as CAMHS Peer Mental Health Counsellors, Dorm Crew cleaners, BSC tutors, or EMS Medical Staff.

A Likert Scale was used for one of the series of questions. That data was cleaned by converting 'Strongly Agree' answers equal to the positive integer 2 and continuing downwards until 'Strongly Disagree' answers were set to -2. The scale from -2 to 2 was then analyzed.

Student administrators were invited to select multiple options from a series of choices in one question. There, if the respondent selected multiple options then the individual options selections were unlinked and the total number of responses from all respondents for one choice was taken as a percentage of the total number of all options selected for all choices and that was recorded for data analysis. To clarify, if students were invited to select representative options A and/or B then the total number of votes for A from all respondents would be taken as a percentage of the total number of all votes (the sum of the votes for A

and votes for B). Respondents could select as many choices as they liked but only with equal weight.

Data Analysis

After prefacing with demographic survey information, data analysis was split into six parts. The first analyses what the student administrator map looks like at Harvard. The second looks at the methods of compensation. The third looks at which students take which roles on campus. The fourth looks at how students feel about their compensation. The fifth looks at why students do the work that they do. The sixth looks at the alternative compensation and incentive methods that students would find preferable.

Survey Demographic

The survey recorded information about respondents' race/ethnicity, class year, gender, and financial aid eligibility.

Racially, White/Caucasian student administrators were overrepresented in the survey with 52% of respondents identifying. This was followed by 14% Asian or Asian American, 12% LatinX or Hispanic, 10% Black or African American, 5% Middle Eastern or North African, 2% American Indian or Native American or Indigenous Peoples, and a remaining 5% not disclosing their identity.

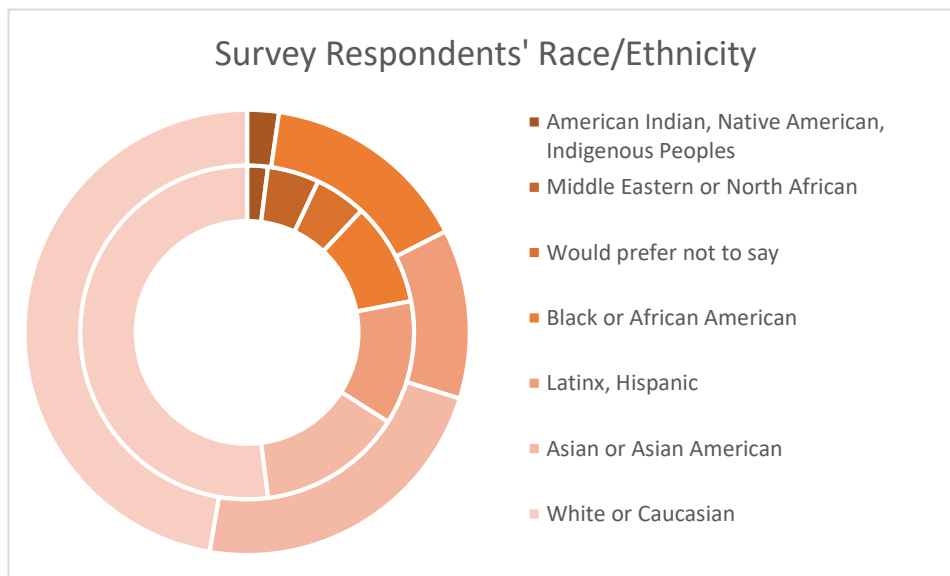


Figure 1 Survey data shows white student administrators are marginally overrepresented

The inner circle of Figure 1 represents survey participant data whilst the outer circle represents the equivalent racial makeup of the Harvard College Class of '22 where categories overlap (Middle Eastern or North African and Non-Disclosed is not included). As compared

to the most recent, most racially diverse Class of Harvard College, White student administrators are marginally overrepresented and Black or African American student

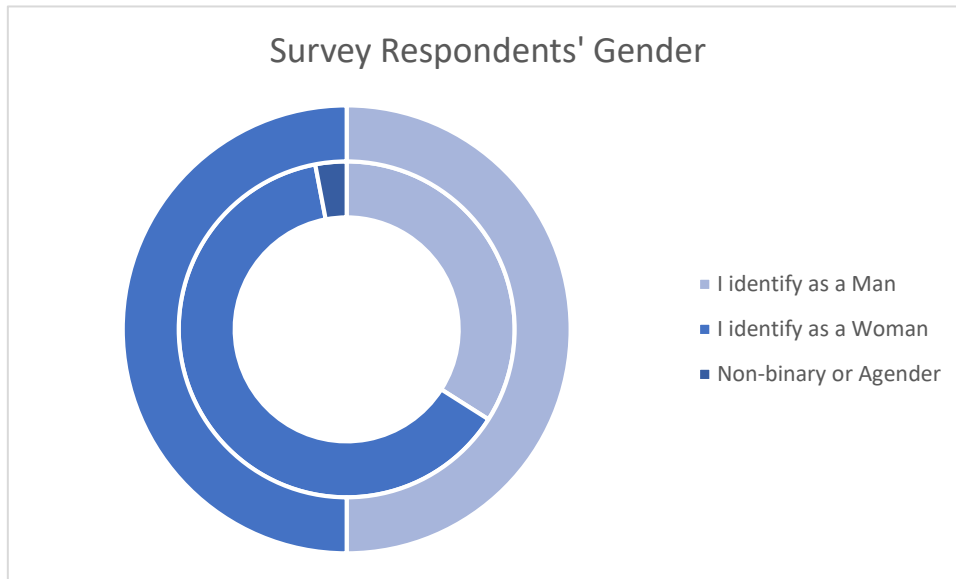


Figure 2 Survey data shows women make up the majority of respondents

administrators are slightly underrepresented. By and large the data is comparable.

Women student administrators are overrepresented in the survey data, too, as shown by Figure 2 where the inner circle is survey data and the outer circle is the 50:50 admissions estimates.

Women make up 63% of the survey respondents with men making up 34% and non-binary or agender students contributing to the remaining 3% of respondents.

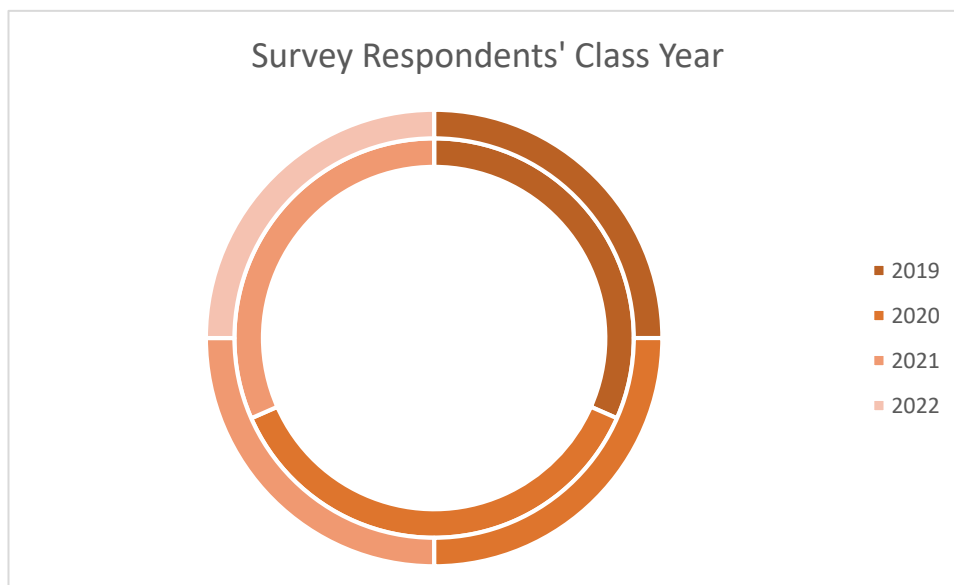


Figure 3 Upperclassmen made up the entirety of survey respondents

Students administrators responded only from the Sophomore, Junior, and Senior classes; there were no First-Year survey respondents. This is likely due to the timing of the survey which came out during the mid-late fall semester (First-Year’s first semester) when many First-Years may not have found or settled into an on-campus job.

