

# Update on Contract Negotiations

HUCTW leaders have been in negotiations since May 2022 and we want to update you on what's been happening at the negotiating table lately.

We meet every week with Harvard administrators and discussions have been progressing at a steady pace, however we anticipate challenges ahead, particularly in the area of pay increases as inflation continues to stay high. Our Union will need strong, broad-based, visible support from our members to help push through those challenges.



We'll be inviting you to take part in some visibility activities to support contract negotiations around campus soon, but in the meantime one easy way that you can **show your support for HUCTW negotiations is by putting up HUCTW posters and Zoom backgrounds in your workspace; download them here:** <https://huctw.org/visibility>.

Even something as simple as changing your name on Zoom to show your HUCTW affiliation (Maria Lopez, HUCTW Member) is an easy way to show support. **It is important that Harvard knows HUCTW members stand behind our push for a fair contract—with meaningful raises that keep us ahead of inflation.**

Our 2022 negotiations are focused primarily on three subject areas: (1) salary increases, (2) remote work and flexibility, and (3) reduced staffing and extra work, and **HUCTW leaders have made comprehensive presentations to Harvard about HUCTW concerns and goals in each of these subject areas. In this letter, we have included excerpts and slides from each of these HUCTW negotiations presentations to Harvard.** Most of the content for these presentations was drawn from the HUCTW pre-negotiations survey, which over 2,800 members took part in. Survey responses provided a wealth of compelling data and stories from members over the last year that have proved invaluable for making our case to the University for a strong contract.

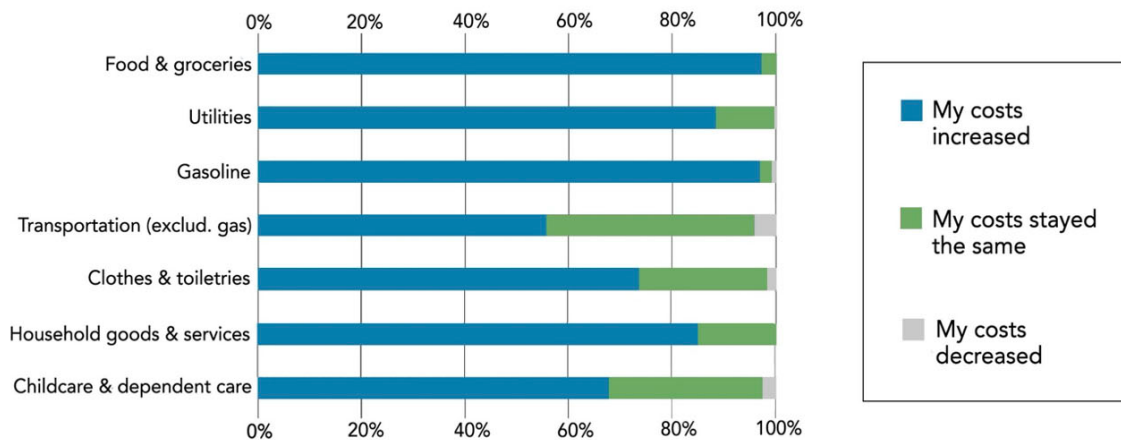
## HUCTW Presentation to Harvard: Member Finances & Pay

One of the most important presentations HUCTW leaders made to Harvard administrators in this year's negotiations was on the impact of inflation (recorded at about [7% for the Boston area](#) in the latest August reading) on HUCTW members over this last year, using survey data to demonstrate why **substantial and timely financial relief for members is so critical.**

In the survey, we asked members to tell us about their household cost increases over the last year. The following chart, shared with University leaders, shows the percentage of HUCTW survey respondents who reported that their costs increased in a given household cost category. For example, almost 100% of respondents indicated that their food and gasoline expenses had increased for their households over the last year, with many indicating that these costs increased "significantly." Unlike previous years where members indicated that some costs increased and others did not, this year, **members indicated that their costs rose in almost every household cost category.**

## Increased in Costs for Members

The blue portion of each bar shows the percentage of respondents who reported an increase in their costs for that category between April 2021 and April 2022.



