

# The Worklife Issues of Higher Education Support Personnel

by *Linda K. Johnsrud*

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Many colleges and universities are small cities and, like cities, employ a wide variety of personnel. The 2.5 million college and university staffers are employed in more than 300 occupations in some classifications.<sup>1</sup> Faculty members comprise just 35 percent of the employees. Executive, administrative, and managerial personnel make up 5 percent of the employees.<sup>2</sup> We know far more about this 40 percent of the higher education workforce than about the 60 percent who provide support services.

Until now, we have had only national demographic data on education support staff (ESP). But a recent NEA-sponsored study provides more extensive data. This chapter reports the key results of NEA's survey that includes all employee categories except faculty and executive-administrative-managerial staff.<sup>3</sup>

## CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYEES

NEA divides the ESP population into nine job groups:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Building and grounds maintenance/repairs
- 2) Security services
- 3) Food services
- 4) Health and student services
- 5) Paraprofessionals:—instructional and noninstructional aides
- 6) Secretarial, clerical, administrative services
- 7) Technical services
- 8) Trades, crafts, machine operators
- 9) Transportation, delivery, vehicle mechanics

NEA disaggregates the nine groups into 60 job subgroups—showing the variety of work performed (Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

## WHO ARE THEY?

The 1996 NEA ESP Data Book, drawn from 1990 data, provides national averages by job group on age, sex, race, citizenship, household income and marital status, educational attainment and enrollment, hours worked, salary and benefits, and workforce projections.<sup>6</sup>

In 1990, there were 767,069 ESP employees: 525,345 were working full-time.<sup>7</sup> Part-timers were most likely to be employed in the paraprofessional, food service, clerical, and maintenance job groups (54 percent, 41 percent,

TABLE 1

ESP JOB GROUP DEFINITIONS
<b>Building and Grounds Maintenance/Repairs</b>
Custodians-housekeepers
Mechanics (except vehicle)-repairs
Groundskeepers
Laborers-helpers-warehouse workers
Crew leaders-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)
Other maintenance
<b>Health and Student Services</b>
Registered nurses (higher education only)
Licensed practical nurses
Nurses' aides
Health or therapist aides-technicians
Medical technicians
Community, family, parent, and welfare services
<b>Food Services</b>
Cooks-food preparation workers
Cashiers
Dietitians-dietary technicians
Food service workers
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)
<b>Paraprofessional: Instructional–Noninstructional</b>
Teacher's, instructional, program aides
Library aides, technicians, assistants
Preschool caregivers
Monitors (building, bus, playground)-dormitory
Crossing guards (K-12 only)
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)
<b>Secretarial, Clerical, Administrative Services</b>
Secretaries-stenographers
Typists-word processors
Clerks-administrative and office assistants
Bookkeepers-accounting and financial assistants
Data entry, statistical, computer clerks
Registration, records, admissions, attendance
Receptionists-phone operators
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)
<b>Technical Services</b>
Technicians (except medical or library)
Computer operators
Computer programmers-systems analysts-data processing specialists
Media, public relations specialists-writers-editors
Designers-photographers-graphic artists
Audiovisual, language technicians
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)
<b>Security Services</b>
Guards-police-security workers
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

ESP JOB GROUP DEFINITIONS	
<b>Trades, Crafts, Machine Operators</b>	
Electricians	
Carpenters	
Painters-glaziers	
Plumbers-heating, ventilation, air conditioning	
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	
Painting services	
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)	
Other trades and crafts	
Other machine operators	
<b>Transportation, Delivery, Vehicle Mechanics</b>	
Vehicle mechanics	
Bus, truck, van drivers	
Supervisors-assistant supervisors (nonmanagerial)	
Other transportation	
<hr/>	
<i>SOURCE:</i> NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).	

31 percent, and 14 percent, respectively). Of the total workforce (part- and full-time), 44 percent were enrolled in diploma- or degree-granting programs; 33 percent were under age 25. But only 27 percent of full-time ESP staffers were enrolled in these programs, and only 18 percent were under age 25.

A comparison of part- to full-time employees may be misleading, since some categories include many graduate and undergraduate students who typically work part-time. Our demographic data, therefore, focuses on full-time employees.

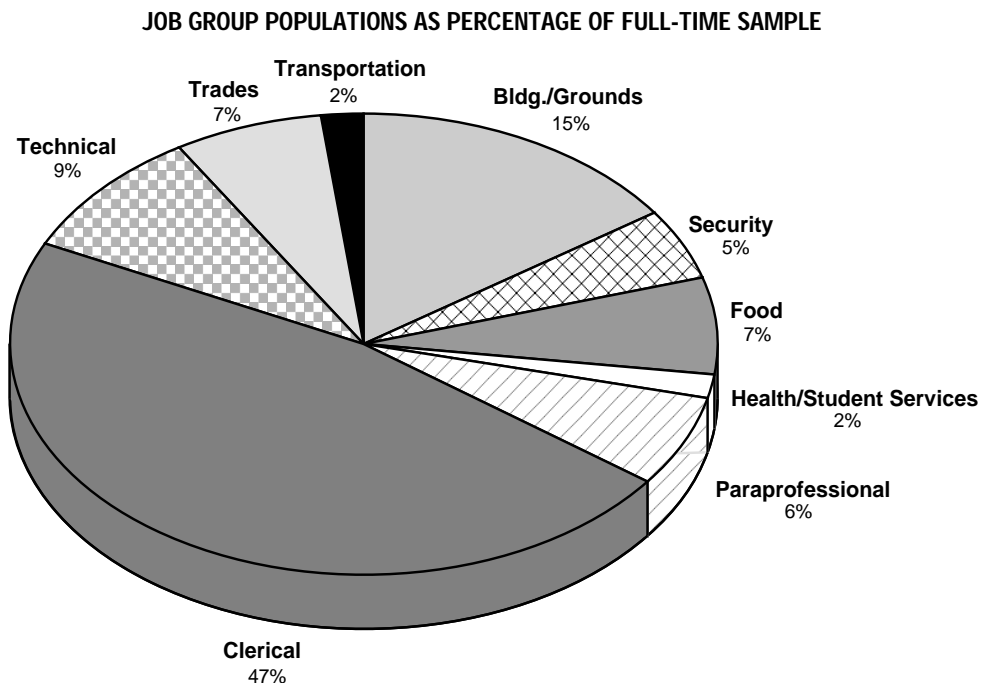
### Job Groups

Figure 1 shows the relative size of the nine job groups that comprise the full-time ESP workforce. Secretarial, clerical, and administrative staff make up nearly half of these employees (47 percent). The next largest groups were building and grounds maintenance (15 percent), technical services (9 percent), and trades, crafts, and machine operators, and food services (tied at 7 percent).