Again, the inner ring represents survey respondents with 32% Class of 2019, 37% Class of 2020, and 32% Class of 2021. The outer ring represents the roughly 25:25:25:25 split between all classes including the class of 2022. Overall, each class garnered a similar number of responses and Upperclassmen are likely to have experienced a full semester’s workload in their jobs allowing them to reflect more accurately upon them.

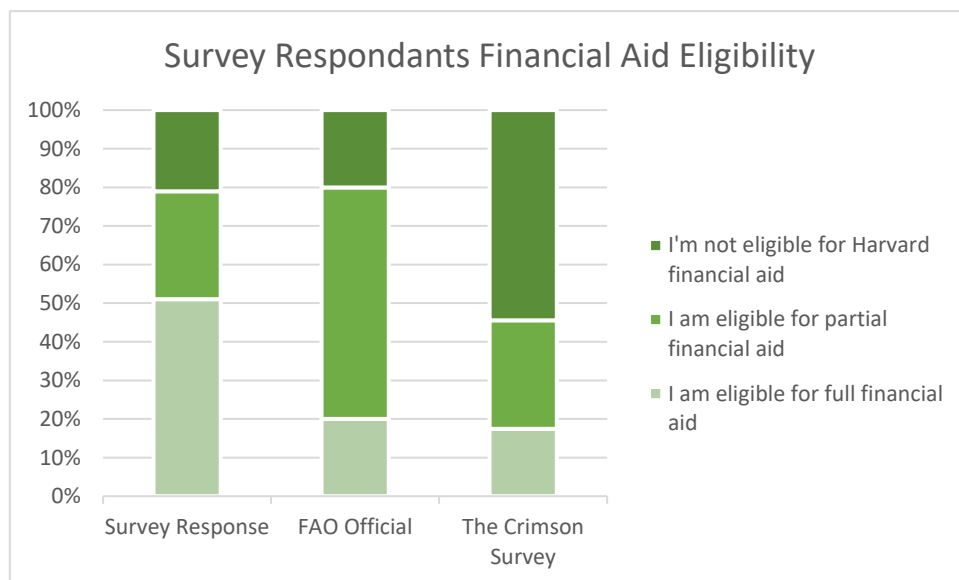


Figure 4 The Distribution of Financial-Aid Eligibility through multiple measures

Student administrators’ financial aid eligibility was recorded as the final piece of demographic information. Figure 4 shows the financial aid eligibility of respondents on the left as compared to the college-stated financial aid eligibility on the middle bar (which are fairly vague and split 20:60:20%) and the rightmost bar reflecting Harvard Crimson’s Class of 2022 Freshman survey data of students who fit the Financial Aid Office’s guidelines for financial-aid eligible (that is full financial aid below \$65,000, partial financial aid between \$65K-150K, and no financial aid above that) with about 65% of the class reporting (1,064 out of 1,661 students).

51% of survey respondents were full-financial aid eligible whilst the FAO quotes that number at 20% and the Crimson Freshman Survey at 17%; clearly, full-financial aid students were

overrepresented in the data. Whilst the FAO quotes about 60% of students as being eligible for partial financial aid, the Crimson estimates this at 28% with the percentage of partial-aid-eligible survey respondents also being 28%. The percentage of respondents with no financial aid eligibility was 21%; the FAO states the official percentage is 20% whilst the Crimson reports 54% of students

These results may be due to the fact that full-financial aid students are more likely to be working in these student administrator roles in the first place, that full-financial aid students were more likely to fill out this sort of survey headlined as being about compensation for their work, or that full-financial aid students were disproportionately targeted through survey outreach. The suspicion is a mix, in varying proportions, of all three.

On the Average Harvard Student Administrator

The first analysis to understand the student administrator compensation market at Harvard was to simply plot the jobs on one graph. The aim of this to try and see whether there was any one generalizable Harvard compensation method for these workers or not.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, there is no recognizable trend for Harvard’s compensation mechanism. Neither standardized by SEO nor College, compensation within offices isn’t often standardized and as shown by the plot, there is little predictability. There are many student administrator jobs spread out at high levels with many also bordering the x-axis with \$0 pay for various hour time commitments in the same range as paid jobs.

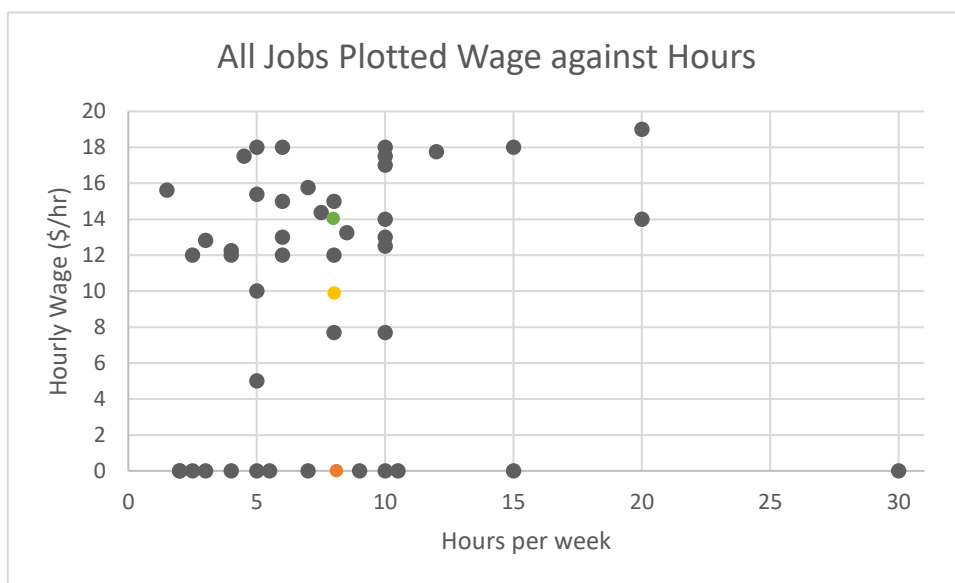


Figure 5 Map of student administrator jobs at Harvard

Each grey dot represents one unique job, the green dot represents the mean of all paid jobs, the orange dot represents the average of all unpaid jobs and the yellow dot represents the average of all jobs paid or unpaid.