As we shared with Harvard in our presentation, many members who took the survey indicated that, due to sustained high inflation, their standard of living has been substantially eroded. **A significant number of respondents said they had gone from feeling relatively financial stable in 2020 to financially precarious in 2021.** Many members indicated that they have been forced to make considerable cutbacks and difficult choices in their daily lives to accommodate the higher prices, even with regards to necessities – including putting off repairs to homes and vehicles, drawing on retirement contributions to pay bills, and going further into debt to ensure that their immediate basic needs are met, as demonstrated in the many quotes from the HUCTW survey that we shared with Harvard leaders:

## Member Comments on Difficult Choices

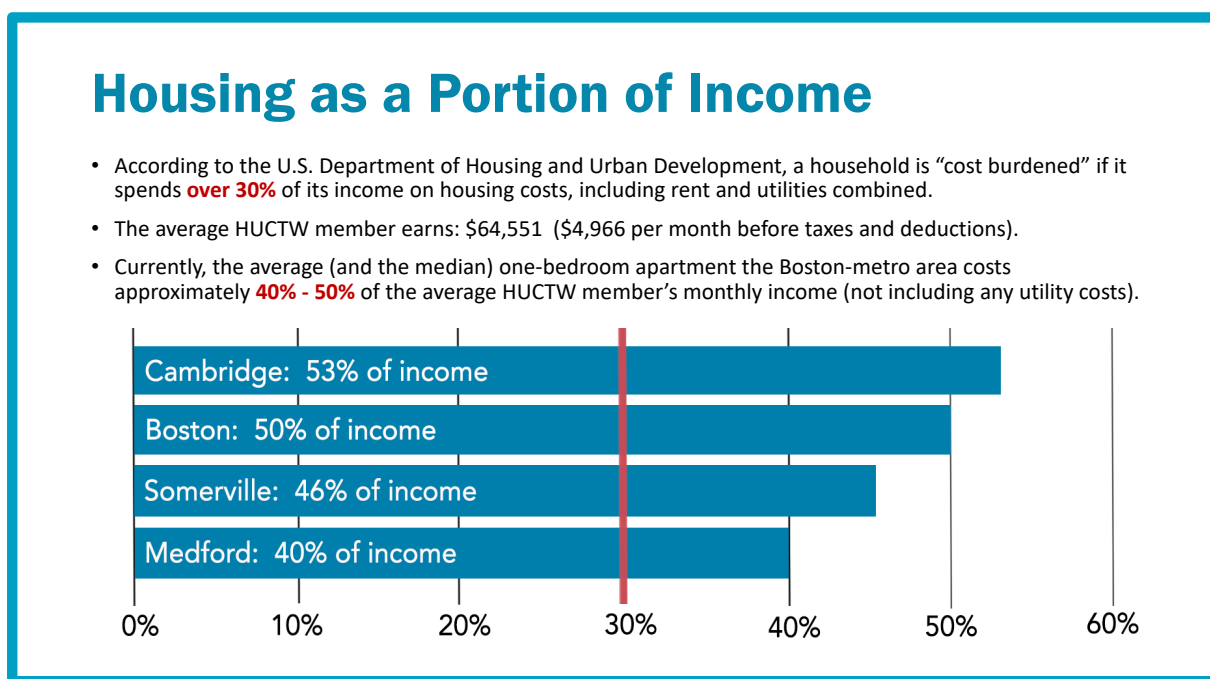
- *"The childcare assistance is appreciated, but this only puts a small dent in our monthly daycare costs and it's crazy to say that my increased childcare costs are now higher than my mortgage payments even with this support. The increase in costs for healthy food choices leave us questioning if we should leave out nutritional items for the sake of paying our bills on time."*
- *"I just spent all my savings on a necessary car repair last week. That savings took a year to accumulate and was gone in one transaction (thousands of dollars). It is really tedious and stressful to live like this. I just want my salary to keep up with inflation, which doesn't seem like a big ask."*
- *"We keep putting off renovations in our home because the costs have skyrocketed. The sewer pipe in our basement is leaking and the cost to repair that has gone up considerably since the last time we got a quote, but we just don't have room in the budget."*
- *"We've been driving around in a 20-year-old car for several years because we can't afford to buy a newer used car and make the \$500-a-month payments. I have elderly parents (both in 80s) who need care and providing that care makes it impossible to get a second job to bring in extra money."*
- *"My partner and I share a car because with our current salaries and increased bills we cannot afford to do anything else. We have also put other important goals (like starting a family and saving for a down payment on a home) on hold as neither of us feel we are making enough financial progress in our jobs to pursue these goals."*

