

# 2013 Survey of MSU Academic Specialists

Conducted by the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee

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## Purpose

The purpose of this survey, conducted by the Michigan State University (MSU) Academic Specialist Advisory Committee (ASAC), is to better understand the experiences and opinions of MSU specialists as they relate to mentoring, professional development, compensation and other employment issues, so that the ASAC can better serve its constituents. The survey consisted of four categories: (1) Employment Experience, (2) Professional Development, (3) Academic Specialist Advisory Committee, and (4) Demographic Information.

## Academic Specialist Advisory Committee

The ASAC provides the governance structure for the MSU specialist community, including the functional areas of teaching, curriculum development, advising, research, and outreach. Among other activities, ASAC organizes a bi-annual Specialist Professional Development Forum and occasional informational seminars; meets with administrators responsible for budgets, benefits and retirement, and other aspects of human resources; and collaborates with the University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) to develop annual salary raise recommendations for the MSU Provost and Board of Trustees.

## Survey Respondents

This survey was sent to approximately 743 academic specialists across campus, including advisors, outreach staff, instructors, curriculum developers, and researchers. The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey; response was anonymous and voluntary. Within a two-week time period from November 12<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013, a total of 292 responses were received, indicating a response rate of approximately 39%. Frequencies were calculated based on the total response counts for the particular question.

## Key Findings

- **Employment:** Most academic specialists are employed in a fixed term capacity, in annual appointments, for 100% time. Though a majority of time commitment of the specialist community is spent on advising, many specialists play multiple roles ranging from research, teaching and outreach to administration. Most specialists are evaluated by their supervisor on an annual basis and have some form of informal mentoring relationship to support them in their career growth. While a majority of specialists indicate that they are relatively satisfied with their employment experience, less than half feel that they are adequately and fairly compensated for their work as an academic specialist.
- **Professional Development:** A majority of specialists indicated that their unit supports their professional development through non-credit learning experiences. Roughly 16% of specialists have taken advantage of the Academic Specialist Professional Development Support Program (university funding support for credit courses in pursuit of a higher degree). Of the specialists that do not have a terminal degree, a plurality (39%) are interested in pursuing one. Noted topics of interest for professional development experiences provided by ASAC included the ins and outs of being a specialist, contemporary teaching techniques, negotiation skills, work/life balance and collaboration skills.

- **Academic Specialist Advisory Committee:** While 85% of specialists were aware of the existence of the ASAC, only 7% have ever contacted the committee with a question or issue; a majority of those who had contacted ASAC were satisfied that their concern was addressed. Three quarters of specialists rarely, if ever, refer to the Academic Specialist Handbook for guidance. Respondents suggested that the ASAC should have a more public presence, produce a newsletter, host appreciation events, provide comparisons to similar job classifications at other universities and seek non-credit course reimbursement for specialists.
- **Demographic Information:** A majority of specialists who responded were female (65%), White/Caucasian (86%) and between the ages of 25-45. Sixty percent (60%) of respondents have a Master's degree. A plurality of specialists (45%) fall in the annual MSU salary range of \$50,000-\$74,999, and a majority (64%) received a raise equivalent or equal to the 1.5% approved general merit raise in October 2013.

### **Next Steps**

The Academic Specialist Advisory Committee will utilize the information provided in the survey to provide appropriate recommendations to university administrators regarding employment issues for MSU specialists, to enhance specialist professional development programming and to establish a baseline for future surveys of specialists for tracking progress and trends.

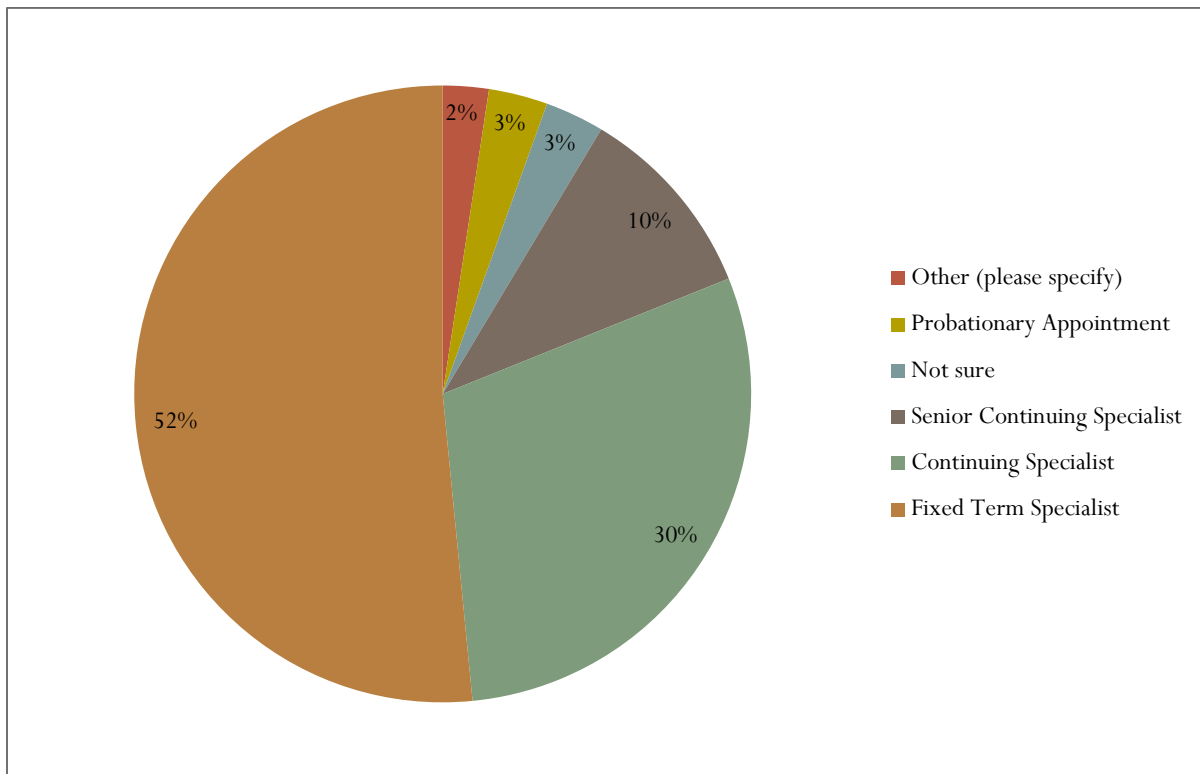
### **For More Information**

Please contact the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee at [ASAC@msu.edu](mailto:ASAC@msu.edu).

## Employment Experience

### 1. What is the nature of your current appointment?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Fixed term Specialist	51.5%	150
Probationary Appointment (under consideration for continuing appointment)	3.1%	9
Continuing Specialist	29.6%	86
Senior Continuing Specialist	10.3%	30
Not sure	3.1%	9
Other (please specify)	2.4%	7
<i>answered question</i>		<b>291</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>1</b>



