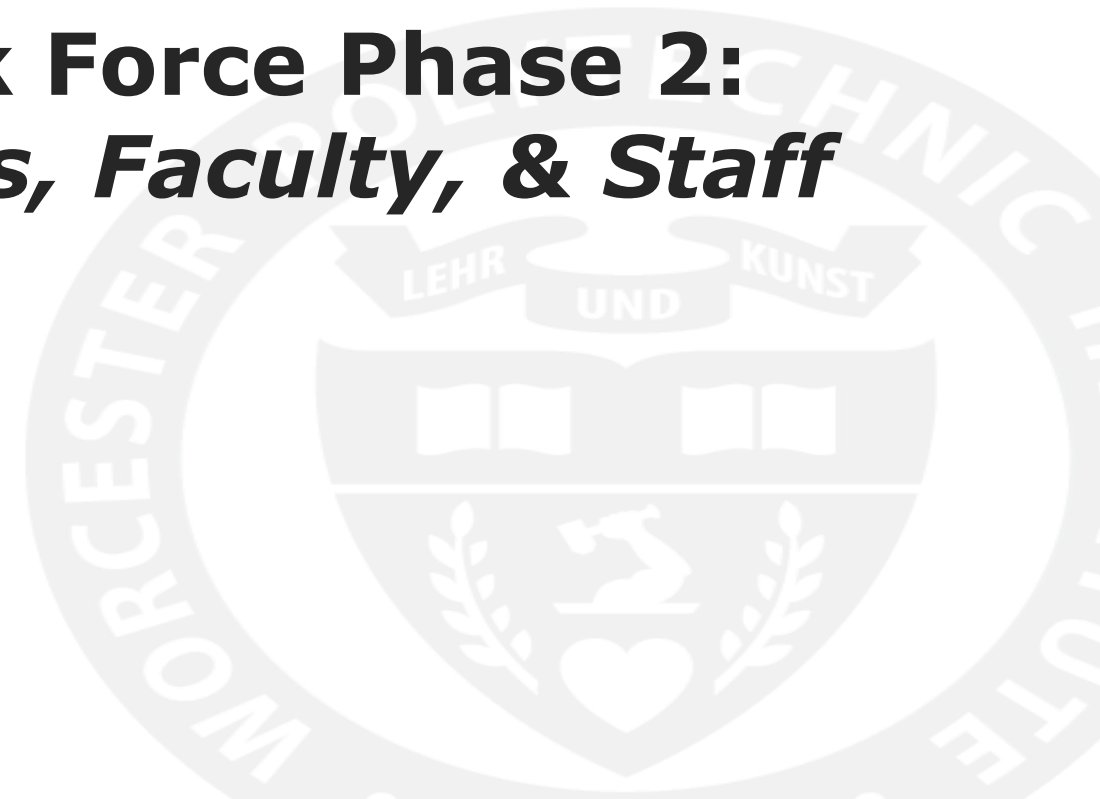




WPI

Findings and Recommendations of the Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force Phase 2: *Special Student Populations, Faculty, & Staff*

March 17, 2022



Agenda

Addendum to Phase 1: BIPOC, ALANA, and LGBTQIAP+ Students

- **BIPOC Students:** Black, Indigenous, People of Color
- **ALANA Students:** African American, Latino/a American, Asian American and Native American
- **LGBTQIAP+ Students:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Aromantic, Agender and Pansexual

Faculty Findings & Recommendations

Staff Findings & Recommendations

Summary/Next Steps

BIPOC, ALANA, and LGBTQIAP+ Students



Two focus groups were held in January to address concerns of:

- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students
- African American, Latino/a American, Asian American and Native American (ALANA) students
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Aromantic, Agender and Pansexual (LGBTQIAP+) students

Higher impact

Moderate impact

Lower impact

Survey | Overview: Undergraduate Students (Overall)

Academic Pressure

4 of the top influences on mental health & well-being

Up to 82% of respondents report too much academic pressure

Lack of Self-Care & Balance

3 of the top influences on mental health & well-being

Half of respondents report FOMO & balancing multiple commitments as major influences