As housing is a major cost that affects almost every member and survey data indicated that the majority of HUCTW members rent their homes, we put a particular emphasis on the significant rent increases many of those living in the Boston-area experienced throughout 2021 in our presentation to Harvard.

According to a report published by the rental listing website Zumper, although rental housing costs in Boston stayed relatively level in 2020, **the median rent for a 1-bedroom (\$2,510 a month) and 2-bedroom apartments (\$3,000 a month) each increased by 15% between April 2021 and April 2022.**

Our Union presentation to the University analyzed rent as a portion of income, examining Boston-area rent prices in the context of the average HUCTW member's annual salary (about \$65,000). A member earning this salary takes home about \$4,996 per month before taxes and deductions, which means **the average price of a one-bedroom apartment in the Boston-area would consume about 40% – 50% of this member's income.**

**The US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Census Bureau define a household as “cost burdened” if they are spending more than 30% of their income on rent & utilities combined.** The following chart lists the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in the four most common Massachusetts cities and towns that HUCTW members live in. In all of them, the average member is paying 40% - 50% of their salary towards rent for a one-bedroom apartment.

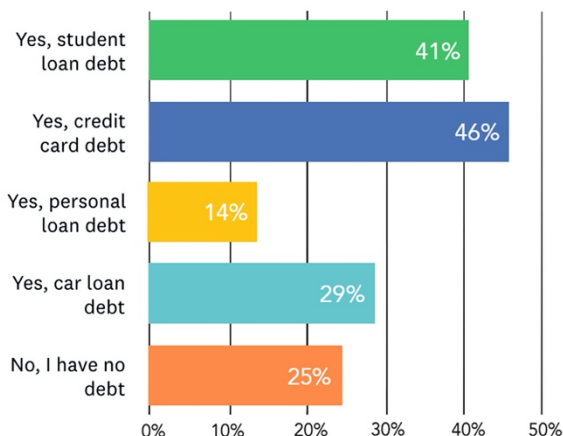


All slides on these pages are excerpts from presentations that HUCTW negotiators gave to University leaders as part of our 2022 Contract Negotiations.

In our presentation to Harvard, we shared survey data that indicates that many members are very concerned about debt—particularly student loan debt. Members who are already feeling squeezed by high housing, food, gas, and other costs expressed concern about their large student loan payments being added to the cost burden once the federal loan repayment freeze ends. And many of those with private student loans indicated that they are already struggling to manage payments, as their loan repayment pause ended many months ago.