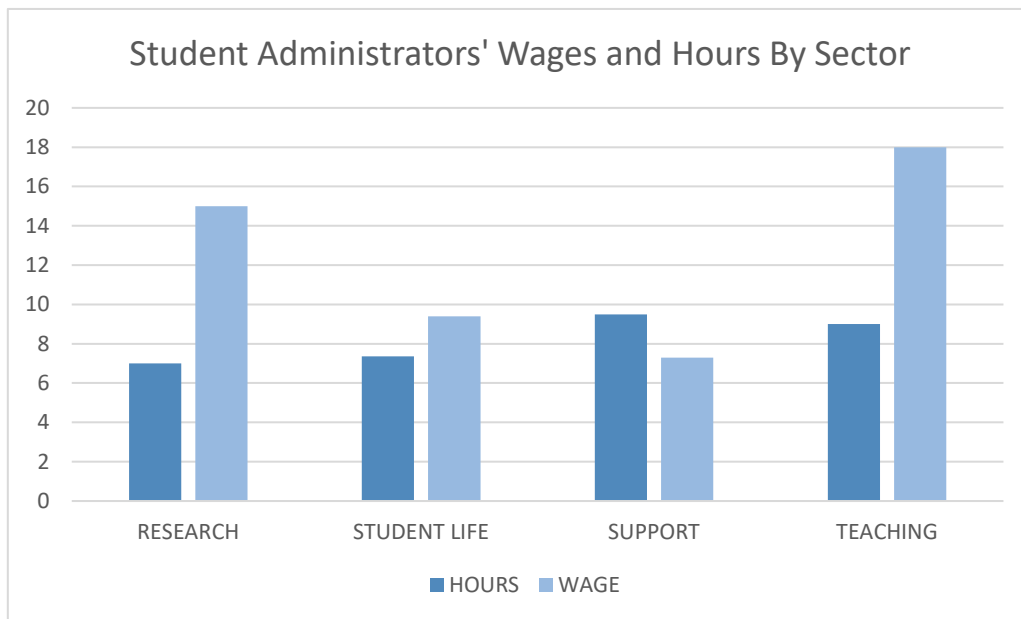


Figure 6 Wages and Hours sorted by Student Administrator role type

Of note is that students administrators, whether paid or unpaid, are on average putting in exactly the same number of hours of work (around 8.2/week) although getting paid very different wages.

To understand who the winners and losers from such a muddled compensation geography, the jobs were categorized by sector and compared with one another for wages and hours per week worked (Figure 6).

The data shows that whilst all types of jobs put in roughly the same number of hours of work (between 7 hours/week for Research roles to 9.5 hours/week for Support roles), Teaching roles are most handsomely compensated at a mean of \$18/hour whilst Support roles (\$7.29/hour) and Student Life (\$9.39/hour) are compensated most poorly.

This trend is supported statistically, too. Performing a multitude of pairwise t-tests, it is seen that Student Life roles and Support roles each earn significantly less than Teaching roles with confidence levels at 99% certainty ($p = 0.0048$ and $p = 0.014$, respectively). Marginally significantly is the difference between the pay earned by Research roles and Student Life roles and Research Roles and Support roles with earning disparity at statistical confidences around

88-90% ($p = 0.105$ and $p = 0.121$, respectively). Finally, the number of hours was shown to be marginally significantly higher for Support roles over Student Life roles and marginally significantly higher for Teaching roles over Student Life roles with 86% and 78% statistical confidence levels ($p = 0.142$ and $p = 0.222$, respectively).

Altogether, this paints a picture that Student Life roles are working marginally fewer hours but earning significantly less than their counterparts in Teaching or Research roles.

On Compensation Method

One of the main variation between the 47 respondents was the method they were paid (for this analysis we ignore the 12 workers who received no compensation at all for their work). Commonly employees at Harvard are either offered a stipend (PAFs, Student Life Program Directors/Chairs, Food Literacy Fellows) or an hourly wage (e.g. Dorm Crew, Office Interns, Ticket Sales, Tour Guide, Teaching Fellow/Assistant, BSC Tutors). However, whilst appearing lucrative, these compensations methods aren't equal.

By comparing the average hourly wage either verbatim from responses or calculating the equivalent wage through dividing the stipend by the 14 weeks per semester and quoted hours per week worked, we can see a clear mismatch in compensation. With a significant t-test value below $p = 0.0000098$ (below $1/1000^{\text{th}}$ of 1% uncertainty) the average wage of stipend-based jobs was substantially lower than hourly-waged jobs.

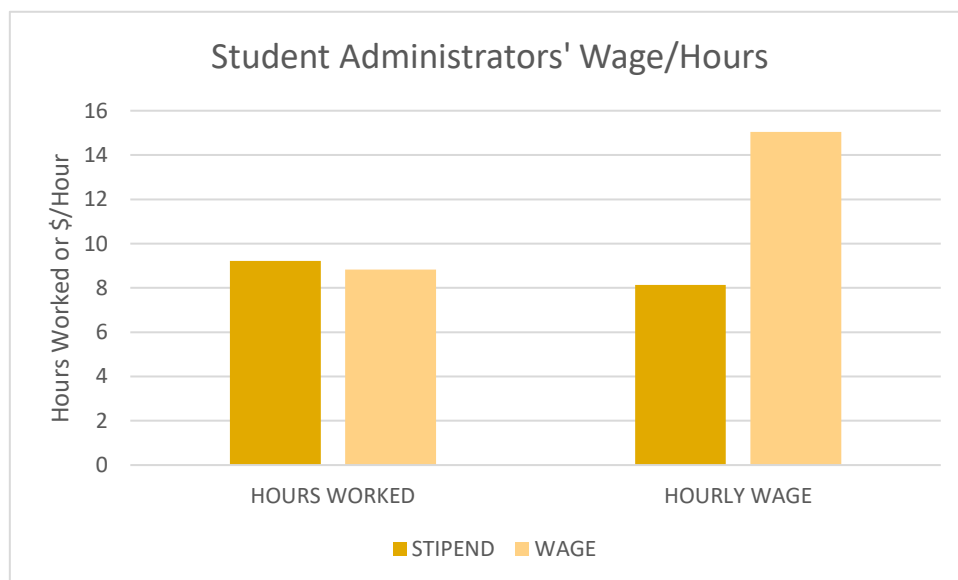


Figure 7 Student administrators' roles' wages and hours sorted by compensation method

On average, stipend-based jobs paid \$8.13 per hour with hourly-wage jobs paying \$15.04 per hour. As shown in the graphic above (Figure 7), the number of hours worked in their jobs

was almost equivalent with stipend-based student administrators working slightly more hours per week than their waged-based counterparts. Not only do stipends compensate students less for their work, but students feel undervalued as a result. Asked “Do you think you deserve more than, less than, or about what you earn?”, students displayed another clear trend. With a t-test value of $p = 0.0013$ (99.87% certainty), students on stipends said that they deserved more for their work with the comparable majority of wage-based labor roles reporting their deserve about what they get.

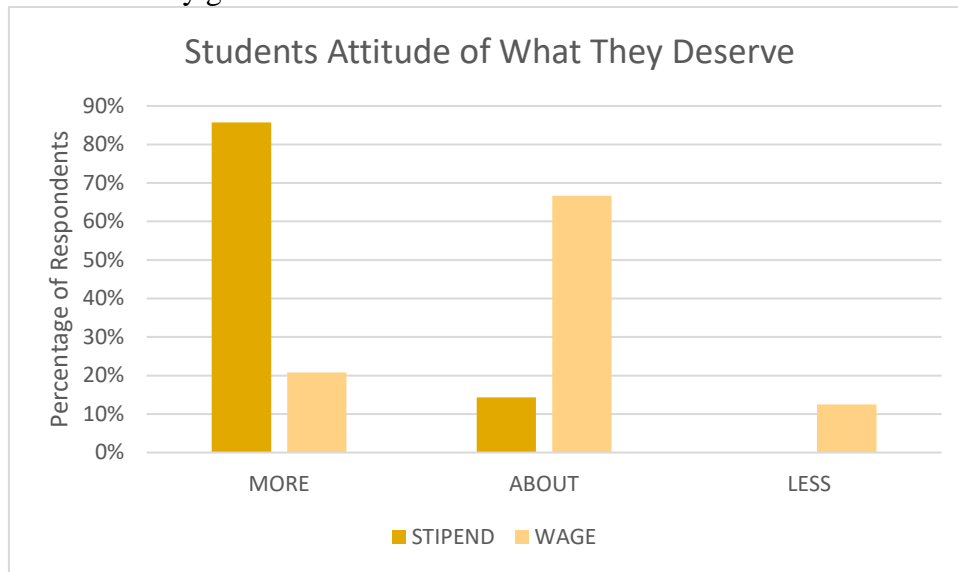


Figure 8 Student administrators responding on what they deserve for their work

Whilst 86% of stipend-based workers feeling undervalued and feeling that they deserve more for their work, this doesn't take into account students who aren't paid at all for their work such as HOCO Chairs, EMS Medical Support Personnel, Peer Counsellors, or Academic Integrity Fellows.