### Sex

Women made up 61 percent of the workforce; men, 39 percent (Figure 2). The breakdown by job group revealed few surprises.

FIGURE 1



SOURCE: NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

Women outnumbered men in the health and student services, secretarial-clerical-administrative services, food services, and paraprofessional categories. Men outnumbered women in buildings and grounds maintenance, security, trades, and transportation. The technical group came closest to being balanced (men=59 percent; women=41 percent).

### Race

The full-time workforce was 77 percent white and 23 percent minority (14 percent Black, 6 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian) (Figure 3). Maintenance showed the highest minority representation at 32 percent (21 percent Black, 9 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian). Health and student services, technical services, and trades reported the lowest minority representation (15 percent each).

### Citizenship

Ninety-four percent of the full-time staffers were U.S. citizens (not shown). The paraprofessional (5.4 percent) and food services (5.3 percent) categories included the most non-citizens.

### Household Income

Of the full-time staffers, 16 percent lived in households with annual incomes of less than \$35,000. Again the paraprofessionals and food service groups included the largest proportions from households with annual incomes of less than \$15,000 (35.6 percent and 33.7 percent, respectively) (Figure 4).

### Educational Attainment

About 25 percent of full-time staffers completed high school, 45 percent had some college, 15 percent were college graduates, and 6 percent had advanced degrees (Figure 5). Educational attainment varied considerably by job group. Support staff in technical services and in health and student services showed the highest levels of attainment (college graduates=59 percent of each group; advanced degrees=22 percent of the technical staff and 35 percent of the health and student services staff). Trades, maintenance, and food services showed the lowest educational attainment (high school only=38 percent, 37 percent, and 32 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 2



SOURCE: NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

### Projected Size of the Workforce

The size of the ESP workforce is expected to remain stable between 1995 and 2000 (Figure 6). A 7 percent increase is expected between 2000 and 2010. Table 2 shows the projected growth for full-time and part-time staff. The clerical group is projected to show a 10 percent growth rate; the average growth rate for other groups is 4 percent.

### Average Salaries

The 1993-94 \$20,203 average salary for full-time staffers increased by 4.8 percent to \$21,176 in 1995-96 (Table 3). Average 1995-96 salaries for specific ESP groups ranged from \$12,795 for food services to \$31,195 for health and student services.

### Health Insurance and Pension Benefits

Between 1990-94, employers provided health insurance to 76.1 percent of full-time workers; 27.5 percent paid the entire cost and 46.6 percent paid part of the costs. About 85 percent of the full-time workers had access to an employer-sponsored pension plan. The

participation rate was 73.7 percent.

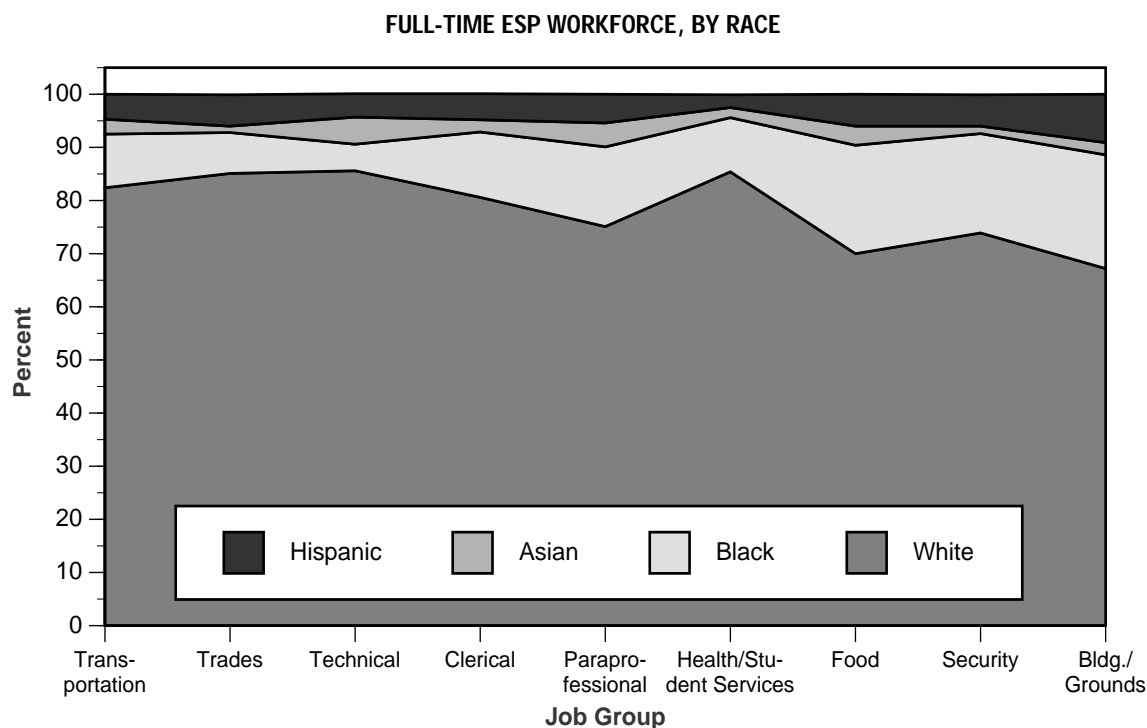
### THE NEA ESP SURVEY: A CLOSER LOOK

The 1997 NEA survey randomly sampled ESP in higher education to learn more about their work lives, job satisfaction, and concerns about their jobs. The return rate for this mail survey was 54 percent (N=1,061). Respondents included all nine job groups, but 63 percent were in secretarial, clerical, and administrative services, 11 percent were paraprofessionals, and 10 percent worked in building and grounds maintenance. The remaining 17 percent were spread across six groups. The results were weighted by NEA region.