Lack of Resilience

Students who report lower resilience also report being more overwhelmed

One third to half of respondents report low resilience; two thirds report long-term mental health issues

Lack of Social Connection

1 of the top influences on mental health & well-being

Social isolation on campus is highly influential; personal relationships less so

Inadequate Communication

Few students report knowing where to find MHWB resources

Almost half of respondents gave themselves failing grades re: knowledge of MHWB resources

Pandemic Burnout

1 of the top influences on mental health & well-being

Many respondents are frustrated with the current restrictions, as well as long-term Covid impacts

Resource Scarcity

Not a top need, but moderately impactful (ie, finances, SDCC access, food)

Many requests for resources that exist (ie, didn't know we offer them already or want more access, better quality)

Different Constellations of Experiences for Undergraduate Students from Special Populations

Each marginalized undergraduate student subgroup reported being **overwhelmed more often** this academic year than their more privileged peers, including:

Women students.
Non-binary students.
LGBTQIA+ students.
BIPOC students.



Are they more overwhelmed in the same ways?

Specific Stressors

BIPOC, ALANA, and LGBTQIAP+ Students

Finding

BIPOC and LGBTQIAP+ members of the WPI community report a greater sense of disconnection and particular stresses on their mental health and well-being.

Students reported the following specific stressors:

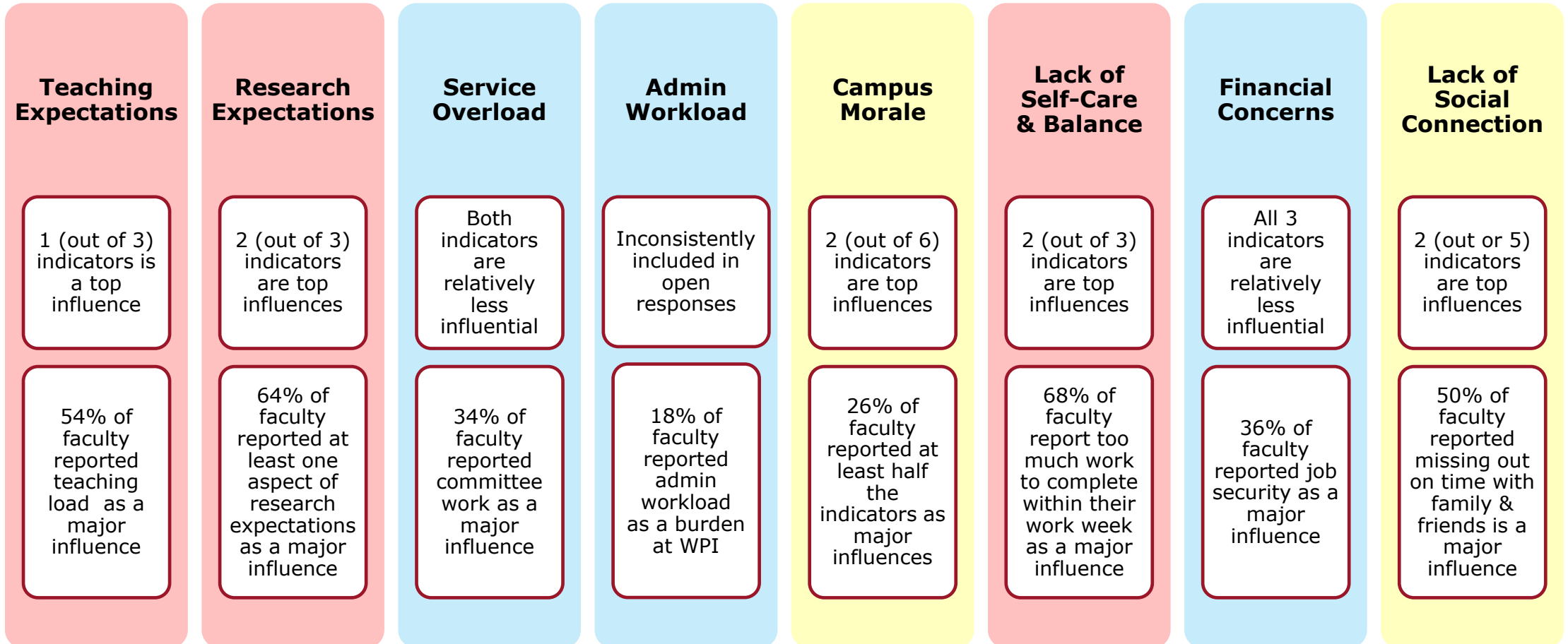
1. Financial Stress
2. Lack of representation on the faculty of minoritized populations
3. Lack of safe spaces for cultural groups to build community
4. Lack of institutional knowledge to be passed through cultural groups; opt-in to communications facing a cultural group
5. Inaction regarding incidences of disrespect towards minoritized populations
6. Lack of DEI training for all faculty
7. A lack of connections between faculty and students
8. Food insecurity