On Who Takes Low-Income Jobs

To discern whether any demographic group was being disproportionately impacted as a result of statistically proven uneven compensation practices for Student Administrators at Harvard, the average hourly wages were plotted by demographic level of financial aid eligibility.

Figure 9 shows the hourly wage earned by students on full, partial, or no financial aid. As one might suspect, the hourly wages reflect the financial privilege of the individuals doing the job. Broadly, full financial aid students are taking jobs with the highest paying salaries, partial financial aid students are taking jobs with slightly lower earning potential, and students on no financial aid are at liberty to take the jobs paying the least.

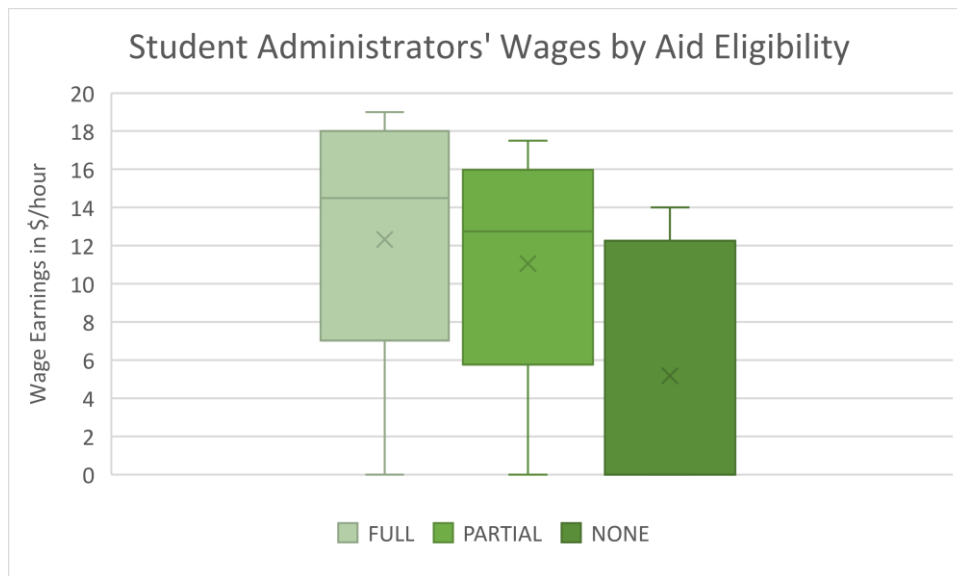


Figure 9 Student administrators' wages sorted by their demographic income background

Importantly, the range for all jobs has the same lower bound with low-income students occupying the full range of high- to no-paying jobs. These results are also backed by statistical analysis. Financial aid-ineligible students were found to earn significantly less than full financial-aid students with 99% confidence ($p = 0.010$) with partial aid students also earning significantly more than full financial-aid students ($p = 0.043$).

In aggregate, students on any financial aid took jobs with wages higher than those of students without financial aid at 99% confidence ($p = 0.009$).

On Attitudes towards Compensation

Having seen that students on heavy financial aid are mostly the ones who feel obliged to take high-paying jobs, the question turns to whether those jobs are financially sufficient and satisfying their mandated financial aid term-time work requirement. Students were asked “Given what you earn, do you think your work is worth more, less, or about what you earn?” to assess whether students felt undervalued, overvalued, or sufficiently valued by their employers.

Analyzing 39 complete dual data responses, the attitudes of student administrators towards their compensation was graphed by their level of financial aid.

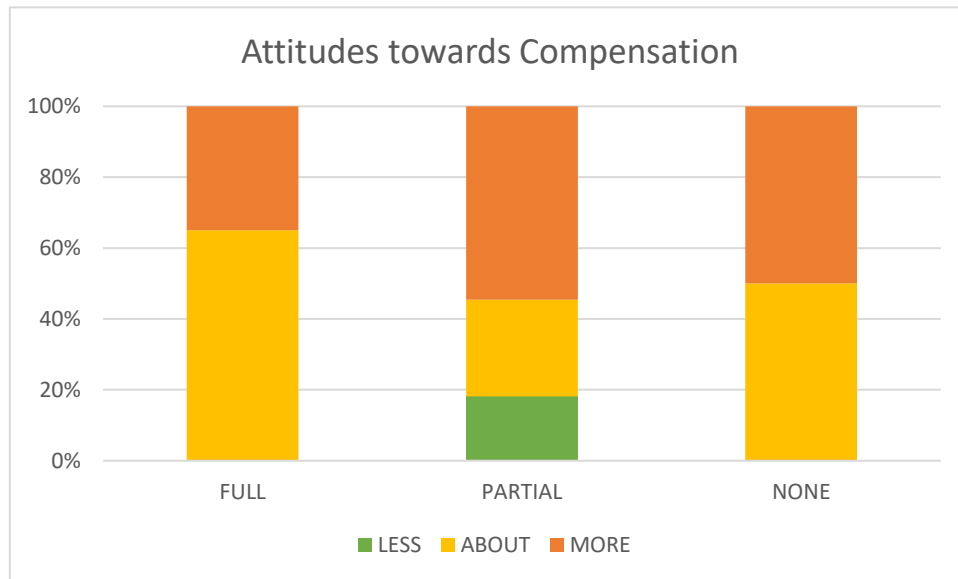


Figure 10 Student administrators' attitudes to compensation sorted by demographic income background

In line with finding that full financial aid students often earn higher wages is the finding that the highest proportion of full financial aid-eligible students felt they deserved about what they earned (65%). However, a higher 35% of full financial-aid students felt they were underpaid for their job. For partial financial aid-eligible students, the majority (55%) said that they deserved more than they earned with far fewer agreeing they were properly compensated (27%). Two students stated that they felt they deserved less than they earned. Searching the data reveals that those roles are Dorm Crew cleaners and Office of Sustainability interns. The students taking the lowest paying jobs on campus felt more mixed with 50% (4) saying they deserved more and the remainder saying they deserved about what they received.

Open-Answer Responses

Students were given the option to respond to why they thought their work was worth more or less than they earned immediately after they responded to the previous check-box question.

Three main themes emerged from responses:

- 1) Students were honest when they thought they deserved less**

Multiple students spoke out saying that they thought their work was not compensated in line with what they deserved for the job, some describing their “generous” bosses as paying them for tasks that “do not require much effort or critical thinking”. One student administrator representative of many of these responses said:

“I make way above minimum wage for the basic task of cleaning which seems almost unfair given the lack of accessible work in the Square. Likewise, during late spring, since I am billing \$17.50/hour over 85 hours of work (with overtime), I can make \$2000 a week. While that is very very helpful to me, I still think it’s a lot of money for doing what I do.”

Student Administrator

2) **Students mentioned unrecognized emotional labor many times**

Student administrators were clear that their work was fairly comparable or even above their level of competence and expertise at times. Some said, “I was at times doing the work that full-time administrators should have been doing. I was making less than minimum wage when you include all the hours that I put into the program” and statements similar to “financially as a ‘job’ it makes no sense. I have spent far more time on the work than I am compensated for.” were commonly repeated.

3) **When students thought they deserved more, they compared their work to administrators and mentioned unbillable hours**

The students mentioned the topic of *emotional labor* many, many times in their responses, talking about how their work often left them “on call” for most hours outside of their working ones ready to support or care for other students. One said,

“I am willing to do this work for free and care about the work, but I am also working hard and that work is worth more than nothing.”