### Profile of the Respondents

About 52 percent of the survey respondents worked for more than 10 years in higher education; 49 percent worked at the same college or university for more than 10 years. About 61 percent were in their current job for less than 10 years.

FIGURE 3



SOURCE: NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

Community colleges employed 59 percent of the respondents; four-year colleges employed 33 percent; 93 percent held full-time positions. About 54 percent earned between \$15,000 and \$24,999 a year; another 29 percent earned between \$24,999 and \$34,999.

### Sources of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Responses to the initial question, "How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your current ESP job?" are arranged by degree of "satisfaction," with levels of relative satisfaction listed first (Figures 7, 8, and 9). When "very satisfied" and "satisfied" are combined, respondents showed high levels of contentment regarding health and safety issues (80 percent), the kind and amount of work done (89 percent and 74 percent, respectively), job security (79 percent), and personal fulfillment (76 percent) (Figure 7).

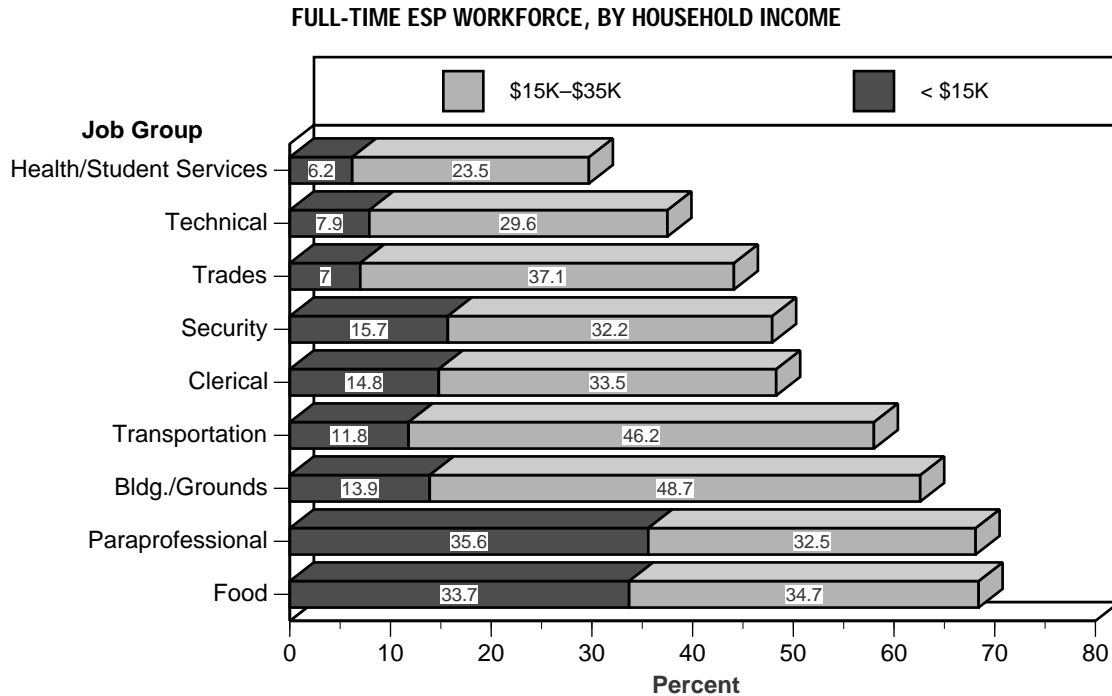
Respondents also indicated considerable satisfaction with local association support (71 percent), faculty support (71 percent), supervisor support (73 percent), freedom to decide

how to do the job (84 percent), and job benefits (87 percent) (Figure 8). Employees were less satisfied with opportunities for skills improvement and for new skills training (68 percent and 65 percent, respectively) (Figure 9). The respondents expressed least satisfaction with wages (55 percent) and with chances for promotion (31 percent).

### Working Conditions

Figures 10 and 11 indicate the percentage of those surveyed who responded "yes" or "no" to questions about working conditions. Most respondents had written job descriptions (92 percent), their employer kept necessary equipment in good repair (81 percent), and they received annual written evaluations (73 percent). About 59 percent indicated their employers provided necessary safety equipment and guidelines; 58 percent reported their supervisors provided written evaluations in the past year. Most respondents did not have to pay for job-related uniforms, equipment, or supplies (no=90 percent) (Figure 11).

FIGURE 4



SOURCE: NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

### Job Protections

The survey asked “yes” or “no” job-related questions about employees in their job classification (Figures 12 and 13). Most respondents were covered by a grievance procedure (90 percent), subject to a probationary or waiting period before becoming permanent (86 percent), and covered by “just cause” provisions protecting them from arbitrary or unfair dismissals (yes=57 percent; don’t know=35 percent). About 55 percent of the respondents indicated that current employees in their job classification had preference over outsiders when vacancies were filled; 50 percent report their college had a layoff and recall procedure based on job seniority (don’t know=34 percent). Only 26 percent reported protection from involuntary transfers from one work site to another (no protection=36 percent; don’t know=36 percent) (Figure 13).

### Major Worklife Concerns

The survey asked about concerns regarding current jobs. Figures 14 and 15 display the responses arranged from “major concerns” to