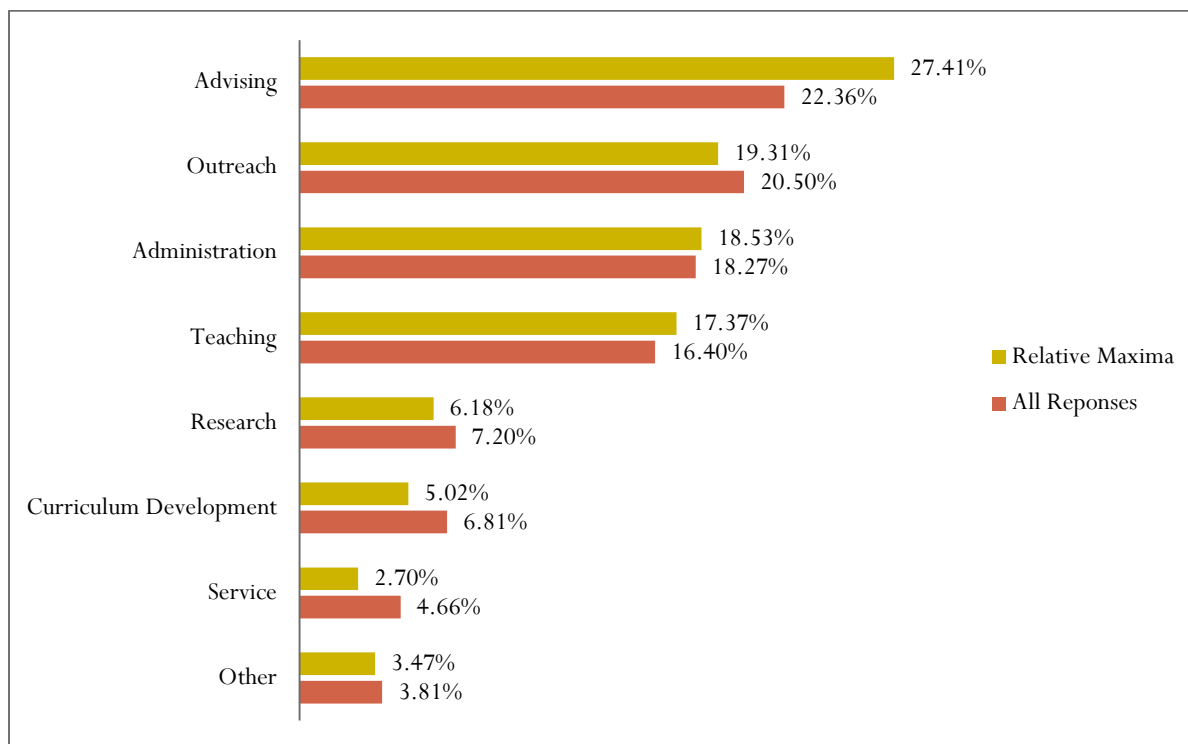
Other responses included:

- Retired/emeritus
- Appointment expired
- Awaiting re-approval

2. Please estimate the percentage of your time that you devote to the following functional areas (percentages should add to 100%).

Answer Options	Response Average	Response Total	Response Count
Teaching	25.05	4,685	187
Curriculum Development	13.60	1,945	143
Advising	38.25	6,388	167
Research	16.46	2,058	125
Outreach	30.04	5,857	195
Service	11.78	1,331	113
Administration	28.21	5,219	185
Other	15.13	1,089	72

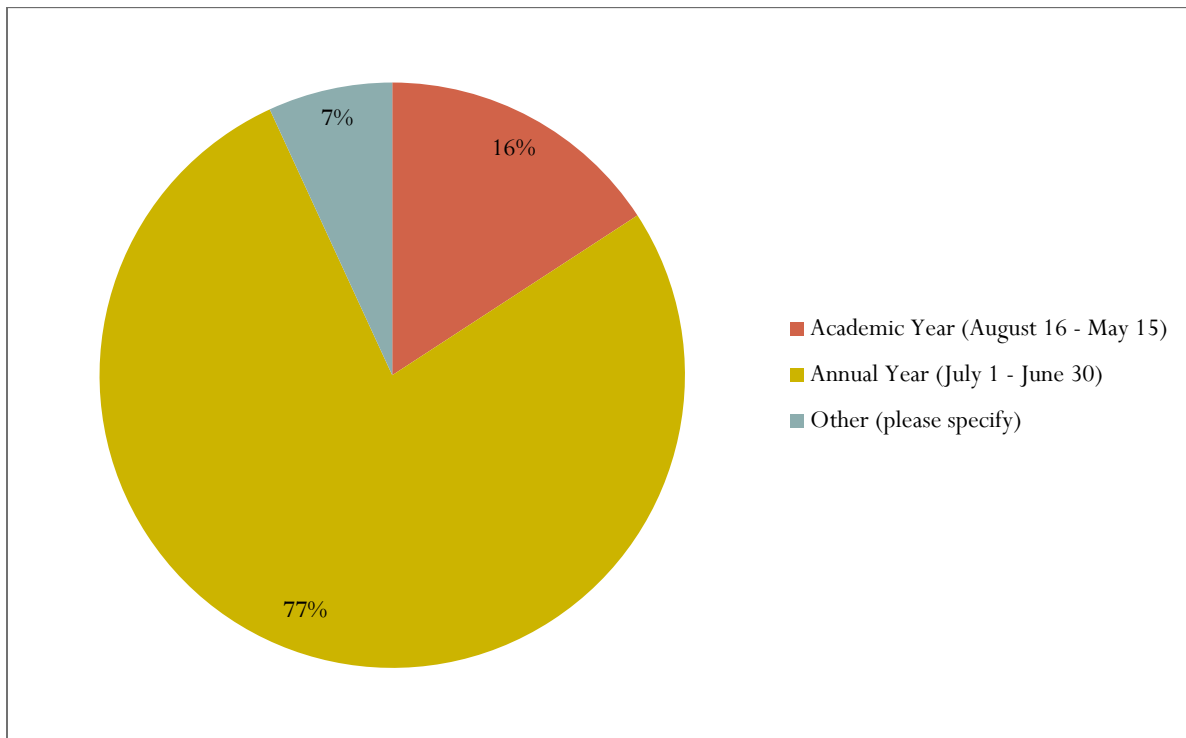
*answered question* 286  
*skipped question* 6



All responses indicate the average percentage time that is devoted to each functional area across the academic specialist population. The relative maxima indicates the functional area that was indicated as the primary for the respondent's appointment time commitment.

### 3. What is the basic employment commitment for your position?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Academic Year (August 16 – May 15)	15.8%	46
Annual Year (July 1 – June 30)	77.3%	225
Other (please specify)	6.9%	20
<i>answered question</i>		<b>291</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>1</b>



Other responses included:

- Grant year
- Other start/end date

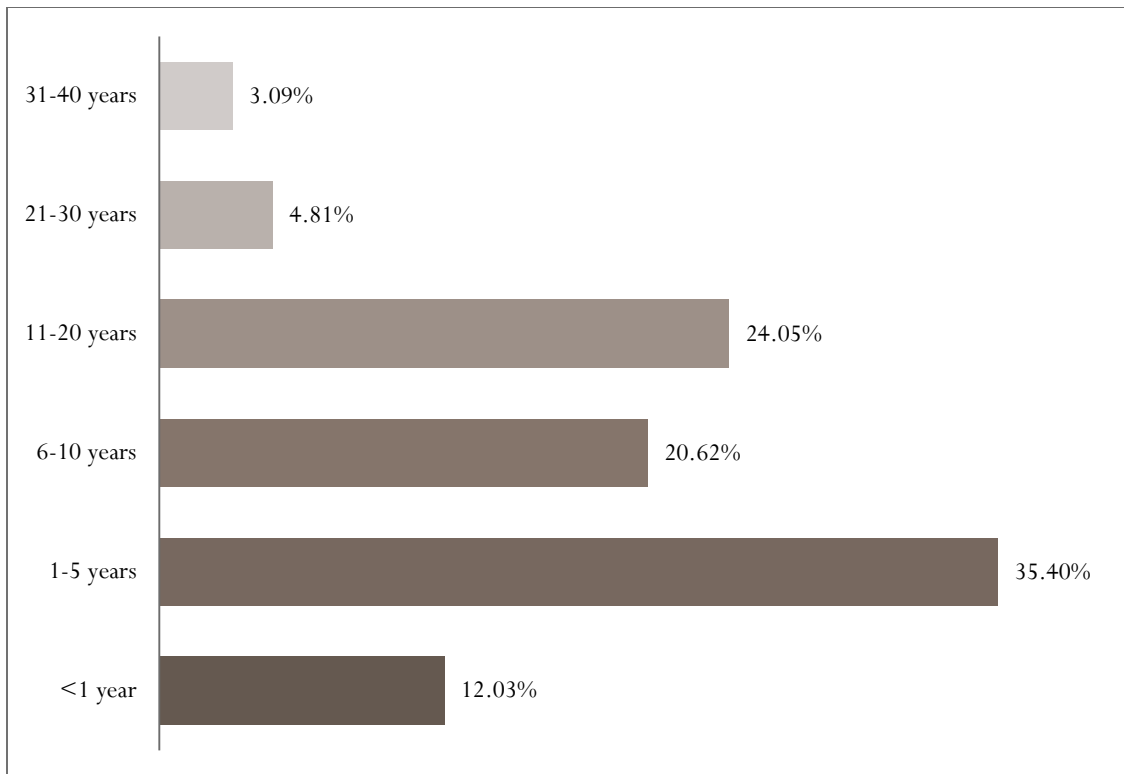
### 4. At what percentage time are you currently employed?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
100%	91.0%	264
75-99%	2.1%	6
50-74%	4.8%	14
25-49%	1.0%	3
Less than 25%	1.0%	3
<i>answered question</i>		<b>290</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>2</b>