Student Administrator

Teaching staff and Support roles mentioned that they “often work more than what I would report in my work report” due to inaccurate hours reported on their timesheet. No students in survey, interview, or informal discussion mentioned working according to the

hours they were paid, instead focusing solely on the job that needed to be completed. Others mentioned that, were they to be compensated with money or more “*recognition/appreciation*”, they “*would work even harder*”

Multiple students made direct comparisons to administrators that they see working alongside them, one wrapped the mood up, saying,

“It takes a lot of time and often goes unappreciated. There are many jobs on campus that require far less work and get paid something. This could be an administrators full time job, but instead it is a voluntary position for students.”

Student Administrator

On Job Motivations

Students, waged or stipend-based, high or low-earning had different reasons for taking the job. Some, to fulfil their financial aid work requirement, support their family, or earn disposable income, whilst others seek to explore interests, build professional or social networks, gain professional skills or experience, or simply achieve a sense of purpose or public service.

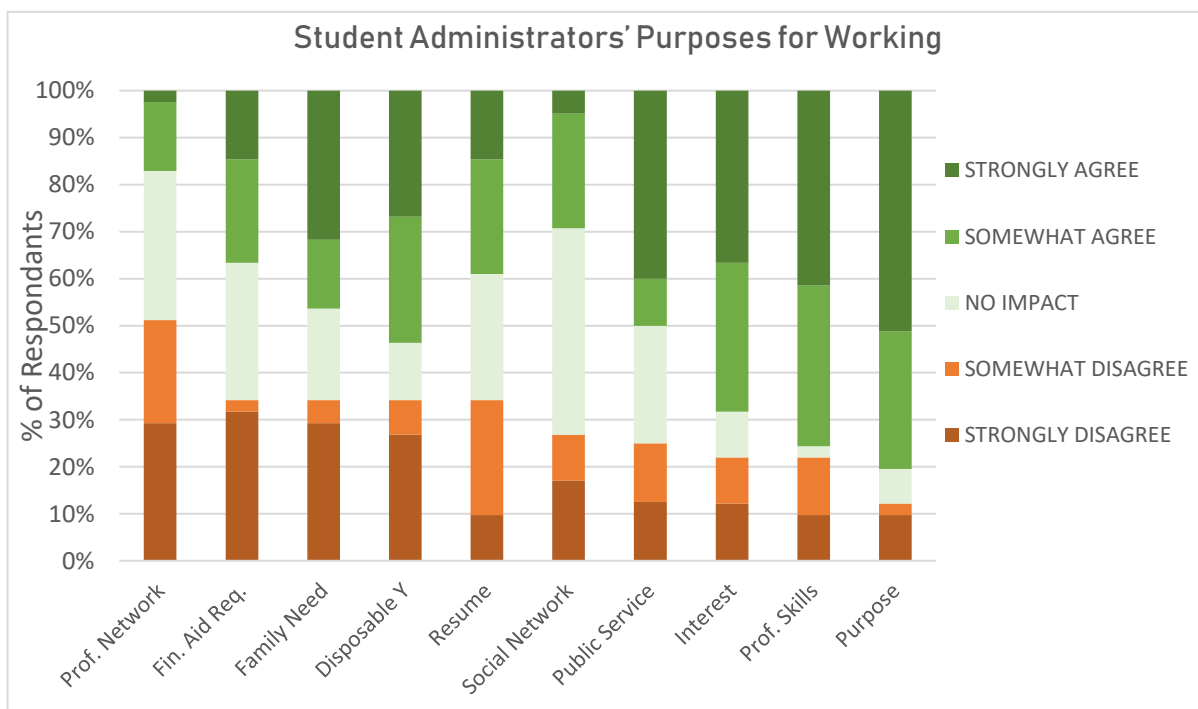


Figure 11 Student administrators' motivations for working sorted by purpose

Students were asked to respond to their work motivations on one of these axes and the responses are charted in Figure 11. Generally, fewer students cared about professional networks or resume needs. Income reasons (disposable, financial aid requirement, and family need) show polarized results reflecting the polarized financial aid background of respondents. Overwhelmingly, more students chose to work for interest, professional skills, and for a sense of meaning/purpose.

However, looking at the breakdown of student motivations by income (Figure 12; shown reorganized in Alternative Figure 1 below) shows a different story. Students' motivations were categorized by whether they were students on full-financial aid, partial-financial aid or were not financial aid-eligible. Subsequently, pairwise t-test analysis was performed on each pair (full-aid vs. partial aid, full-aid vs non-aid, partial aid vs. non-aid) to search for significant differences. Additionally, a t-test analysis was performed simply between financial aid-eligible students (full or partial) and non-financial aid-eligible students to draw out larger scale differences. The questions were phrased on a 5-part Likert scale; here 2 represents 'strongly agree' whilst -2 represents 'strongly disagree'.

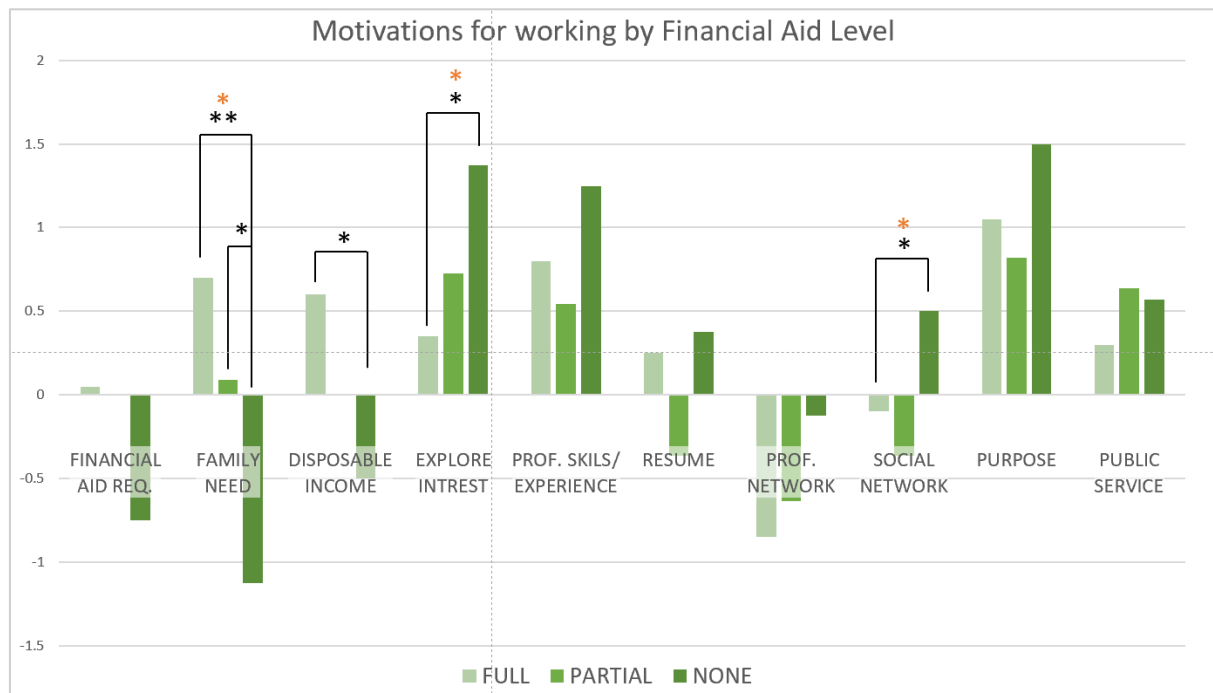
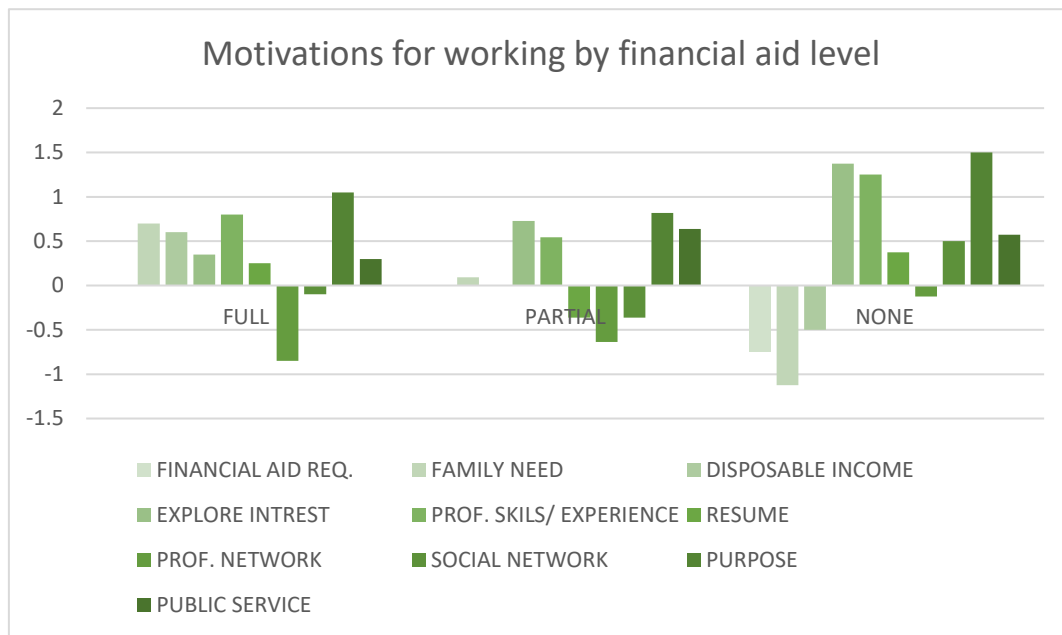


