



Northern Illinois University

Remote Work at NIU

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Co-chairs of NIU Remote Working Task Group
August 31, 2021

Charge of the Remote Working Task Group:



- Develop an institutional framework for decision-making
- Leverage NIU's experiences during the pandemic
- Make recommendations for remote working at NIU moving forward

Guiding Principles:



- Prioritize students' needs and service to students
- Promote flexibility to enhance employee health/well-being, retention, and engagement
- Develop recommendations guided by fairness, equity, and functionality
- Ensure that operational effectiveness and efficiency will be maintained or strengthened

Task Group Approach:



April/May 2021

- Task Group launched, with 6 sub-groups
- Sub-group leaders appointed, with recommended membership
- 55 participants, representing diverse roles across campus

May/June 2021

- Data gathering and sub-group discussions, including a student survey, chairs/directors/deans survey, and survey data, models, and best practices from internal and external resources
- Sub-group reports submitted to co-chairs

July 2021

- Co-chairs synthesized reports into single report and recommendations

August 2021

- Received feedback from subgroups and leadership, and revised report
- Submitted report to leadership

Task Sub-Group Leaders:



1. Policy – Therese Arado and Miriah Ranken
2. Technology – Andrew Johnson and Jason Rhode
3. Student Experience – Jenna Osterlund and Michelle Pickett
4. Faculty Experience – Mya Groza and Ralph Wheeler
5. Employee Engagement, Support and Work/Life Balance – Anna Quider and Susan Swegle
6. Models and Effective Practices – Greg Martyn and Michael Stang

Student Experience:



- Satisfied with flexibility from teachers/advisors (66% of respondents), advising (58%), and taking courses (55%)
- Dissatisfied with interacting with NIU peers (57% of respondents) and connection to the NIU community (55%)

"I feel completely disconnected from my peers and teachers. I feel I have no support system and that makes it very hard to want to get up and do schoolwork."

"I don't feel engaged at all. There is no sense of community and no personal interaction."

--Student Survey, 997 Respondents, April 2021

Student Experience:



- 71% experienced less work-life balance than normal since the start of COVID-19
- Negative impact of COVID-19 on their
 - Physical well-being (62% of respondents)
 - Social well-being (56%)
 - Emotional well-being (68%)
 - Financial well-being (48%)
- 62% have increased their use in mental health services

--Student Survey, 997 Respondents, April 2021

Student Experience:



- 63% prefer to take all or most classes in-person rather than online
- 21% prefer all or mostly online classes
- 16% prefer half of their classes online and half in-person

"I have ADHD and it's really hard for me to focus and retain information during online classes. I do not have a distraction free work environment."

"Working remote has provided greater flexibility, more free time, and a better ability to concentrate. Much better work/life balance. Save tons of money not having to commute."

--Student Survey, 997 Respondents, April 2021

Faculty and Staff Experience:



- Summer 2021 survey of NIU chairs, directors, deans and associate deans
- Feedback from members of the Remote Work Task Group
- Internal sources - PCSW's *Faculty and Staff COVID-19 Work-Life Balance Survey* and RIAC's *Work-Life Balance Report*
- External sources - EAB, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education* and best practices/model/policies from other organizations

Faculty and Staff Experience:



- A mix of remote and in-person work is preferred
- In teaching, mentoring students and work with colleagues, face-to-face is preferred
- For office hours, large group meetings and individual work, remote is preferred
- Need for enhanced guidance about best practices and technology support
- Guidelines are important, but they should allow for local adaptation
- Potential for inequity exists, especially in relation to implementation, workload, and promotion

Benefits of Remote Work:



- Recruitment and retention of diverse workforce and students
- Financial savings (gas, commute, parking, meals, etc.)
- Potential for increased productivity
- Improved work-life balance
- Improved personal wellness
- Reduced environmental impact

Challenges of Remote Work:



- Remote work option is not an option for all work
- Work that relies on access to students, colleagues, labs, and other resources may not be as productive
- Fewer opportunities to create bonds, engagement, and informal connections
- On-site employees may face increased workloads and expectations because more visible and available
- Differences in participation and access may lead to inequities in advancement

Short-Term Recommendations:



- Deactivate the *Work at Home Policy* and develop new *Remote Work Policy*
- Encourage remote working arrangements to be set locally, at the unit-level
- Create collaborative forums for sharing successes and best practices
- Review other policies, such as *Flextime Policy*, *Bring Your Own Device Policy* and technology purchasing/refresh policies

Remote Work Agreements:



- Consider impact of modality on individual and unit productivity
- Include:
 - Duration of agreement, trial period, review and renewal
 - Scheduling times for availability/accountability
 - Technology (hardware, software, training) required
 - Workspace requirements for best productivity
 - Communication standards, frequency, reports, etc.
 - How will remote work productivity be evaluated
 - Compliance with Federal/State law, NIU policies and collective bargaining

Long-Term Recommendations:



- Update job descriptions to reflect modality options
- Review impact of remote work on campus spaces (parking, flexible office space, environmental impact, etc.)
- Review impact of remote work on service to students
- Continue to develop toolkits and training to support supervisors and employees
- Move all mandatory training to virtual



We would like to hear from you ...

What worked?

What is your plan?