### 5. How long have you been an academic specialist at MSU?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 year	12.0%	35
1-5 years	35.4%	103
6-10 years	20.6%	60
11-20 years	24.1%	70
21-30 years	4.8%	14
31-40 years	3.1%	9
More than 40 years	0.0%	0

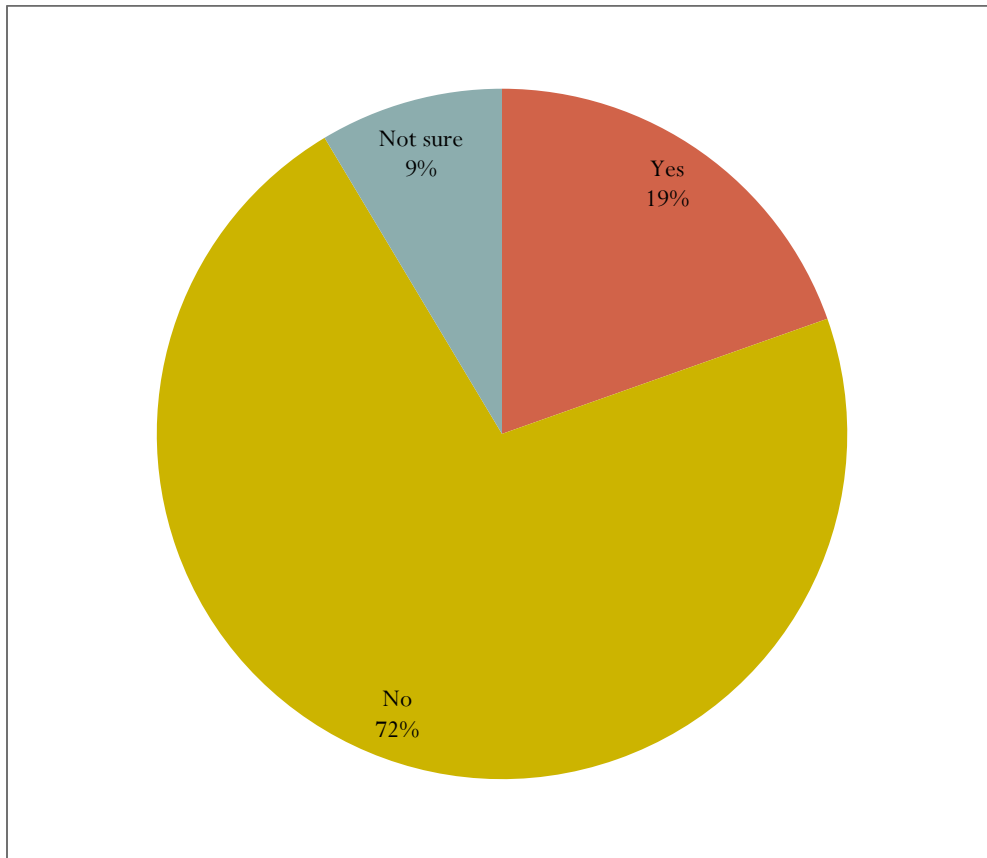
answered question 291  
skipped question 1



6. Did you attend an orientation for academic specialists upon being hired to MSU?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	19.6%	57
No	71.8%	209
Not sure	8.6%	25

answered question 291  
skipped question 1



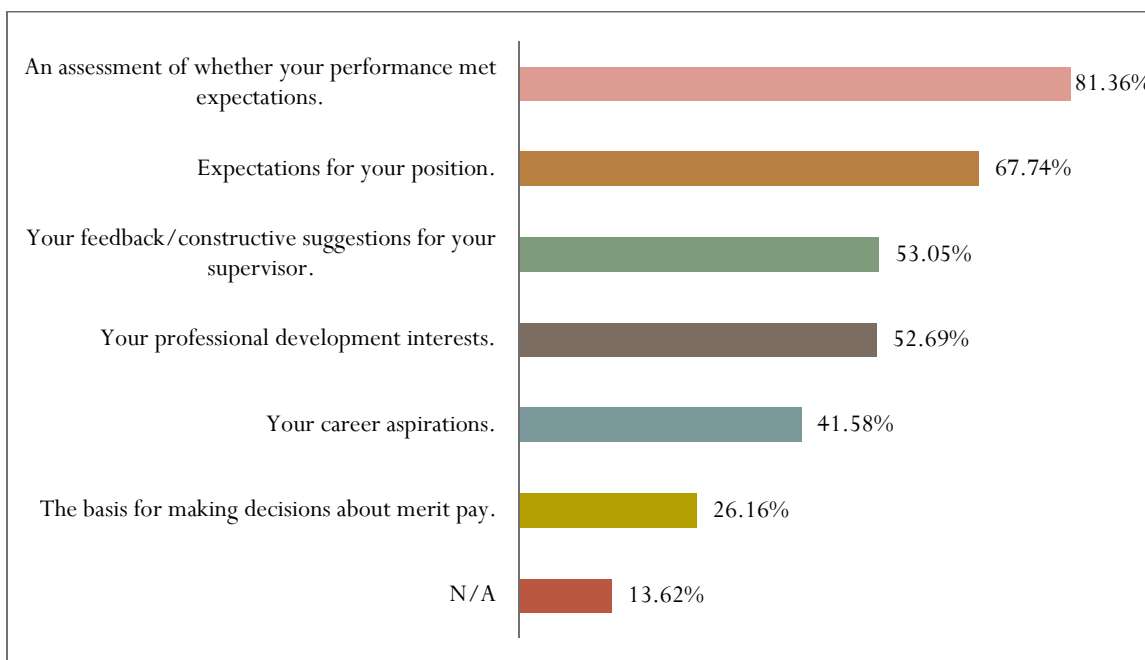


**7. Does your supervisor conduct a performance evaluation with you on an annual basis?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	81.7%	237
No	8.3%	24
Not sure	10.0%	29
<i>answered question</i>		<b>290</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>2</b>

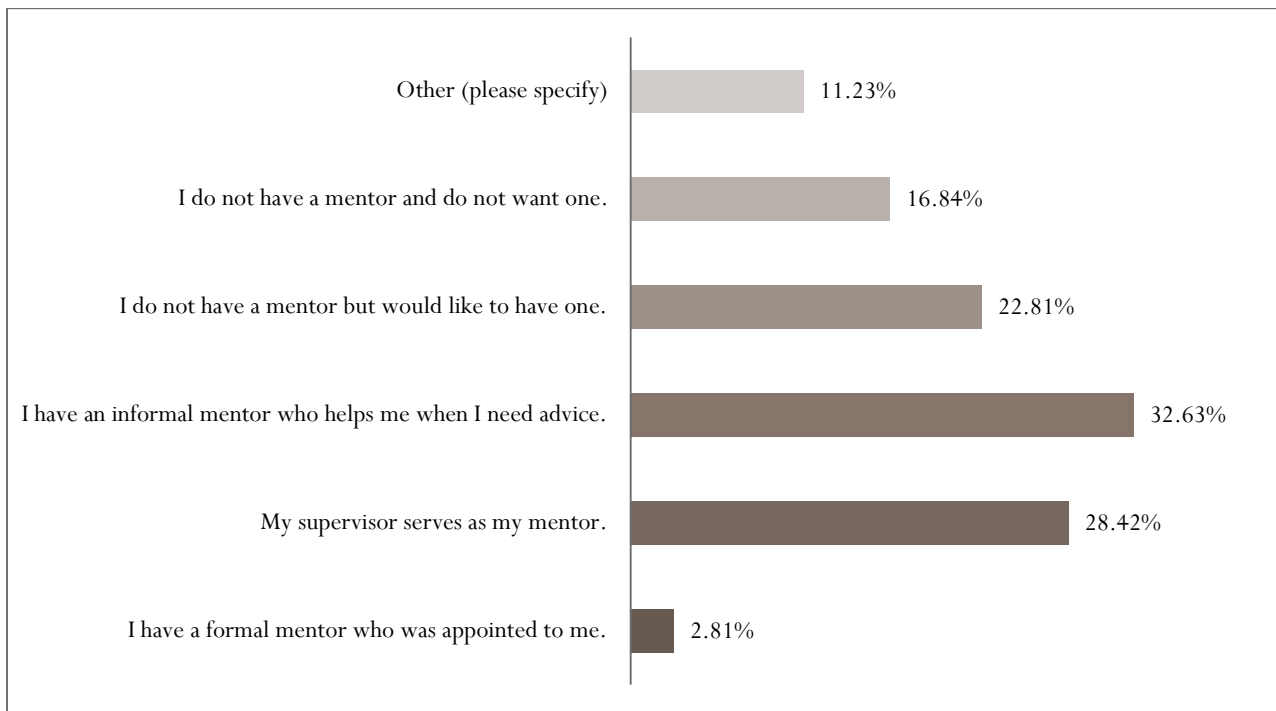
**8. If/when you have had an evaluation with your supervisor, which of the following did you discuss (check all that apply)?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Expectations for your position.	67.7%	189
An assessment of whether your performance met expectations.	81.4%	227
The basis for making decisions about merit pay.	26.2%	73
Your feedback/constructive suggestions for your supervisor.	53.0%	148
Your career aspirations.	41.6%	116
Your professional development interests.	52.7%	147
Not applicable (i.e. you have not had an evaluation with your supervisor.)	13.6%	38
<i>answered question</i>		<b>279</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>13</b>