Overview: Faculty

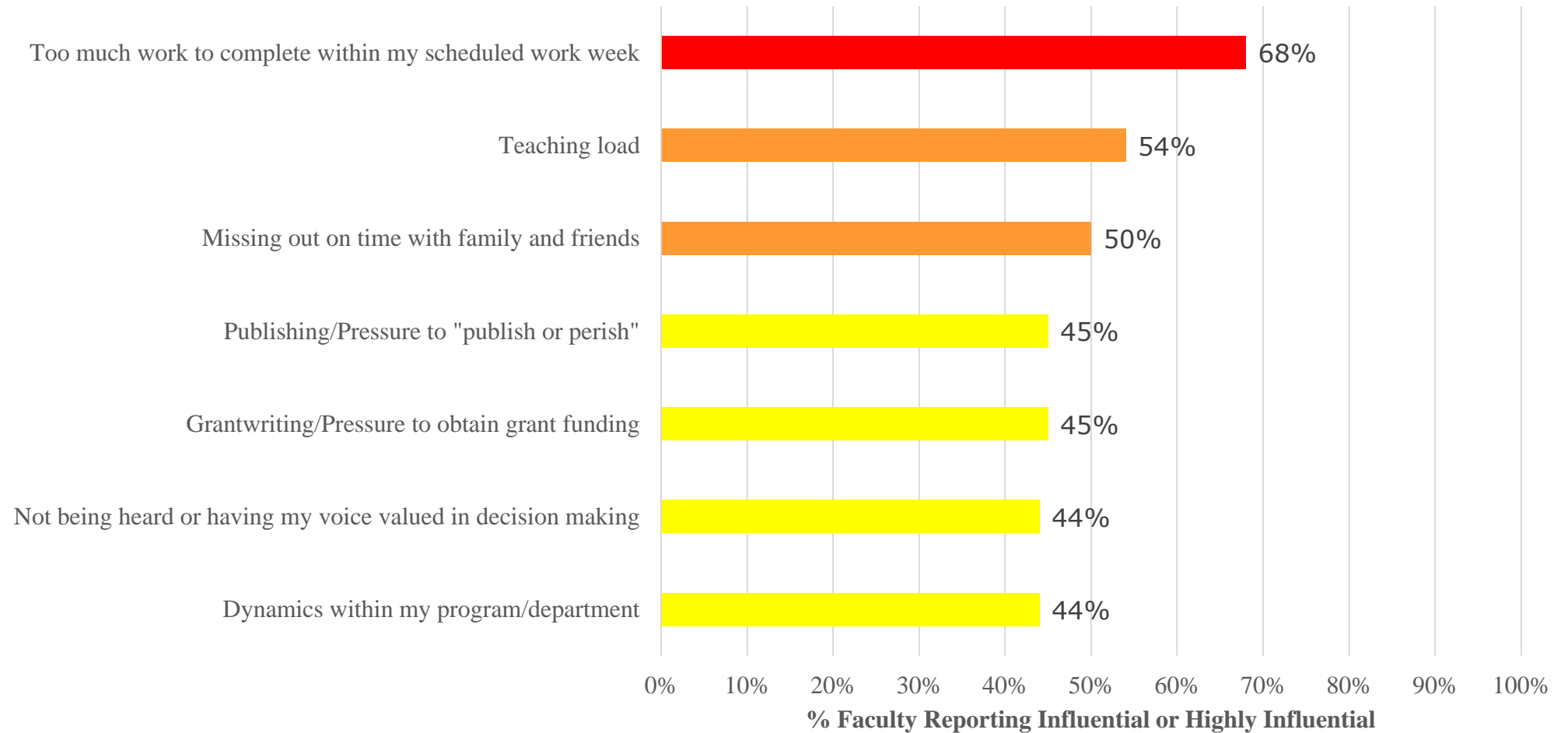
Higher impact

Moderate impact

Lower impact



Which factors have the greatest influence on faculty?