## Member Debt

Respondents were asked what **type of debt** they have (aside from mortgage) and asked to check all that apply:



Respondents with debt were also asked how much **total debt** they have (aside from mortgage debt):



## Member Comments on Student Loans

- "Our dual-earner household currently lives paycheck to paycheck and carries both student loan debt (significant) and some consumer debt. When federal student loan repayments are 'unpaused', we will have an additional \$700/month to pay, stretching us beyond what our income can comfortably absorb."*
- "My current salary provides me just enough to float above the surface of living paycheck-to-paycheck, but when the student loan moratorium ends, I'm afraid I might sink under. I'm young. I want to invest in retirement. I want to have an emergency fund. But as the chokehold of inflation grows tighter around the neck of my bank account, those desires become further and further out of reach."*
- "Student loans are a huge burden I've carried since graduation. As an international student, I only have access to private student loans. While federal loan payments are still on hold (after 2 years), my private loan payment resumed after 6 months. My payment recently doubled and it's now more than half of my monthly rent."*
- "Thanks not only to inflation but also to the impending doom date of student loan repayment, I quite literally cannot afford to move out of my parents' home."*
- "My rent increased by \$450 a month in December. This plus the increased costs of everything else put me at risk of being evicted for the first time in my life. Thank goodness I got an emergency loan to get me through. I'm more worried now about student loan repayments starting again. That will be another \$370 a month to add to my already constricted budget."*

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Union leaders concluded this presentation by talking about HUCTW member goals around the pay program:

- We need a pay program that responds to price inflation thoroughly, providing financial stability and building a sustainable middle-class standard of living in one of the most expensive regions in the country.
- We need a pay program that honors our hard work over the last two years, when we worked innovatively to tackle the challenges of the pandemic with fewer staff and fewer resources.

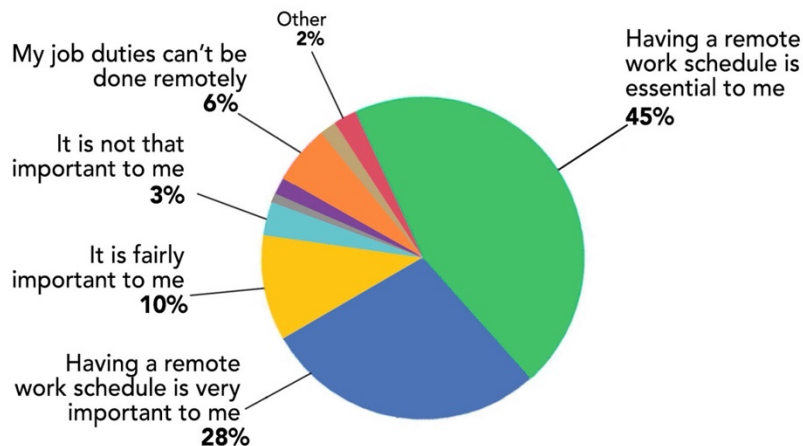
- We need a pay program that meets our needs so we can retain and recruit talented, productive employees who feel financially secure and supported.

## HUCTW Presentation to Harvard: Remote Work & Flexibility

In our presentation to University leaders about workplace flexibility, Union negotiators made it clear that remote work and flexible hours are more important than they've ever been to members. As our survey results showed, 73% of respondents indicated that remote work was "essential" or "very important" to them.

### Importance of Remote Work for Members

HUCTW survey respondents were asked "How important is having a remote work schedule to you (either fully remote or hybrid)?"



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HUCTW negotiators also emphasized that since every member has a different combination of work responsibilities and personal needs, flexibility and remote work policies should not be "one size fits all." Although the Harvard-HUCTW contract already contains strong language on flexibility and remote work options, it is clear that the language is being applied in a wide range of ways depending on the department. Many members have had success negotiating remote work arrangements they are happy with, but many others are facing pushback from their departments or supervisors.