**9. What experience have you had with someone at MSU serving as a mentor to you in your role as a specialist?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I have a formal mentor who was appointed to me.	2.8%	8
My supervisor serves as my mentor.	28.4%	81
I have an informal mentor who helps me when I need advice.	32.6%	93
I do not have a mentor but would like to have one.	22.8%	65
I do not have a mentor and do not want one.	16.8%	48
Other (please specify)	11.2%	32
<i>answered question</i>		<b>285</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>7</b>



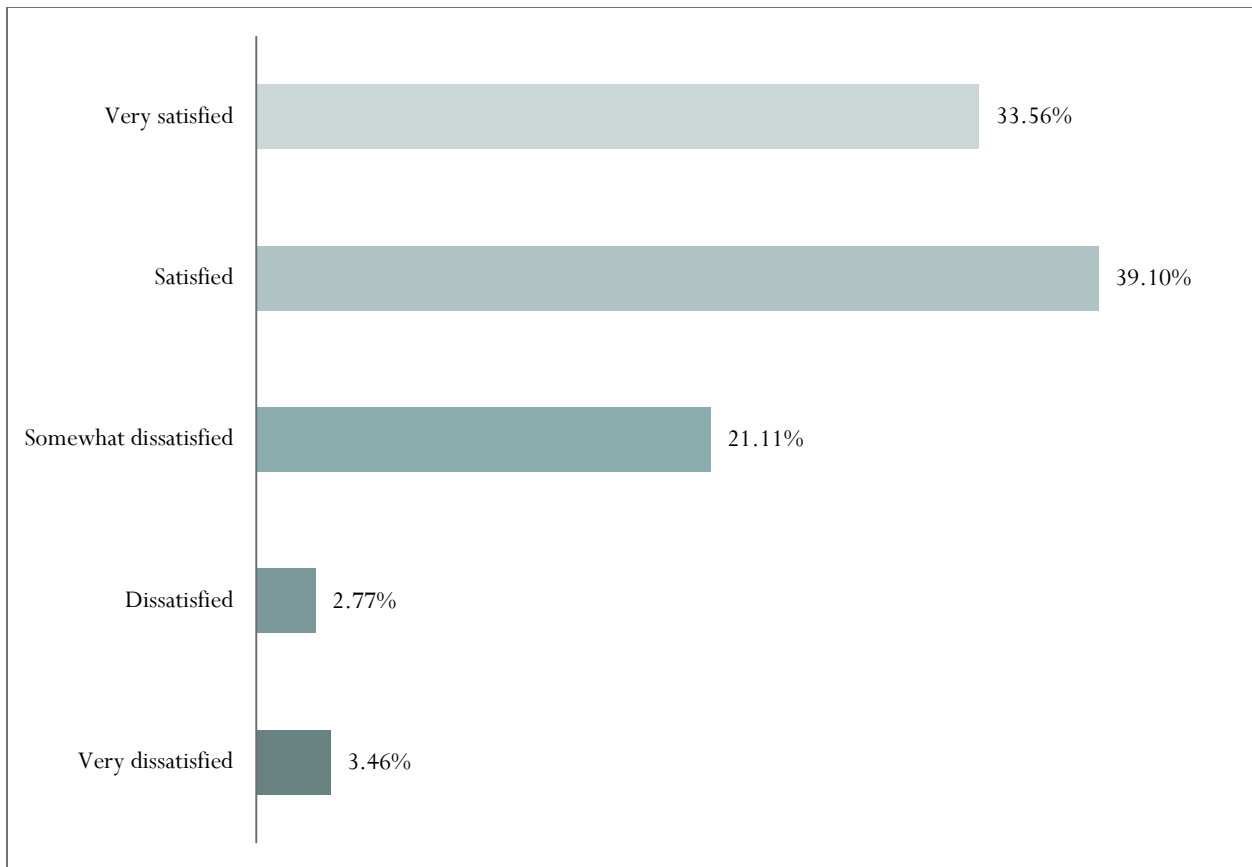
Other responses included (most frequent responses):

- My team mentors one another as needed.
- My mentor retired.
- I have a mentor, but he/she is not specific to my role as a specialist.
- I have not given the idea much thought.
- I am a mentor to others.
- I no longer need a mentor due to the stage of my career.

**10. How satisfied are you with your employment experience as an academic specialist at MSU?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very dissatisfied	3.5%	10
Dissatisfied	2.8%	8
Somewhat satisfied	21.1%	61
Satisfied	39.1%	113
Very Satisfied	33.6%	97

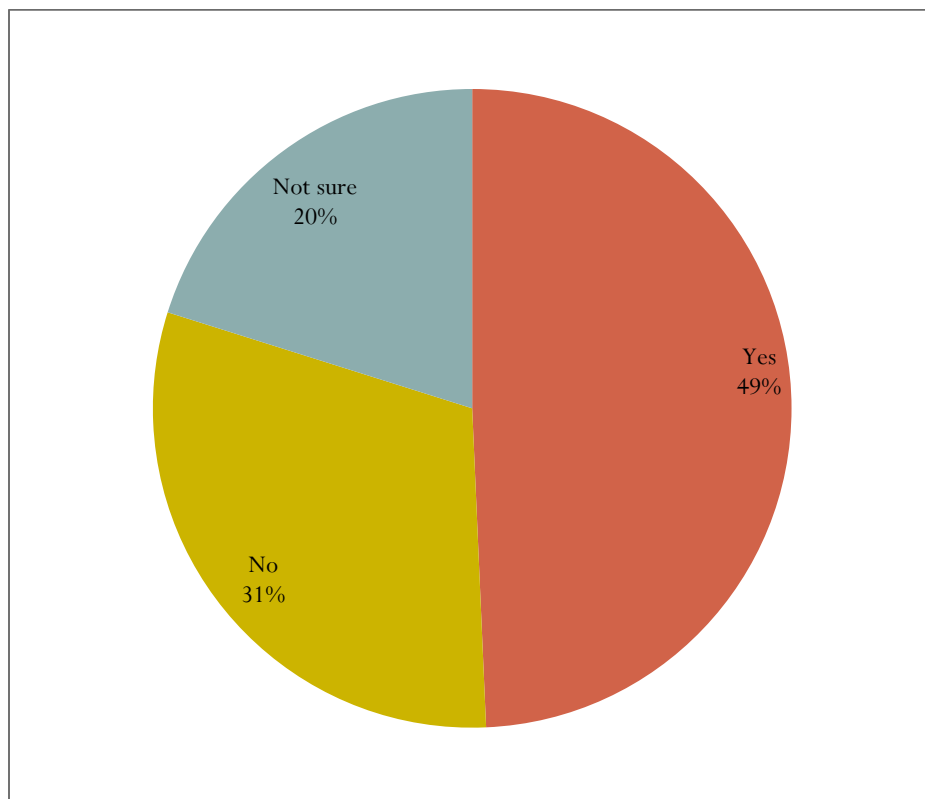
*answered question* 289  
*skipped question* 3