Faculty: Overwork

Finding

Faculty feel overworked with teaching, research, administrative and other duties. WPI is a culture of systemic overwork; individuals feel pressure to do more and more.

Sample Recommendations

- Evaluate optimal teaching load, including credits delivered. Hire more faculty in overloaded areas and/or those pertaining to strategic initiatives
- Acknowledge labor by marginalized faculty as part of their workload
- Build more days into the schedule give faculty the time to allow for more student/faculty interaction outside of the classroom (e.g., advising meetings)
- Implement “No Meeting Fridays”
- Provide a regular term off for teaching faculty; no one should be teaching 8 courses per year for XX years in a row

Faculty: Appreciation

Finding

Faculty do not feel appreciated and wish to be recognized for more than “just research.” Campus morale is low.

Sample Recommendations

- ❑ Eliminate the label of “merit-based” pay increases; increases are not about merit but rather how a very limited amount of funds can be distributed
- ❑ Prioritize, recognize, and signal greater value of service and engagement within the WPI community in addition to teaching and research. Ask this in Faculty Annual Report and other evaluations
- ❑ Make mental health and well-being support and community engagement an explicit part of merit, tenure, and promotion to show its value, while also recalibrating expectations overall
- ❑ Support rewards of teaching buyout or other opportunities for faculty who go above and beyond in providing student support service or who have administrative roles
- ❑ Encourage leaders to show appreciation for faculty by calling out/calling in/holding accountable those faculty who are harming students (e.g., those who say they are “too old to learn your pronouns”) and requiring training and performance improvement plans

Faculty: Mental Health Challenges

Finding

Faculty feel unprepared to deal with students' mental health challenges or provide resources for students and themselves. There is an imbalance in faculty ability/willingness to support students.

Sample Recommendations

- ❑ Increase resources for faculty and staff beyond referrals to the EAP
- ❑ Support TRT faculty who are taking on disproportionate mentorship responsibilities, for which they are not recognized or compensated
- ❑ Address feelings of exclusion or not belonging by faculty, especially in humanities, social sciences, and business and disproportionate feelings of overwhelm by junior, female, BIPOC, and TRT faculty
- ❑ Set realistic expectations and boundaries for work and working hours for faculty, department heads, and deans. Communicate work hours and availability explicitly
- ❑ Provide training on how to interact with other populations on campus around mental health

Faculty & Staff: Work/Life Balance

Finding

Work/life is out of balance. There is a need for clearer boundaries between work and life, and a more thoughtful distribution of work load and more balanced work habits/expectations.

(Note: This finding and recommendations are the same for faculty and staff.)

Sample Recommendations

- Reconsider “working hours” 8:30 to 4:30 or 9 to 5, instead of 8 to 5 or consider shift to 35-hour work week; allow for flexibility; encourage the use of email signatures such as “I understand my work hours are not necessarily the same as yours...”
- Re-evaluate meeting schedules and establish meeting etiquette to allow breaks/downtime; make meetings 25 or 50 minutes, instead of 30 and 60, to allow for breaks in between
- Streamline work: too many hands are required to touch things when fewer is often enough
- Discourage working through illness/injuries and encourage using sick time when needed
- Lead by example. Support idea that it’s OK to seek balance; model self-care and “powering down” behavior

Staff: Summary of Findings/Challenges

Higher impact

Moderate impact

Lower impact

Overworked

Burned out

Covering multiple positions for extended periods of time

Work/Life Balance

Desperate need for better balance

More boundaries between work and life

Better distribution of workload

Appreciation

Don't feel work is appreciated

Especially during the pandemic

Compensation

Better compensation in recognition of hard work

Improved benefits

Would improve employee retention

Mental Health Education

More mental health training and education for themselves and others

Decision Making

Want to be more involved with campus decisions, especially those that require staff support

Want more opportunities to connect with others

During the current academic year, how often have you felt overwhelmed?