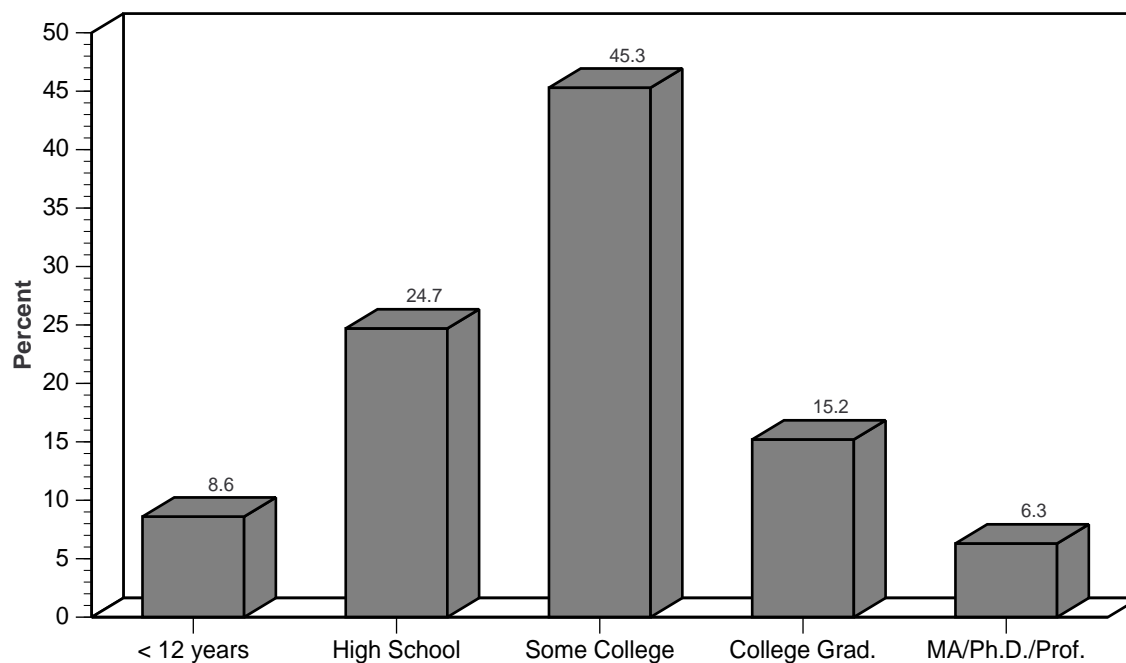
“not a concern.” Respondents expressed the most concern about the lack of opportunities for promotion or advancement (58 percent), the perception that wages did not reflect changes in their job (57 percent), layoffs and downsizing (46 percent), and the increasing performance expectations (38 percent).

A consistent 24-28 percent of respondents reported the following worklife issues as major concerns: the need to retrain or develop new skills, the need to improve current skills, threats to health and safety, involuntary transfers, and having to work outside their assignment.

About 48 percent responded “very” or “somewhat” concerned about outsourcing work; 50 percent answered “not very” or “not at all” concerned. When asked if their local associations should oppose efforts to contract out services, 71 percent indicated “very important”; 19 percent indicated “somewhat important” (not shown). Employees may be split as to whether their own job was threatened, but they wanted their local associations to remain vigilant.

FIGURE 5

## FULLTIME ESP WORKFORCE, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



SOURCE: NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

## DISCUSSION

The survey provides a fairly positive picture of the work lives, degrees of satisfaction, and concerns of education support personnel who work in higher education. The majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with their jobs, health and safety on the job, and the kind and amount of work they do. The majority also felt relatively satisfied with job security, job fulfillment, freedom and benefits, and support received from local associations, the faculty, and supervisor.

Respondents reported higher levels of dissatisfaction when asked about wages and opportunities for training and promotion. These responses were consistent with responses about major concerns. The lack of opportunities for promotion or advancement and the perception that wages do not reflect changes in their jobs were of most concern.

The sources of dissatisfaction are not all cost items. Employers can provide opportunities for learning new skills and for improving

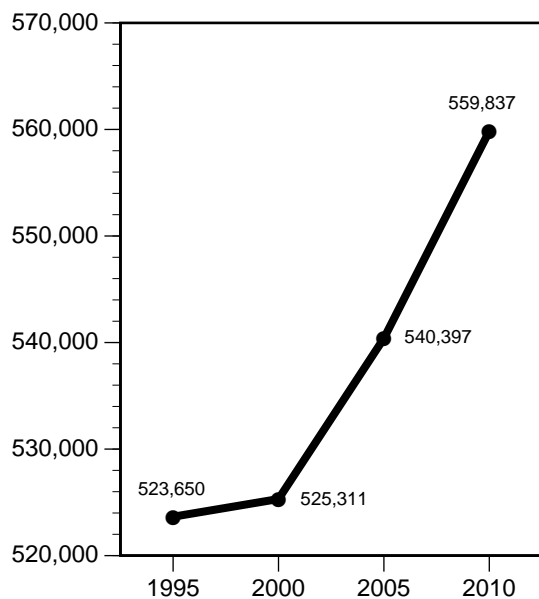
existing skills at low cost. No research has examined the morale or turnover of education support staff, but career development and recognition for service increases the morale of midlevel administrative staff, which in turn decreases the intent to leave.<sup>8</sup> ESP staff morale and stability are apt to increase when employers recognize and develop internal talent for promotion and advancement.

Collective bargaining agreements or contracts covered about 75 percent of the respondents. But employees often did not know or understand all the provisions of their contracts. About one-third did not know whether employees in their classification were covered by "just cause" provisions protecting them from arbitrary or unfair dismissals; involuntary transfers from one work site to another; or were subject to a layoff and recall procedure based on job security. Vulnerability to abuse increases when employees do not know their rights under such fundamental tenets of collective bargaining contracts.

Many respondents were unaware of the

FIGURE 6

**PROJECTED SIZE OF FULL-TIME ESP WORKFORCE  
1995-2005**



*SOURCE:* NEA ESP Data Book: A Work Force and Membership Profile of Educational Support Personnel (July 1996).

TABLE 2

**PROJECTED SIZE OF ESP WORKFORCE, BY JOB GROUP**

	1995	2010	% Change
Bldg./Grounds	93,521	97,061	3.78
Security	34,302	35,355	3.36
Food	62,001	64,167	3.49
Health/Stud.	10,981	11,427	4.06
Paraprofessional	75,319	78,830	4.66
Clerical	364,496	401,518	10.16
Technical	64,457	67,602	4.88
Trades	39,390	40,958	3.98
Transportation	12,354	12,872	4.19
TOTAL	756,821	809,890	7.01

*SOURCE:* 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

specifics of outsourcing: Over one-half did not know whether any of nine companies that fre-

TABLE 3

**ESP WORKFORCE: FULL-TIME AVERAGE SALARIES**

	1993-94	1994-95	% Change
Bldg./Grounds	\$18,526	\$19,751	6.61
Security	23,670	25,765	8.85
Food	12,970	12,795	(1.35)
Health/Stud.	33,825	31,195	(7.78)
Paraprofessional	12,409	13,605	9.64
Clerical	19,067	20,082	5.32
Technical	28,828	31,404	8.94
Trades	29,167	28,117	(3.60)
Transportation	22,763	18,724	(17.74)
TOTAL	\$20,203	\$21,176	4.82

*SOURCE:* 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

quently provide services to colleges and universities held service contracts on their campuses. Awareness will increase, though, since this issue has gained national attention.