**11. Do you feel that you are adequately and fairly compensated for your work as an academic specialist?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	49.3%	142
No	30.6%	88
Not sure	20.1%	58

*answered question* 288  
*skipped question* 4



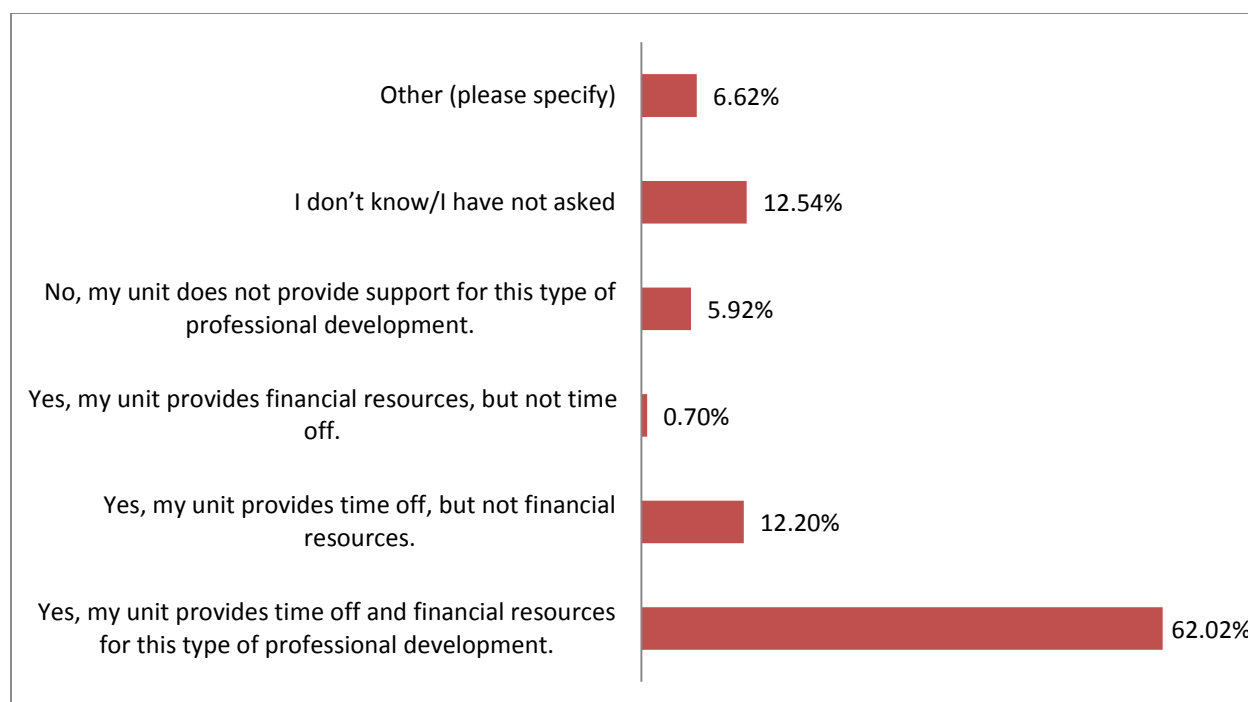
Why or why not? (most frequent responses)

- My department treats me the same as my faculty colleagues.
- The good benefits package makes up for a lesser salary.
- I work longer hours (e.g. from home) than specified to complete everything.
- I am overqualified.
- I take on extra responsibilities without recognition.
- I rarely/never receive significant raises.
- I was hired during the recession for too low of a wage.
- People doing the same work are compensated very differently, even within departments.
- Academic specialists are viewed as less valuable than faculty.
- Raises are not keeping up with increases in the cost of living.
- I am not sure how my skills/responsibilities stack up to others in similar roles at the university/elsewhere.

## Professional Development

**13. Does your unit (department/school/center/college) support your professional development through conferences, seminars and other non-credit courses?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, my unit provides time off and financial resources for this type of professional development.	62.0%	178
Yes, my unit provides time off, but not financial resources.	12.2%	35
Yes, my unit provides financial resources, but not time off.	0.7%	2
No, my unit does not provide support for this type of professional development.	5.9%	17
I don't know/I have not asked	12.5%	36
Other (please specify)	6.6%	19
<i>answered question</i>		<b>287</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>5</b>



Other responses included (most frequent responses):

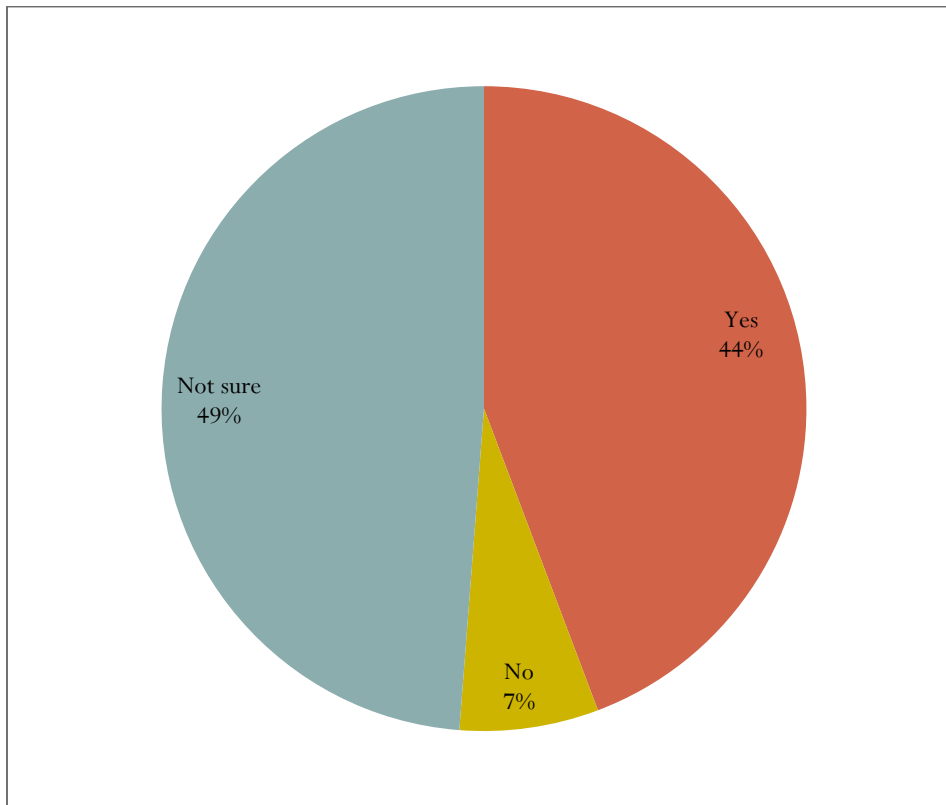
- Financial resources are available but limited.
- Support is available depending on grant specifications.
- My professional certification requires continuing education, but my unit doesn't support it.
- The subject is under review.