## Reasons for Remote Work Denial

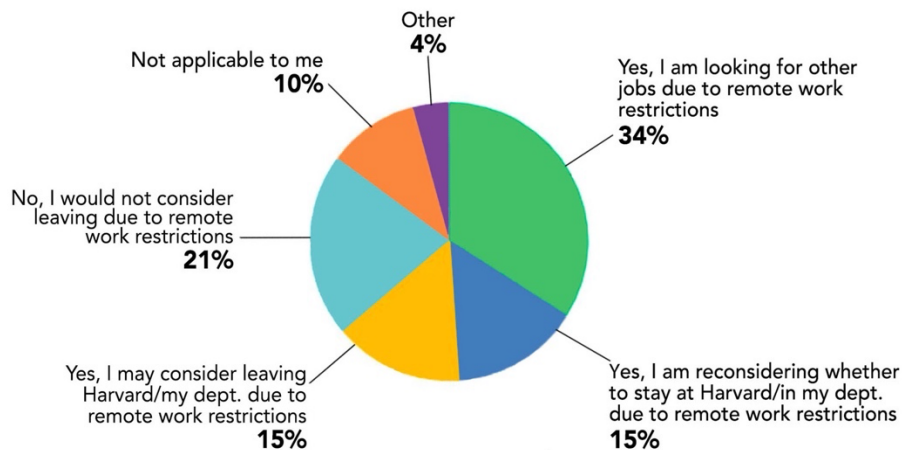
If your remote work request was denied, what reason or reasons were given?



We emphasized to University leaders that many of those who said their remote work/flex work schedule requests were restricted or turned down altogether indicated that they were considering looking for other jobs as a result. For example, 64% of those who said their remote work requests were denied indicated that they were contemplating or had started looking for work outside their department or Harvard.

## Impact of Remote Work Denial on Retention

If your department denied your remote work request, has it made you think about leaving Harvard or leaving your department?



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## Member Comments on Remote Work

- *"I absolutely love my job, but if I had to begin commuting again five days a week, I would look for remote work elsewhere. It is absolutely unproductive and life-draining to be commuting five days a week in the world we live now if the job is remote capable."*
- *"Harvard is supposed to be a thought leader, progressive, ahead of the curve--but we need to practice what we preach. I have lost count of the number of articles/ news stories/ think pieces/ well-documented research done by HBS, HKS, etc. that all tout the importance of giving your employees autonomy, independence, etc. and not forcing everyone into a rigid box. What will it take to get Harvard to listen to the advice of its own faculty, if not its own employees? It is also frustrating to me how there are different and arbitrary standards for upper management and HUCTW, who are the backbone of the university."*
- *"It's been incredibly demoralizing to commute 1.5 hours into an office to sit and stare at a screen. When I'm able to work remotely, my mental health significantly increases and I'm so much better at focusing and doing my work."*
- *"We have proven over the last two year that working from home is productive and beneficial to all parties, but Harvard continues to advance the idea that our return to campus is somehow essential to its mission. We perform cutting-edge research but continue to manage from a bygone era. I encourage Harvard to embrace the flexibility that our technology offers, align its goals with its core values, reevaluate management styles, and respect its staff by treating us as intelligent people who helped the University get through the pandemic without missing a beat."*
- *"Lessons learned from the pandemic are that 1) it's not over, 2) work can be accomplished remotely, and 3) the work environment is changing through society, not just at Harvard."*

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Union leaders ended this presentation by sharing HUCTW goals around remote work and flexibility, including:

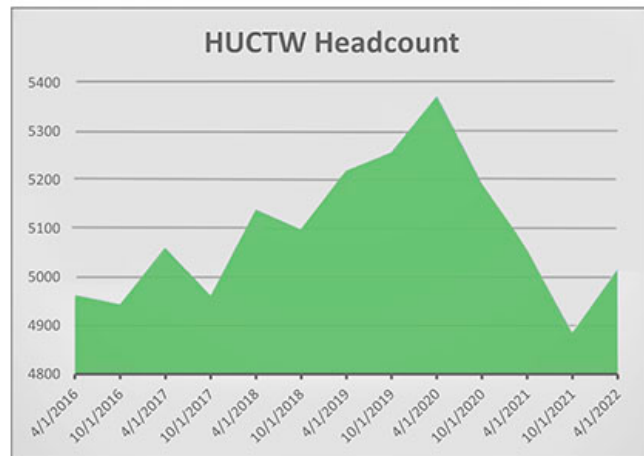
- All members who request remote work schedules or flexible hours should have their requests considered based on their particular duties and needs, and not just on broad departmental or school policy. Any new flexibility policies we create together need to be "flexible," and they should emphasize a range of accessible and adaptable options for HUCTW members (vs only allowing flexibility within narrow constraints).
- Departments at Harvard should make every effort to accommodate member requests for schedule flexibility or remote work, as members who feel supported and respected in their work-life balance are more productive and engaged in their work.
- Our current contract language says that flexible schedule requests cannot be unreasonably denied, but we need to come to a fair, shared understanding with University leaders about what constitutes a reasonable denial.