Figure 12 Student administrators' motivations for working split by financial aid level. Asterisks (*) represent statistical significance levels.

Significant differences ($p < 0.05$; uncertainty less than 5%) between pairwise comparisons are indicated with one black star and relevant lines; two black stars represent significant differences with uncertainties below 1% ($p < 0.01$). Additional significant differences between all aid-eligible students and non-eligible students are marked with orange stars.

Students on full or partial aid worked significantly less frequently due to family need or to earn disposable income. This reflects that students from higher-income households do not take up employment for the motivation of earning money. Much more likely it is that these students take jobs to explore their interests (a luxury that financial aid students don't mirror) or to build their social network (another reason financial aid students don't commonly work).



Alternative Figure 1 : Figure 12 organized by financial aid class groupings

On Best Alternatives

Having found the majority of student administrators feel their job does not reflect what they deserve, they were asked about potential replacement methods of remuneration that they would prefer instead of their current primary compensation method (i.e. what they would give up what they currently get for). Suggested answers were pre-coded with a section for alternative responses provided. The 40 respondents could select multiple responses and the average number of preferable compensation methods selected was 2.8.

Overwhelmingly, student administrators would preference recognition of student leadership on their transcript, class accommodations, or a stable MA Living Wage (\$14.11/hour) over whatever they currently earn in their job.

This trend was repeated in an open-response box immediately previous to this question. Before being presented with pre-coded options, student administrators were asked to say what was lacking from their current job's compensation. Out of all 36 summarized responses,

22% mentioned increased recognition, 19% mentioned increased professional networking, 11% mentioned increased understanding in classes of some kind, and 11% mentioned increased social networking without being prompted.

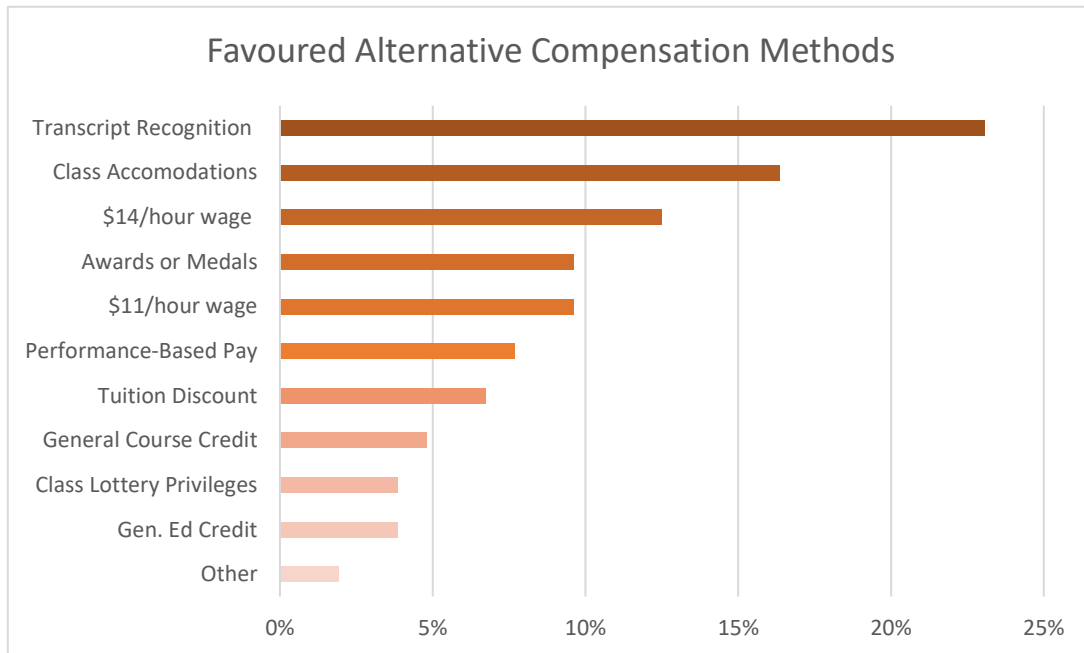
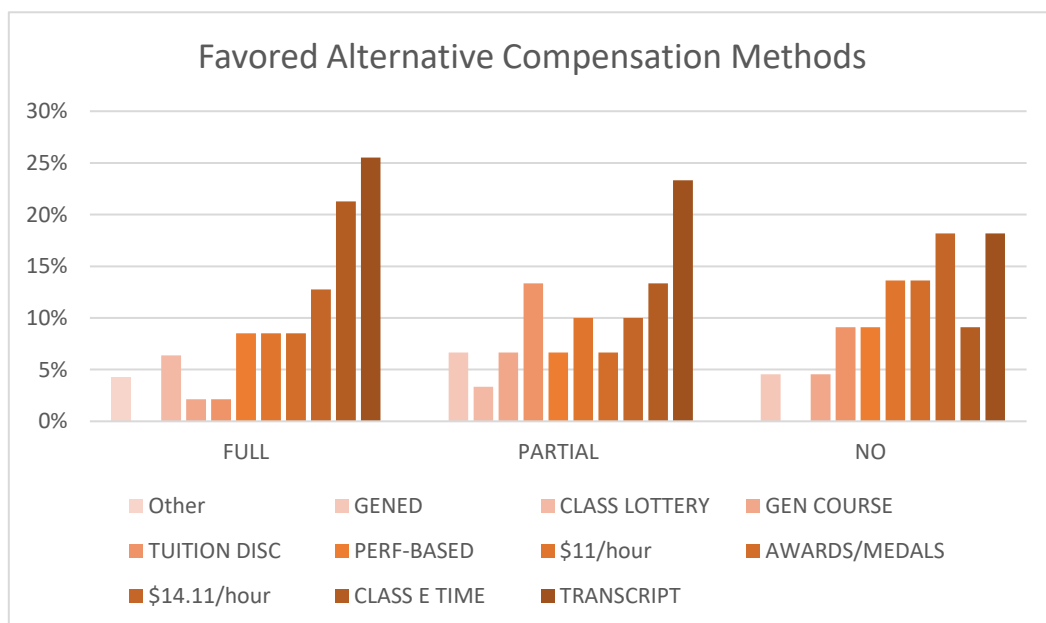


Figure 13 Student administrators' most favored alternatives as replacements for their current one



Alternative Figure 2: Figure 13 reorganized by individual financial aid grouping

The Student Administration Interviews

Methods

6 structured 1-hour-long interviews were conducted with 6 students chosen from across the range of Harvard. Interviewees were invited when they selected a checkbox assenting interest to interview on the survey.