**14. Have you taken advantage of the Academic Specialist Professional Development Support Program (funding support for specialists with at least 24 full-time equivalent service months, currently employed with a 50% time or greater appointment, to pursue job, degree and/or career/professional development-related credit courses at MSU)?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	16.3%	47
No	82.7%	239
Not sure	1.0%	3
<i>answered question</i>		<b>289</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>3</b>

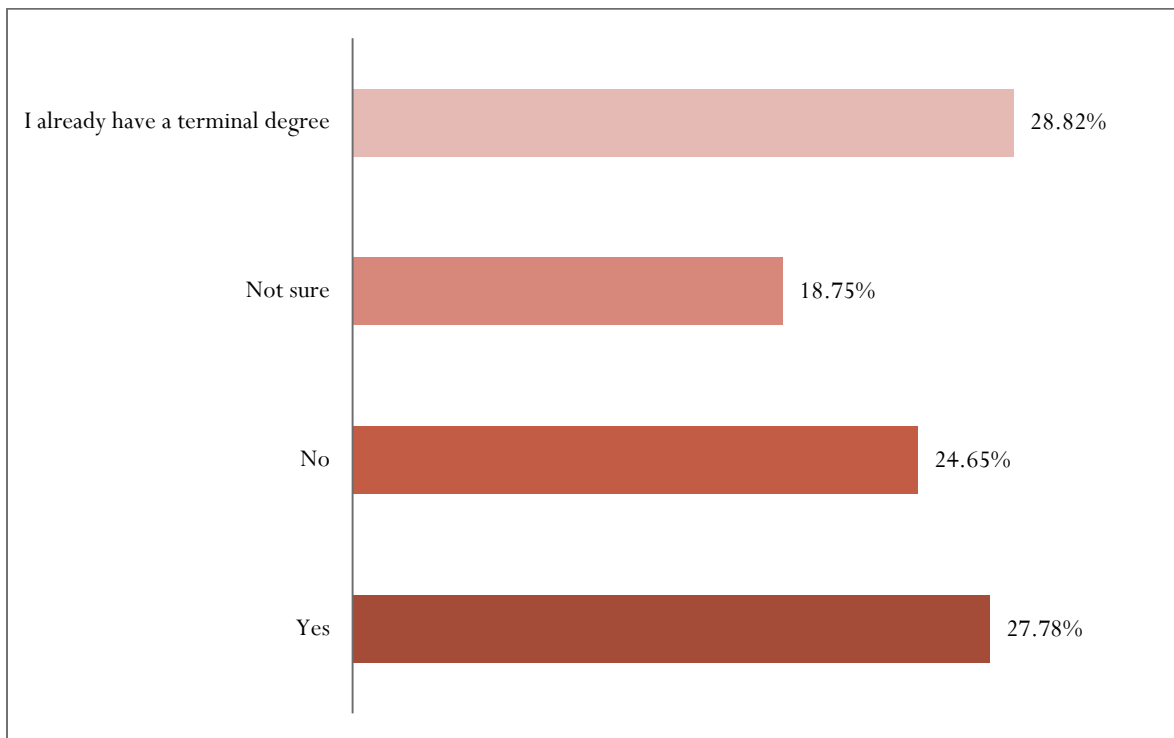
**15. Does your unit allow time off to take degree and/or career professional development-related credit courses at MSU?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	44.3%	127
No	7.0%	20
Not sure	48.8%	140
<i>answered question</i>		<b>287</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>5</b>



**16. Are you interested in pursuing a terminal degree (highest academic degree in your field, usually a doctorate) while working at MSU?**

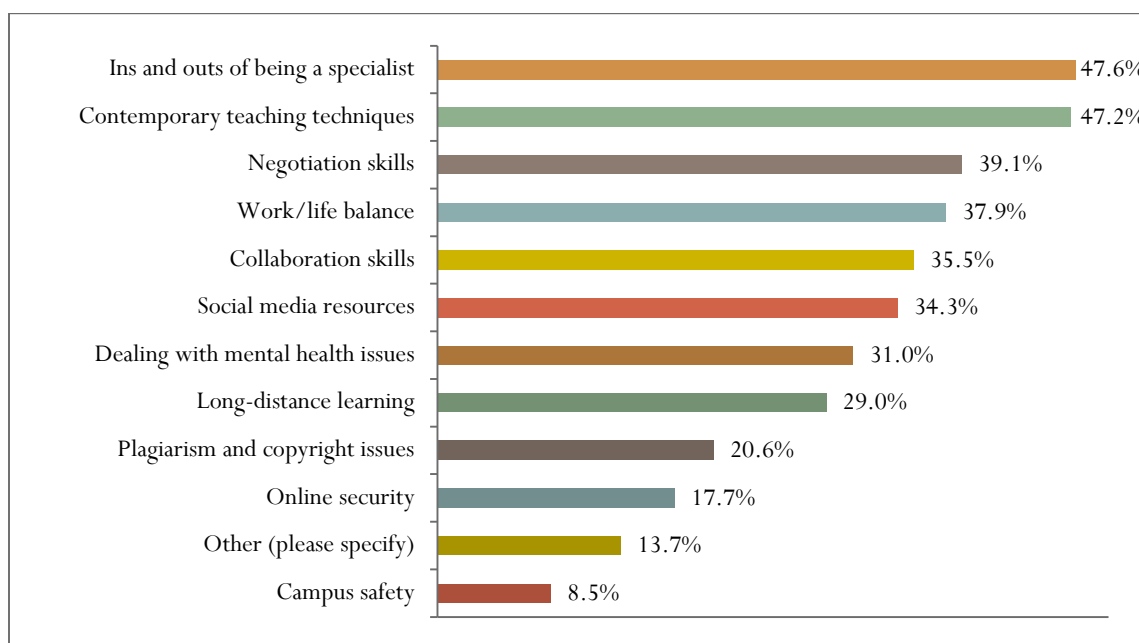
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	27.8%	80
No	24.7%	71
Not sure	18.8%	54
I already have a terminal degree	28.8%	83
<i>answered question</i>		288
<i>skipped question</i>		4



**17. Which topics would be of interest to you at an Academic Specialist Forum (bi-annual) or information session (provided on an irregular basis)?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Ins and outs of being a specialist	47.6%	118
Social media resources	34.3%	85
Negotiation skills	39.1%	97
Long-distance learning	29.0%	72
Campus safety	8.5%	21
Online security	17.7%	44
Collaboration skills	35.5%	88
Contemporary teaching techniques	47.2%	117
Plagiarism and copyright issues	20.6%	51
Dealing with mental health issues	31.0%	77
Work/life balance	37.9%	94
Other (please specify)	13.7%	34

answered question 248  
skipped question 44



Other responses included (most frequent responses):

- University policy and procedure
- Grant writing
- Time management
- Networking
- Cultural and racial topics
- Retirement
- Technology
- Innovation in Higher Education



## Academic Specialist Advisory Committee

18. Were you aware that there is a standing committee of elected and appointed representatives, established in the Provost's office, for academic specialists at MSU (ASAC)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	85.0%	244
No	15.0%	43
<i>answered question</i>		287
<i>skipped question</i>		5

19. Do you know any representative member of ASAC?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	36.2%	104
No	48.8%	140
Not sure	15.0%	43
<i>answered question</i>		287
<i>skipped question</i>		5

20. Have you ever contacted ASAC regarding a question or issue related to your employment as a specialist, compensation or professional development?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	7.0%	20
No	93.0%	266
<i>answered question</i>		286
<i>skipped question</i>		6

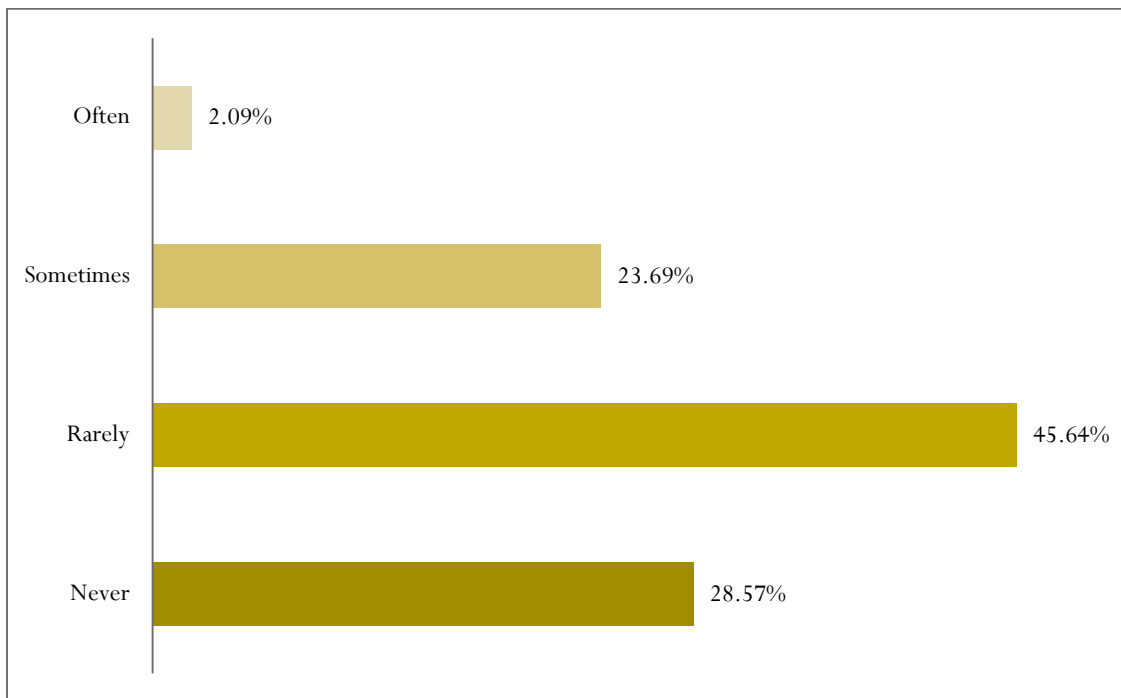
21. If so, did you feel that your question or concern was addressed to your satisfaction?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	70.0%	14
No	30.0%	6
Not sure	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		20
<i>skipped question</i>		272