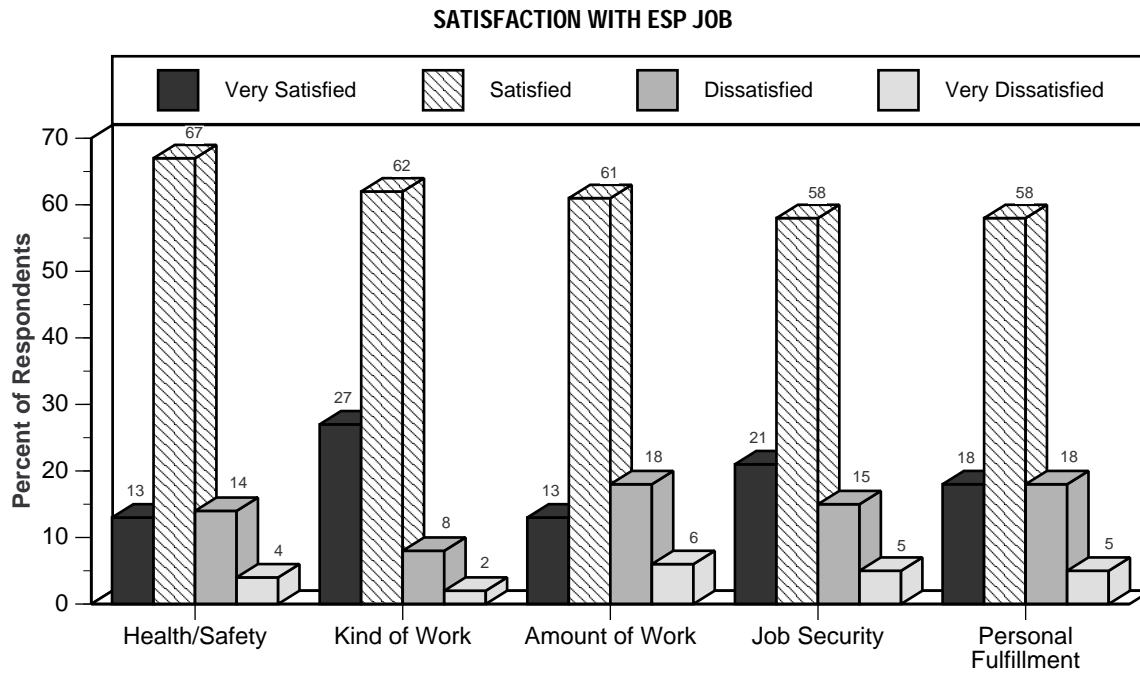
The majority of respondents were satisfied with job security, but 28 percent called downsizing and layoffs major concerns. This view was also reflected in responses to contracting out—a threat to job security unless covered by contract.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Collecting national data on ESP working conditions is an important first step that should lead to comparisons over time. But perhaps as important will be disaggregating the results by sex, race, job group, and institution, since each category may reveal significant differences in satisfactions or concerns. Broad patterns may obscure differences between individual campuses, revealed only by local studies.<sup>10</sup> Campus-based studies may use the national data as a baseline against which to measure themselves.

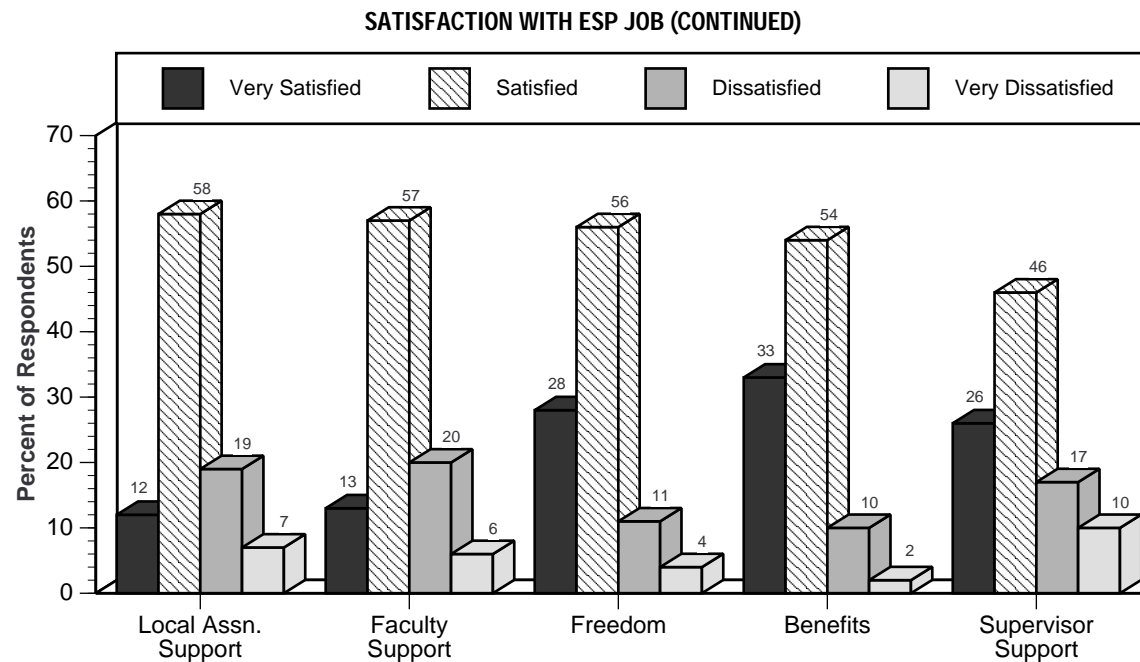
Education support personnel who work in higher education are dedicated, loyal, and diverse and provide critical services. NEA's study has yielded important information and provides guideposts for beginning the process of addressing ESP concerns.