Never	Rarely (once or twice this academic year)	Occasionally (once or twice per term)	Often (once or twice per week)	Very often
3%	10%	24%	39%	25%



64%, or almost 2 of every 3 staff members reported feeling overwhelmed often or very often

147 responses

Overlap: Faculty and Staff

Work-Life Balance

- Both faculty and staff report low self-care & balance / work-life balance and boundaries

More Realistic Expectations

- Faculty report teaching and research expectations affect their mental health, staff also report that expectations to always be available, rapidly pivot toward new initiatives/projects, and work with urgency affects mental health.

Need More Staffing

- Faculty feel effects of low staffing levels, staff note this makes their jobs more difficult and contributes to errors that create problems or delays later

Compensation

- Both faculty and staff ask for higher compensation

Major Themes Across All Campus Groups

Major themes, or areas of difficulty:

- 1 Overwork**
- 2 Work/Life Balance**
- 3 Lack of Appreciation/Support**
- 4 Mental Health Challenges**

Summary



**RADICALLY
CHANGING OUR
COMM-UNITY
(COMING
TOGETHER IN
UNITY)
SUPPORT
SYSTEMS**



**HOLISTICALLY
RESPONDING TO
THE PRESSURE
ACROSS ALL
GROUPS**



**REDEFINING
SUCCESS -
ENHANCING SELF
CARE
& REALISTIC
EXPECTATIONS**

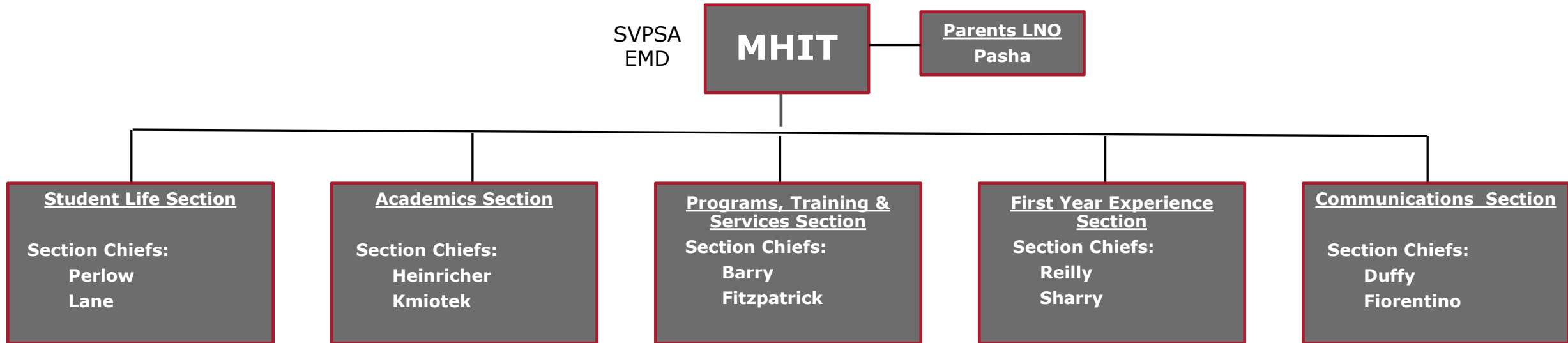


**CO-CREATING A
COMMUNITY THAT
ENHANCES HUMAN
FLOURISHING AND
DESTIGMATIZES
MENTAL ILLNESS**

Next Steps

- Full text report available:
<https://www.wpi.edu/student-experience/resources/be-well-together/task-force>
- Deeper Dives: Recorded webinars available at
<https://canvas.wpi.edu/courses/1046/modules>
- Mental Health Implementation Team (MHIT)

Mental Health Implementation Team (MHIT) Organizational Structure



Discussion and Questions