22. How often do you refer to the Academic Specialist Handbook (available at: <http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/academicspecialist/>)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Never	28.6%	82
Rarely	45.6%	131
Sometimes	23.7%	68
Often	2.1%	6

*answered question* 287  
*skipped question* 5



**23. What recommendations do you have for the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee to better serve you in a governance role?**

- Be more visible.
- Offer formal or informal specialist training periodically.
- Update handbook regularly.
- Publish a newsletter. Utilize social media to connect with specialists.
- Help negotiate higher salaries.
- Provide a breakdown of specialists at the university, including salaries.
- Be more innovative and forward-thinking.
- Address the challenges of fixed term appointments, which are not secure or marketable.
- Initiate one-on-one or small group contact with specialists.
- Host brief Adobe Connect meetings with specialists.
- Publicize and promote the role of specialists at the university.
- Conduct survey of specialists on a more regular basis.
- Advocate for specialists to get benefits (e.g. retirement, course support) before two years of service.
- Clarify language in the handbook relative to time off for illness/health reasons.
- Maintain specialists' parity with faculty.
- Advocate for comparable compensation for people with similar skills, education and experience.
- They already do well.

**24. Please share any other thoughts that you think would be helpful to the ASAC or your fellow specialists.**

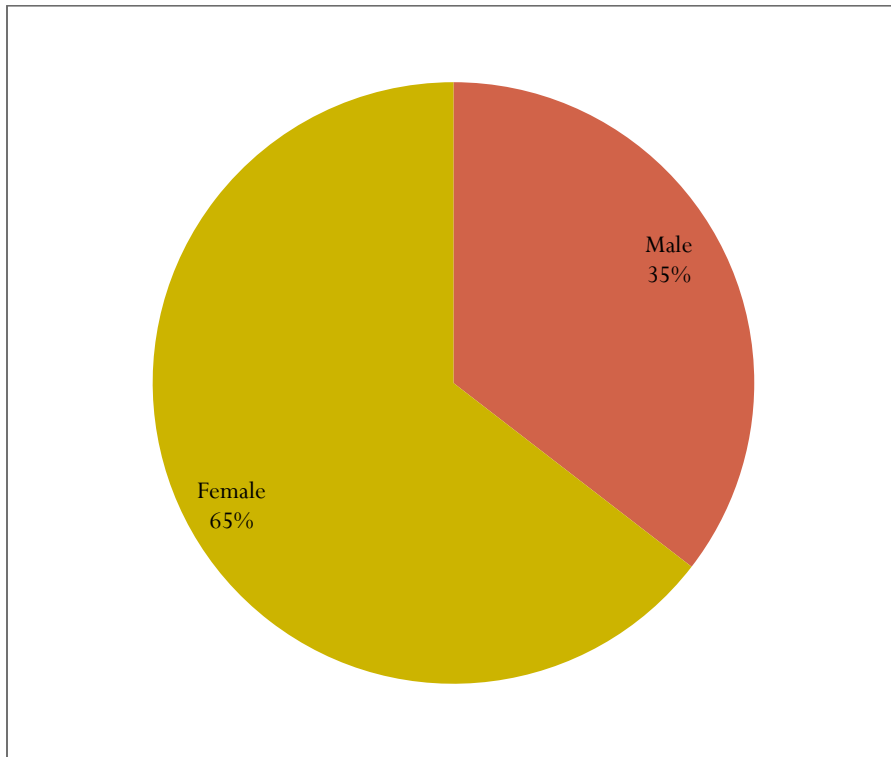
- Provide a newsletter, contact info, other outreach.
- Reinstate non-credit course (certification, etc.) reimbursement.
- Please define the role of ASAC versus other union representation.
- Host appreciation lunches/dinners/gatherings.
- Provide information sessions on relevant issues, such as Affordable Care Act.
- Help newer specialists transition.
- Provide comparisons to “specialists” other universities.
- Focus on advocacy, not professional development.
- Keep up the good work.

## Demographic Information

25. Do you most closely identify as male or female?

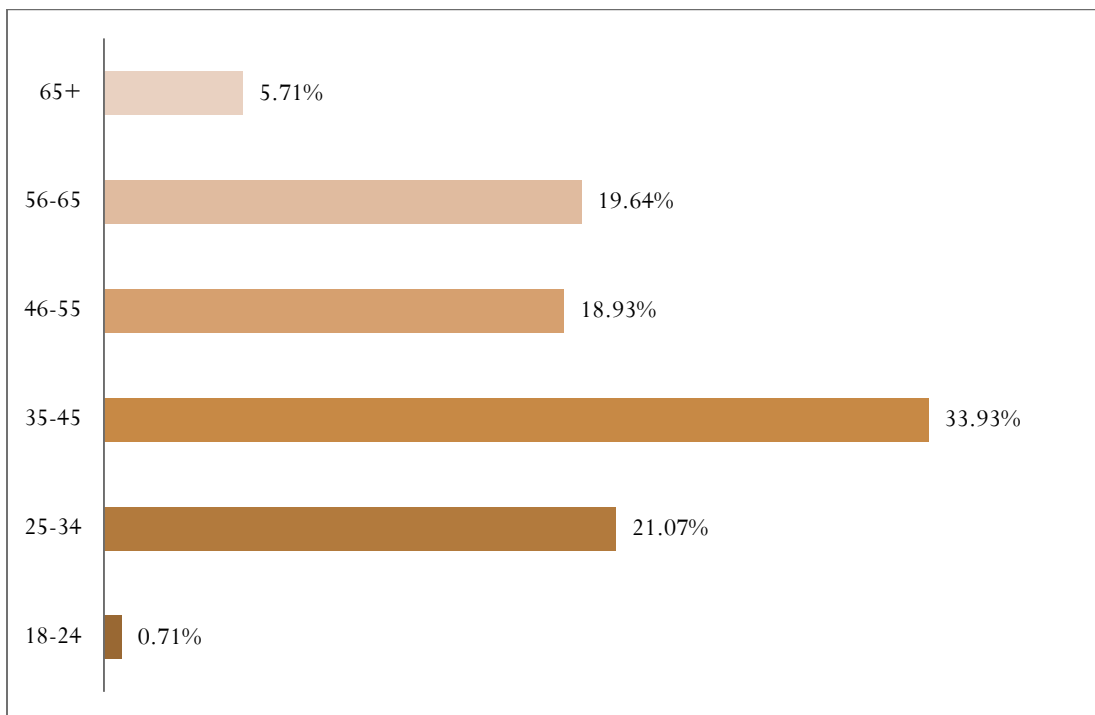
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	35.5%	100
Female	64.5%	182