FIGURE 7



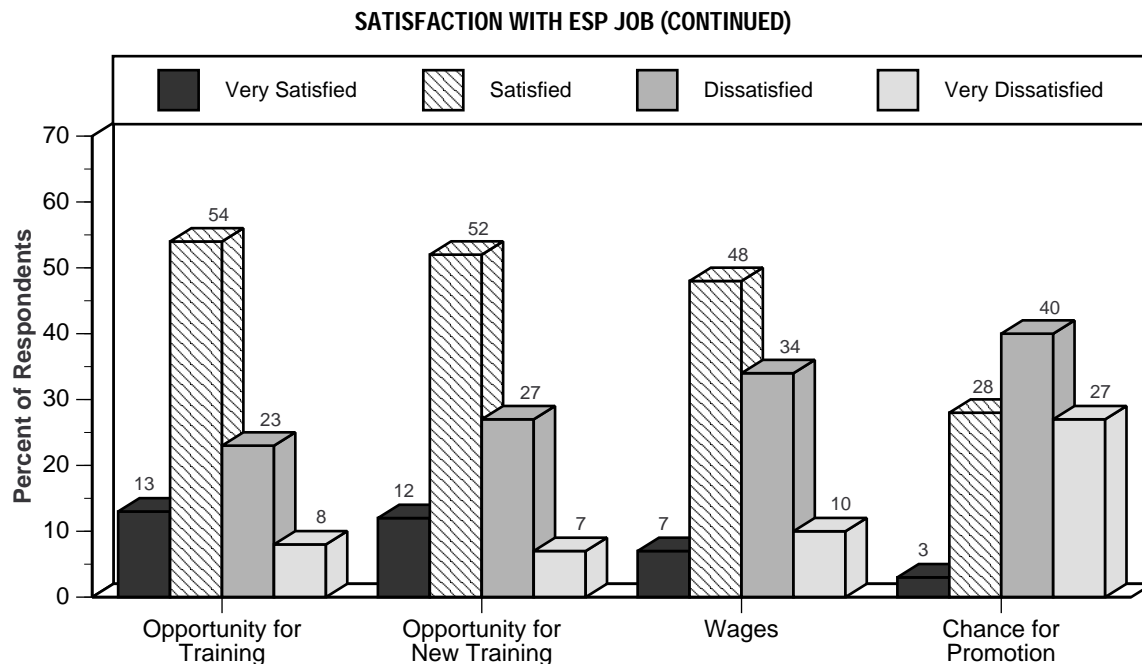
SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 8



SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 9



SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> NEA ESP Data Book, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> NEA Update, 1997. Data source is the 1993 Staff Survey, part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), an annual survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, a division of the U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. IPEDS survey divides higher education employees into eight occupational categories: faculty, research-teaching assistants, clerical-secretarial, executive-administrative-managerial, other professional, service-maintenance, skilled crafts, and technical-paraprofessionals.

<sup>4</sup> NEA ESP Data Book, 1996, ix.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. The report also provides averages for the 1991-1995 ESP job group.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., IV-53. Sources for the NEA ESP Data Book included national data sets such as the Current Population Survey and the U.S. Census of Population as well as the NEA membership files.

<sup>8</sup> Johnsrud, 1996; Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Rhoades and Maitland, 1998. Here is NEA's official policy on outsourcing: "The National Education

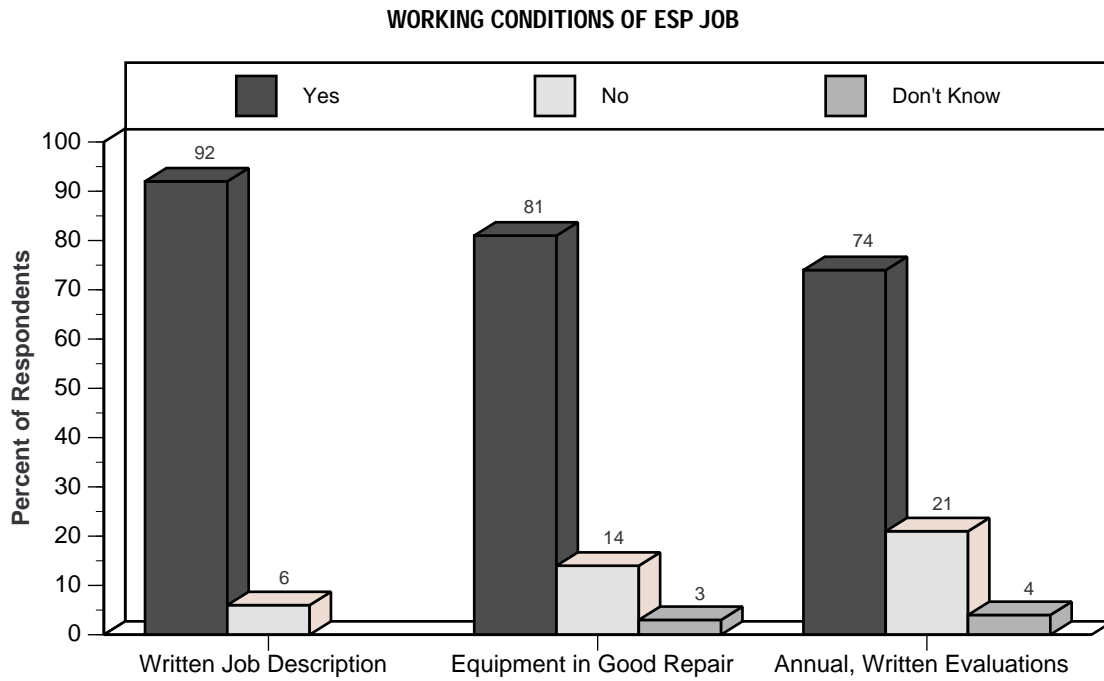
Association opposes subcontracting/contracting out in all public school districts and educational institutions. The Association further believes that school districts and education institutions should not enter into subcontracting agreements that transfer or displace education employees, that replace full-time positions with temporary, part-time or volunteer workers or that abrogate previously contracted benefits, reduce compensation, deny fringe benefits, and/or reduce or eliminate accumulated retirement experience and benefits. ..." (NEA 1997-98 Handbook, F-25, 313).

<sup>10</sup> Johnsrud, 1996.