The students interviewed came from a mix of Harvard's student life and support roles. One head of peer advising, one past chief mental health counsellor, one captain from maintenance, one manager from a House Grille, one head of mentorship from a pre-orientation program, and one director for international first-year affairs (DIFA). These roles may be representative as they come from different areas and were quasi-randomly selected, but students who were interested in interviewing may have prior opinions or particular experience that made them do so.

A 31-minute documentary of the 6 student's responses may be found at:

<http://bit.ly/CompensationDocumentary>.

In summary, the student interviews revealed 3 major trends:

1) Many Roles are Not Financial Accessibility

Students interviewed who worked in student life repeated that they did not believe their role would be attainable for low-income students. Not only does this align with the data that low-income students were unable to take low-wage roles on average, but leads to concerns about representation. The students often felt that working as student administrators weren't parable with jobs that could support them as they sought to meet their financial aid work requirement, but that the work was necessary to do because of its nature alone. One student remarked the problem here, saying "*Working as Co-Director, you certainly don't have time to do any other job*

Student administrators said, "*Being a student on heavy financial aid, there was no way that I could make ends meet, so to speak, unless I was pulling from money in my savings*" and "*I think any student that normally struggles with finances would probably view this position as out of reach. That should no be a reason that someone doesn't take on this position.*" Specifically for low-income students this poses a

problem for accessing roles of representation on campus, as one interviewee points out, saying, *“If you have to earn more money every week then you wouldn’t be able to take on this role because you just wouldn’t be able to justify it for the amount of time that your spending on something for the amount that you’re being paid little for.”*

2) **Students Sacrifice Their Basic Academic and Social Lives to Serve**

One student talked about their role prohibiting them from conducting a senior thesis that they wanted to do or skipping PSETs and assignments for their role during stressful times. Another talked about the way they sacrificed pre-made friendships in coercing them to help complete overwhelming volumes of student administrator work placed on them. In interviews, multiple students talked about the toll that working and supporting other students can take on the mental health. Student reiterated the idea that because they come from certain minority backgrounds, there is often a pressure or *“guilt”* to serve and give back to that community. However, students echoed that without well-paying positions, these jobs quickly took over their student livelihoods, one student eventually saying *“as much as I care, I felt like I came to Harvard to work on myself and then it felt like I got a bit detracted.”*

3) **Students Mainly Want Support, Understanding, and Respect**

Far more than asking for higher wages or more money, students semi-universally wanted for more support. In student administrator roles which were often depicted involving large investments of *“emotional labor”*, students felt they weren’t always understood for their role. For example, when peer counsellors have particularly traumatic conversations with patients, there was no expectation that faculty or administrators would be able to allow accommodations without disclosing confidential information. For others, a *battle* with administrators was described as perceived needs and goals were misaligned or miscommunicated. Most frequently, however, were wishes for recognition. Whether Dorm Crew cleaners providing basic services to students or programming chiefs of pre-orientation programs, students felt underappreciated for their roles and wished that, whilst they pursue efforts beneficial to the campus rather than their resumes, they could receive some legitimization from the College to acknowledge the community service they had performed. This was summed up by one interviewee saying *“{I realized} oh wait, no-one’s really helping*

me on this but I'm setting up ways to help freshmen with this but I'm unsupported with this in the exact same spheres and so are my friends."

Students said *"I think a little more support from the admin in terms of the tasks that I had to do. particularly on budgeting, I got push-back the whole time {from administrators}. It was made to be as if I wasn't trying my best when I actually was. Just that support in knowing that they'd have my back would be great."* Others focused more on the areas where faculty could be more supportive, saying, *"Getting extensions or getting leave or a pass for your academic work."*, or from administrators, students said that *"One thing that would make my job a lot more fulfilling would be if these conversations went place more often."* With evident frustration with the current system, one students remarked *"If you're asking students to do emotional labor then you should support them as much as you can"*

Conclusions

Multiple conclusions from the data provided by administrators, students' data, and students' interviews. Here, they are summarized into 3 brief statements about the student administration on campus.

The Current System isn't Working

This report's research finds overwhelmingly that, one way or another, student administrators are dissatisfied, feel used, financially manipulated, overburdened, and underappreciated for the work they do. The majority of students think that they aren't compensated correctly but this varies a huge amount between some acknowledging they are overpaid to some getting no monetary remuneration for their work. Stipends make feel disproportionately undervalued, but are unevenly distributed with library jobs earning a stable \$12-14/hour but some Support jobs averaging out to \$0.30/hour and some Teaching roles fixed at \$19+/hour. This information, too, isn't well distributed through central channels. The Student Employment Office lists a subset of the available jobs on campus and most student administrators don't report searching for on-campus employment there.

Hours and expectations required by student administrator positions are often unclear before the job is assumed and students are often straddled with unrecognized burdens of chiefly emotional labor, extraneous unrecognized, unbillable hours, or leadership positions that they were not necessarily trained or prepared for. Students understand the importance of their work and perform it out of passion but the arcade of demands and expectations placed on them can often lead to them sacrificing academic work, important social capital, or sleep and mental health; and this is whilst they receive little formal recognition for their input and sometimes feel disrespected in their workplace (as compared to full-time staff performing largely comparable work).

The Wrong People for the Job

Whilst administrators were keen to show the skills and benefit rewards that administrative roles for students can bring, the nature of the job structure largely prevents low-income students from participating in these benefits.

The data shows that lower-income students are generally not able to take lower-paying student administrative roles. This is either because lower-income students are more greedy than students from more privileged backgrounds or because they often cannot financially afford to take on these roles. This research also found that those roles that pay less are disproportionately in areas classed as Student Life and Support roles. If low-income students struggle to access these positions of representation, they will be populated with a disproportionate subset of the College, namely the wealthiest students.

This is important because of how administrators view student administrators' input. Administrators stated that, "*Our work is meaningless if it is not centered on the needs and activities of students*" and "*if we want to change the culture at Harvard, students' voices must be included in the larger conversations about structural or organizational changes that could be made.*" However, if these very roles in Student Life and Support are only able to be filled by wealthy students then the student voices chosen to represent will be those of the wealthy students. Beyond access, this poses a dangerous threat to the voices of minority low-income students going unheard and underrepresented.

In student interviews, students repeated that idea of sacrifice in certain roles. Whilst some roles supported low-income students financially, other roles that low-income or minority students felt compelled to take to support their community, or because they felt "*guilty*" not supporting others like them, led to huge sacrifices. Low-income students who wish to work on low-income affairs or other minority issues related to their identities end up financially disincentivized from taking such roles. As low wages prevent low-income students from taking these roles, the current structure risks blocking the very most qualified students from being able to work on the issues they have the most information to help solve; this further risks causing a painful and unnecessary gap between the skills and the jobs.

Few People Expect Higher Wages

Despite the fact that low-income students are disincentivized from taking the roles that they are potentially best-suited to, students don't generally clamor for higher wages. Chiefly, they simply want to be recognized and appreciated for their work.