*answered question* 282  
*skipped question* 10



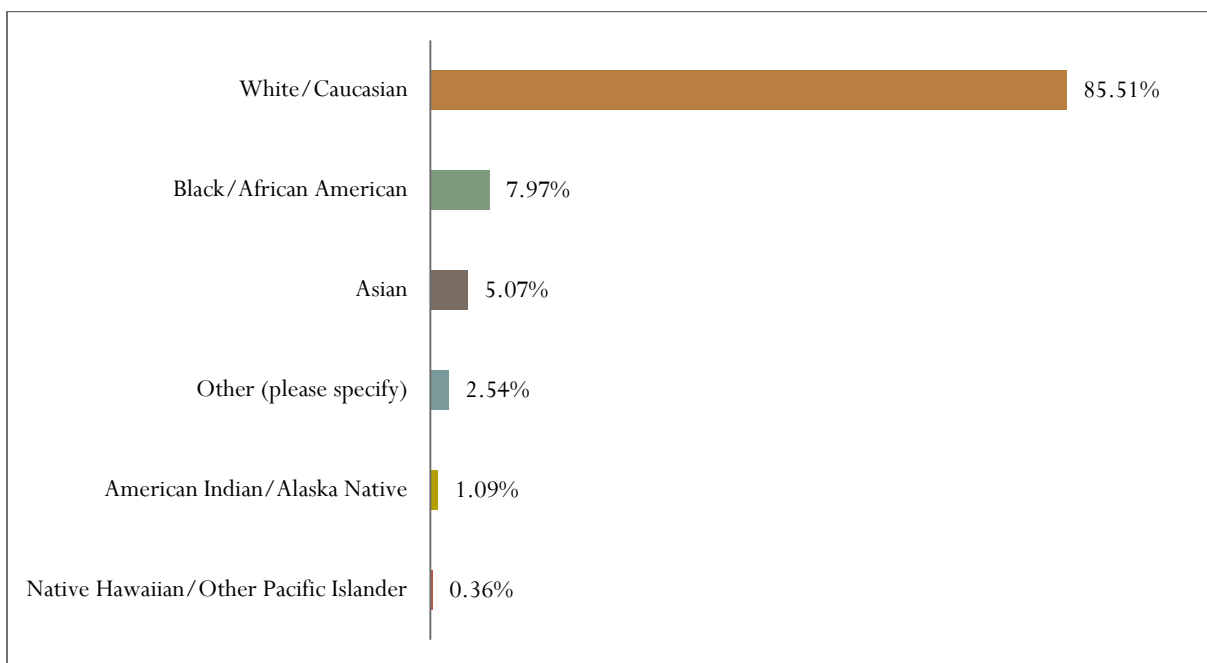
26. How old are you?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
18-24	0.7%	2
25-34	21.1%	59
35-45	33.9%	95
46-55	18.9%	53
56-65	19.6%	55
65+	5.7%	16
<i>answered question</i>		<b>280</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>12</b>



27. Please specify your race (check all that apply)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Black/African American	8.0%	22
Asian	5.1%	14
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0.4%	1
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	3
White/Caucasian	85.5%	236
Other (please specify)	2.5%	7
<i>answered question</i>		<b>276</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>16</b>



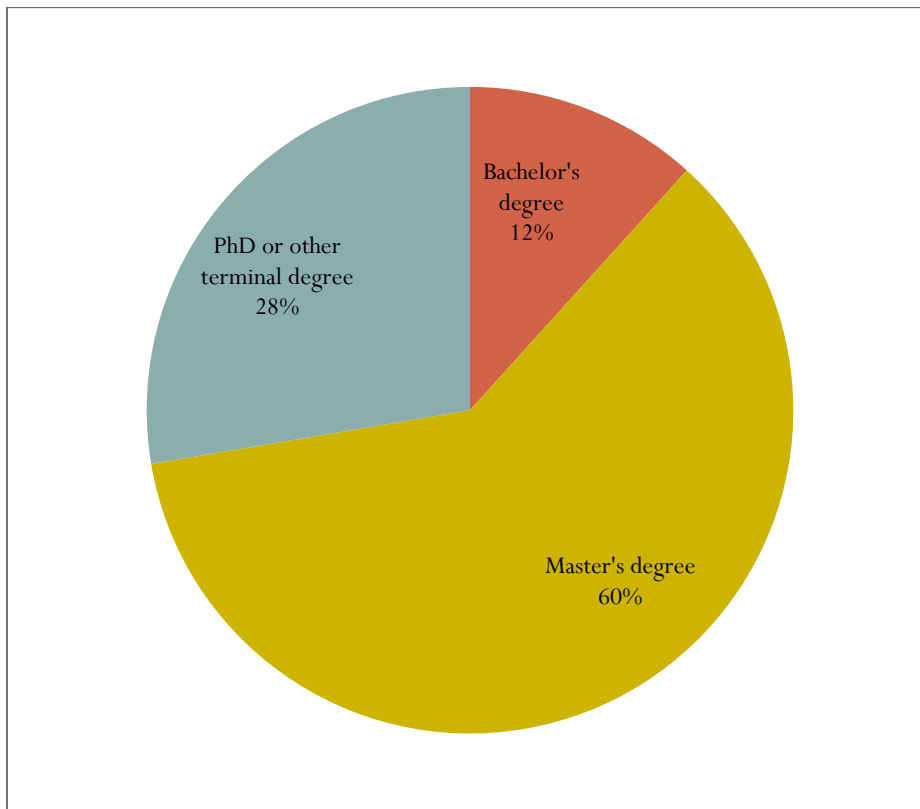
28. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish descent?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	3.0%	8
No	97.0%	261
<i>answered question</i>		<b>269</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>23</b>

29. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Bachelor's degree	11.7%	33
Master's degree	60.6%	171
PhD or other terminal degree	27.7%	78

*answered question* 282  
*skipped question* 10

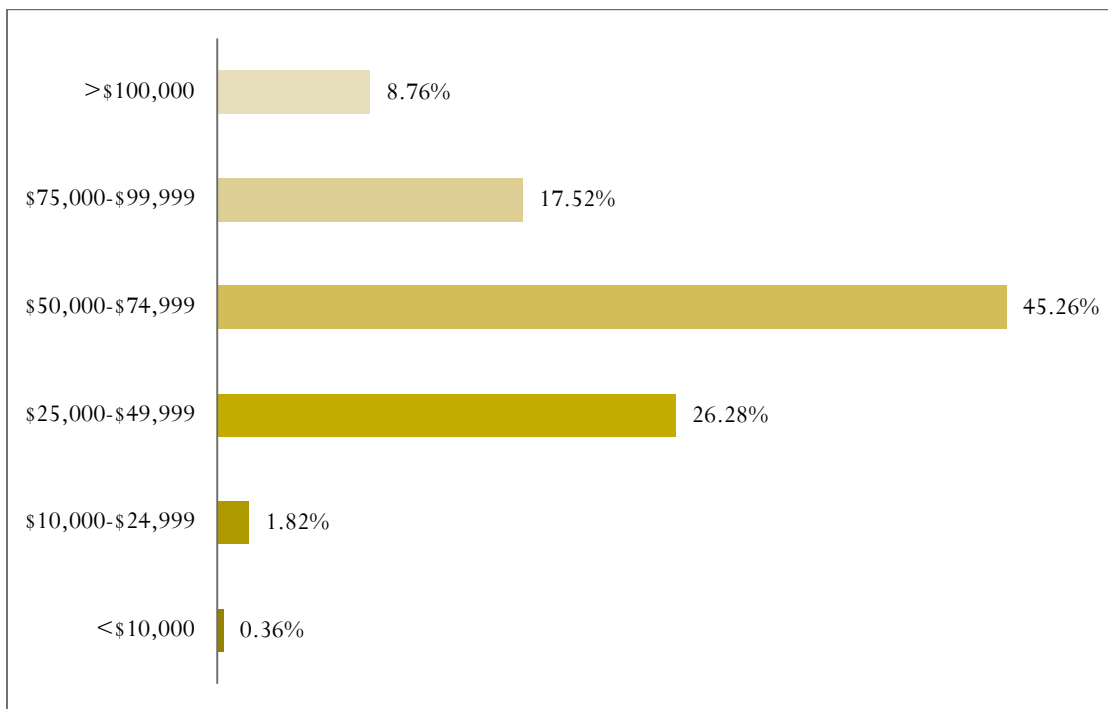




**30. What is the range of your annual MSU salary?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than \$10,000	0.4%	1
\$10,000-\$24,999	1.8%	5
\$25,000-\$49,999	26.3%	72
\$50,000-\$74,999	45.3%	124
\$75,000-\$99,999	17.5%	48
Over \$100,000	8.8%	24

*answered question* 274  
*skipped question* 18



31. What percent raise did you receive this year (beginning October 1, 2013)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1.5%	13.0%	36
1.5% (the approved general merit increase)	30.8%	85
More than 1.5%	33.3%	92
Not sure	22.8%	63
<i>answered question</i>		<b>276</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>16</b>