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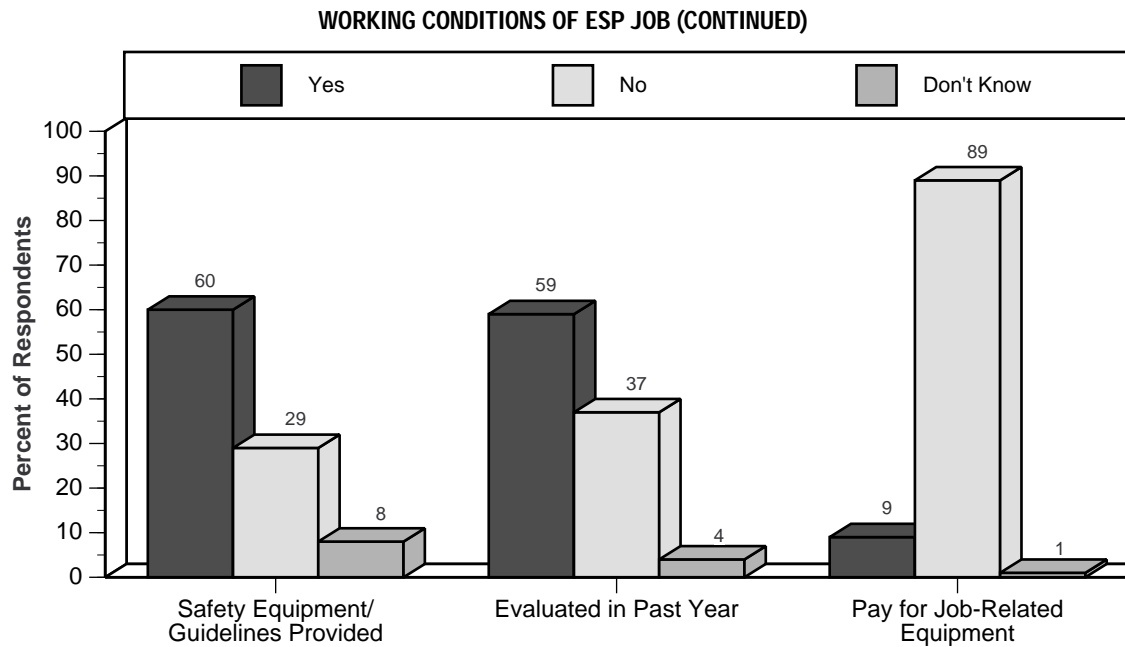
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FIGURE 10



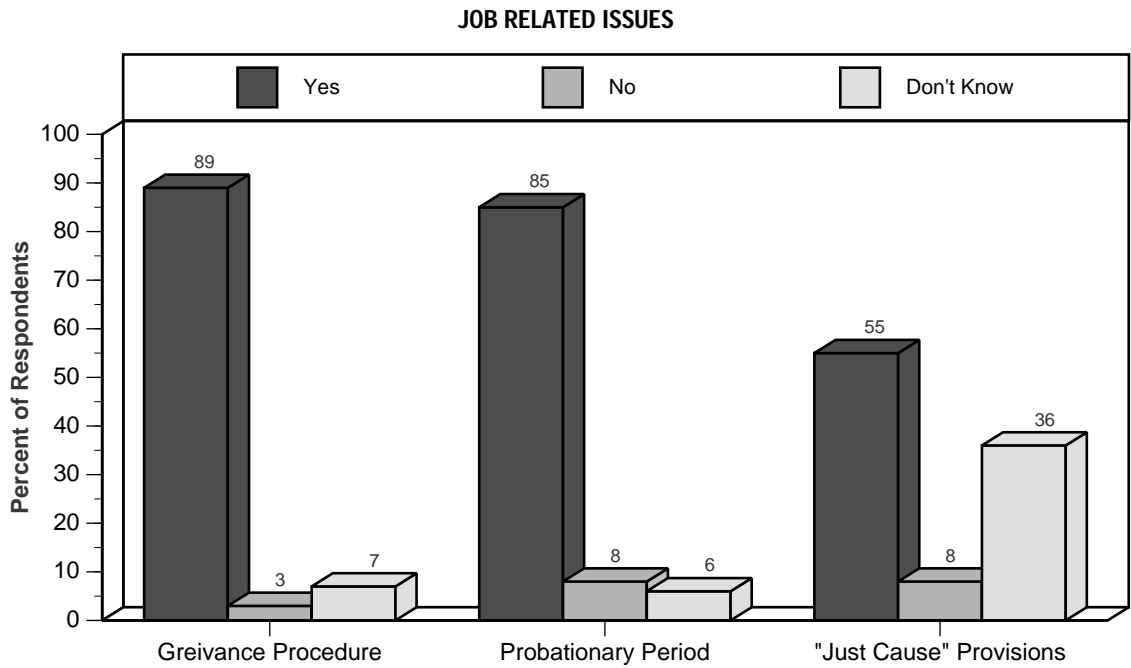
SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 11



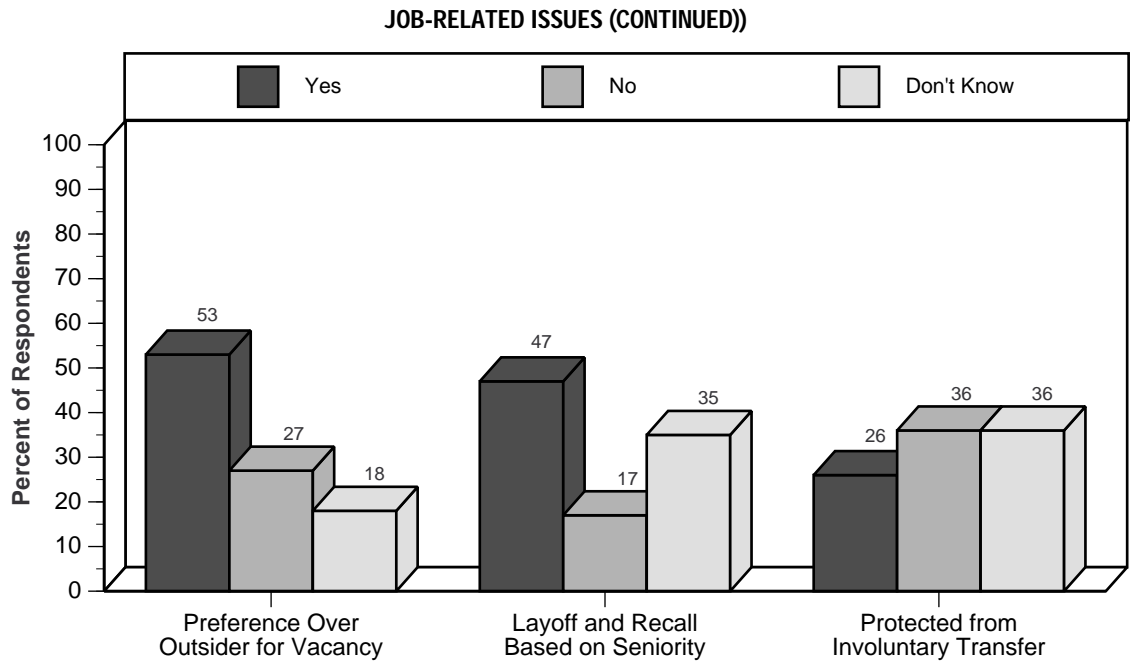
SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 12