## HUCTW Presentation to Harvard: Staffing Levels and Extra Work

Over the course of the last two years, HUCTW has seen staffing levels reduced by more than 400 jobs due to the early retirement offering (VERIP), the hiring frost/freeze, colleagues leaving for other positions, and term jobs ending, among other reasons. Rehiring to fill these positions has been very slow and, as a result, many HUCTW members have taken on additional work that was previously done by a coworker.

## HUCTW Staffing Levels

- The HUCTW total unit size has decreased significantly over the past two years.
  - April 2019 5223 Members
  - April 2020 5377 Members
  - October 2021 4888 Members
  - April 2022 5020 Members
- Numbers have begun to increase slowly, but we are far from a pre-pandemic workforce.
- However, University operations have maintained normal activity.
- There are nearly 900 open positions currently posted, and approximately half of those are HUCTW positions.

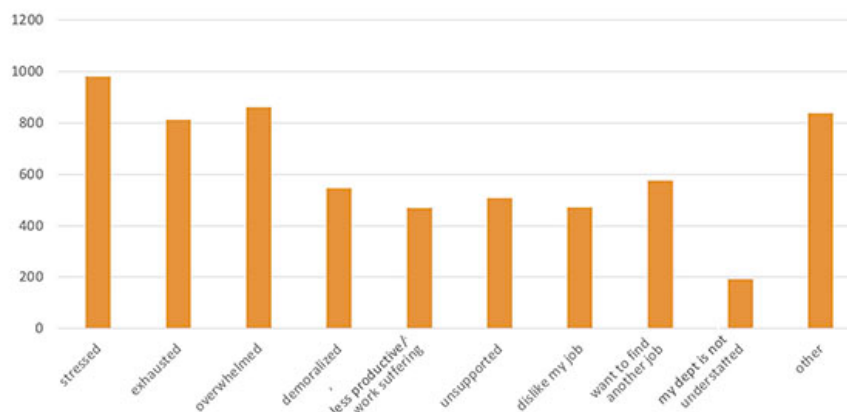


During HUCTW's presentation to Harvard administrators, we shared survey data demonstrating that almost 60% of survey respondents indicated that they had taken on additional work on top of their regular job duties during the pandemic. Yet nearly half of these same members indicated that they hadn't received any additional compensation for the extra work. Additionally, almost 50% of respondents who indicated that they worked overtime hours during the pandemic indicated that they did not report any of their overtime hours worked (23%) or only sometimes reported their overtime worked (25%).

## Impact of Understaffing on Morale

We asked members, "If your department is understaffed, how has this influenced your feelings about your Harvard job? (Check all that apply)"