The vast majority of students appear to be highly motivated to carry out the work on goodwill with low-wages. Where they appear to struggle is with being expected to continue a normal

Harvard student life whilst performing sometimes highly emotionally-taxing and time-consuming jobs supporting others. Administrators, too, aren't keen to raise wages for understandable reasons of labor-cost increases threatening productivity; offices could not output the same quantity/quality of work without the students-administrators that can supplement full-time, full-wage staffers.

Rather than raising wages, finding fiscally neutral alternatives such as providing students with understanding/accommodations for debilitating or traumatic work in academic realms along with providing tangible awards or endorsed markers of merit appears to be the most successful way to support the majority. For students currently unpaid, however, their main priorities are simply gaining recognition, financially or formally, for their work beyond the title they hold.

Recommendations

Given this report's findings and conclusions, and supplemented by informal discussions beyond the input of 55 student surveys, 6 hours of interviewing, and 10 administrative perspectives, 5 key recommendations are made for the College.

1) Make all roles financially accessible to students; remove stipends

Low-income students should not be prevented from participating in campus life or from accessing these critical roles on campus that help to improve the community, develop their skills, deliver benefits, and support peers. Roles with attached high-visibility on-campus representation should not be limited to students from higher-income-backgrounds exclusively.

As stipends result in students sacrificing many hours for sub-minimum wage pay and make students feel undervalued when performing them, jobs should be given fair pay for fair hours. Recognizing the number of hours that students should put in per week through wages or mandating a cap on the number of hours worked through stipends-based jobs (to equate their hourly rate to waged positions) is necessary to ensure students don't continue to feel manipulated and abused for their willingness to work.

2) Give students the recognition they want; consider course credit / transcript notes

One student responded in the survey saying, "*I've learned more working in Room 13 than I have in any of my classes*", emphasizing that these roles are incredibly instructive learning experiences for students on par with classes. In fact, this sentiment was echoed many times with students comparing their on-campus work to class-like in multiple facets.

Whilst increasing wages and replacing stipends with wages is a fiscally taxing measure, recognizing students with course credit would allocate the correct time for working (8 hours a week as standard) and recognize the students' learning. This method would incur immediate transcript recognition for their work and offer students a new approach to liberal arts education, much as free-form research classes or project-management-for-credit classes do in some engineering concentrations.

Alternatively, giving students outright recognition for outstanding contributions to the College community would provide what students want for their work. College-endorsement for students' community engagement would act as a powerful signal of approval for students and students' employers alike.

3) Roles deserve understanding for emotional or traumatic labor

Students are often asked to perform roles that require traumatic labor such as the contributions of peer counsellors, in particular. These students deserve accommodations when their service means they cannot, understandably, pay full attention to their academic work. For these roles, student administrators should receive well-publicized special understanding from faculty and administrators to take the particulars of their work into account when considering extensions, office hours, or missed classes.

4) All jobs have perks; they still deserve pay

Regardless of whether student administrators are getting leadership skills, professional networks, or a sense of purpose, fully-paid administrators are, too. As student administrators perform often parable work, they should be recognized, at least at minimum-wage rates, for the work they conduct.

Some students should be paid less, however. Students recognize that sometimes their jobs pay them rates higher than they are deserving of. Student administrators' jobs should be assessed by the SEO to help balance the division of wages among students to ensure the most crucial roles to maintaining on-campus student health and student wellbeing (physical and mental health medical roles, teaching roles, and advising roles) are paid minimum or living wages as standard. No-wage student administrator roles should be eliminated or duly compensated in other means.

5) This study is not the whole story

Whilst this study fairly accurately presents statistically significant and consistent qualitative and quantitative reporting on student administrators, it is crucially important to continue to listen to them. This report's survey contacted only a representative 55 out of an estimated 2,000 student workers (many of whom may not be considered student administrators) which is the tip of the iceberg. Many more

students deserve to be listened to and there are, doubtlessly, a variety of attitudes and problems present within many more offices that could not be represented here.

Studies and listening sessions should continue to be performed and disseminated on the topic of student administrators. In particular, further study into wage distribution by role and financial accessibility of on-campus jobs should be monitored to ensure low-income students aren't prevented from participating on campus.

As the Harvard College Admissions Office states on admission, “*Financial need does not impact your acceptance to Harvard.*”, “*It is simply our effort to make sure you and your family know you can afford to attend Harvard*” (Harvard College Griffin Financial Aid Office, 2018). Yet, after those students are admitted, some are left feeling unappreciated and unable to participate.

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Appendix

1) Administrator Survey Responses (full text)

“They provide valuable direct services to other students that is unique compared to out staff.”

“Our work is meaningless if it is not centered on the needs and activities of students, therefore hiring students bring their direct input into the all of our programs. Through our student employees we are more able to ensure that our work is relevant and timely to the current student body. What matters to students can change from semester to semester, and this can be difficult for any administrator to keep up with, regardless of their age or educational background. And although there can be tough learning moments as students gain professional skills, it is truly fun to work with students in the roles I have had.”

“We are a business in an educational setting. We work out of three locations (many time simultaneously), are open for business 6 days a week and our event volume is high. We need student staff to fill all of our shifts. The students have great flexibility, generally work with us their whole time at Harvard (we enjoy the continuity), and bring a youthful exuberance and energy. It is a mutually beneficial relationship.

Having administrators fill all of these positions would not be financially beneficial to our organization. “

“Students in our office help us keep a pulse on what issues/topics students are engaging with on campus. That helps us inform our programming and sometimes scheduling of programming. Students in our office also help broaden our student interaction and helps us spread the word about our programs and services to the undergraduate community.

I hire/work with students because I enjoy working with them immensely. Helping them understand what an office work environment is, engaging in conversations with them about their academic life and life in general. As a non academic office, it's a wonderful way of connecting, and providing informal 'advising'.”

“Current undergraduates provide a genuine and relatable voice when talking with prospective students. Their enthusiasm about life at the College helps high school students better understand the Harvard experience. “

“It's Dorm Crew's mission to provide undergraduates with employment and leadership opportunities and to build a supportive community of students (and alumni) who can help students transition to

college, navigate through Harvard, and bring valuable experiences and skills to post-graduate employment. It's student leaders who really make this possible because no one intuitively knows how to actualize those goals in a meaningful way for students better than students themselves. Students are invested in creating positive experiences for one another and building a strong community. They bring energy, enthusiasm, empathy, and dedication to the program that enables it to be successful.”

“I manage a fellowship program that seeks to empower everyone to make more informed food choices. Through this program, the participating students plan food-centric events within their houses to build community and spread knowledge about food. The program wouldn't exist without the students. “

“PAFs serve an important role in the advising system; they bring a student perspective to the first-year advising network. Bringing students into closer collaboration with adults on campus (faculty, proctors, administrators, advisers) has multidirectional benefits. PAFs tend to say that PAFing is among their most rewarding activities on campus, and often enhances their sense of belonging.

The benefits to the advising system are probably multifaceted, but the most obvious one is that students know the student experience better than anyone else. Advisers and PAFs can offer the same suggestion, but a first-year student may tend to believe it more when it comes from a PAF!”

“We hire students to ensure that the programming and services we are providing are a good match to students' own needs, interests, and concerns. It is important to us to involve students in the process of making Harvard a more inclusive and supportive community. Related to this, if we want to change the culture at Harvard, students' voices must be included in the larger conversations about structural or organizational changes that could be made. We also know that students learn a lot of valuable skills from planning events, working on a team, writing and designing publications, interacting with visitors, and generally supporting the mission of the Dean of Students Office. “

2) [redacted from published edition]

3) [redacted from published edition]

- a. Full datasets for this project available upon request from
james_bedford@college.harvard.edu