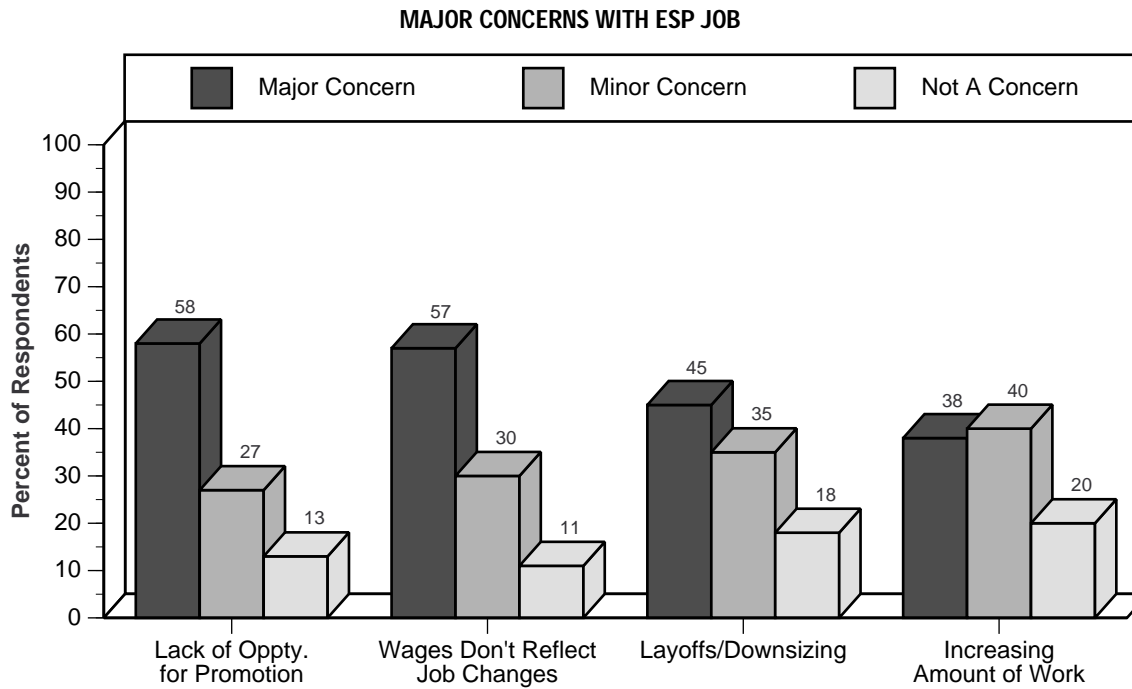
SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 13



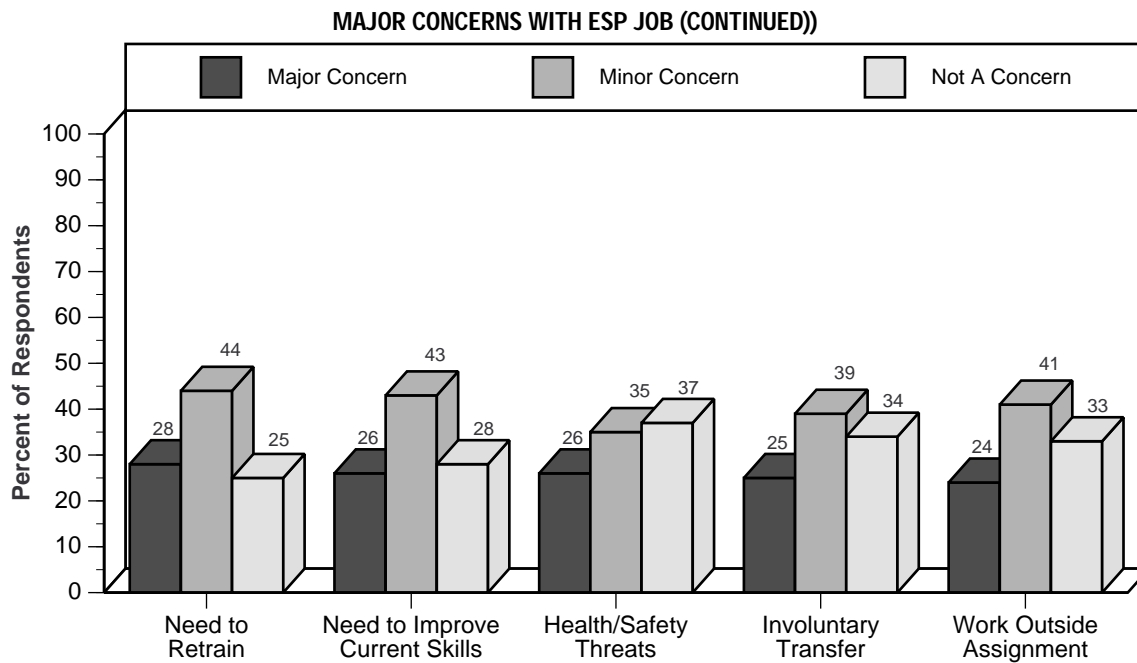
SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 14



SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

FIGURE 15



SOURCE: 1997 NEA Survey of Higher Education Support Personnel Members.

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