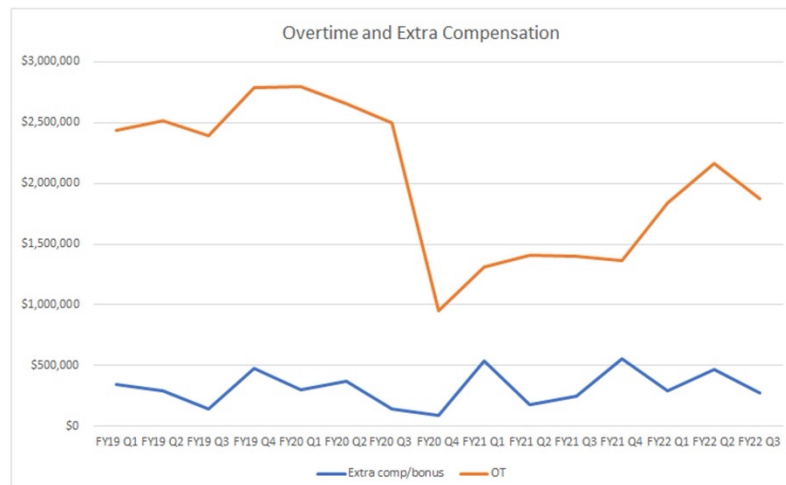
2163 members responded to this question





## Extra Pay for Extra Work

- Overtime and extra compensation/bonuses are two key ways that HUCTW members are usually compensated for extra work.
- While Harvard has returned to normal operations, overtime pay has not yet reached pre-pandemic levels.
- With a greatly reduced workforce covering many hundreds of vacancies we might expect to see an increase in extra compensation and bonuses paid, but no such increase is observed in the data.



When asked why they did not report their overtime worked for pay, many of the affected staff indicated that in some form or another they felt pressured by a supervisor or their department to not report the time:

## Members Comments: Understaffing/Extra Work

- *"Often the lowest paid employees are taking on the most additional work and feel the most uncomfortable requesting additional compensation--even when they are highly skilled and essential."*
- *"Understaffing is difficult and can happen. With good leadership and trust, a heavy workload due to understaffing feels manageable. What became difficult in my last position was the 6 months to hire new people at times."*
- *"It is insulting to be asked to do your boss's job for an extended period of time but not be paid in the correct 'grade' for doing so. It is equally insulting to have been doing that job for months, then not be promoted when they actually hire someone into that position. It leads to a poor work culture, loss of institutional knowledge, burden and stress on fellow coworkers, and added costs of onboarding new employees."*
- *"There is too heavy of a workload. Too little compensation. No extra compensation. Pushback and difficulty asking for overtime. Insanely understaffed. The morale is so low... A large, if not almost all of the reason, the school/classes run so well, and that the faculty are so great is because of the work we do."*
- *"My workload (and resulting no work time for professional development) has encouraged me look for work elsewhere."*
- *"I hope that no additional workloads will be placed on the department as it appears that if someone leaves another department that person's duties are assigned to other departments instead of the employee being replaced."*

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HUCTW leaders concluded this presentation by discussing our Union's goals around understaffing and extra work including:

- Union members should be paid for the hours they work
- Staffing levels should be maintained in such a way that members are able to work in a sustainable, realistic, and productive way

- We need to facilitate conversations between managers and members early on so that when members take on extra work, whether during their regular hours or as overtime, members feel like they are being recognized appropriately for the work they are taking on.

## Next Steps

HUCTW negotiators are in the process of developing or delivering proposals in each of these key areas but, as mentioned earlier, we anticipate reaching these important goals will be challenging. **We will be inviting members to take part in visibility events across campus to show support for negotiating a fair contract, including strong raises that allow us to stay ahead of inflation, as well as policies and programs that recognize our contributions and support a healthy work-life balance.**

As negotiations continue, we are asking **you** to show support for negotiations by putting up an HUCTW Zoom background, poster, or graphic in your virtual and in-person workplaces! Even just changing your name on Zoom to include your HUCTW affiliation is an easy way to show your solidarity and support for the talks.

**You can download Zoom backgrounds, posters, and other HUCTW graphics here: <https://huctw.org/visibility>.**

We'll be in touch again soon, but please don't hesitate to reach out to your [HUCTW organizer](#) or to our general email address [huctw.info@huctw.org](mailto:huctw.info@huctw.org) with any questions or thoughts.

Thank you,  
HUCTW Negotiators and Staff