



**NASA**  
NON-ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

# UAT/SET SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT

March 28, 2022



# Survey Responses

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The Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) conducted an online survey to collect feedback from members about how they are feeling about the U of A for Tomorrow (UAT) and Service Excellence Transformation (SET) restructuring and whether they have been impacted by the changes.

The survey was open from March 3 to March 21, 2022.

We received 514 survey responses, representing roughly 10 percent of support staff currently working at the university. The approximate breakdown of respondents was:

- 90 percent were regular, full-time employees and 10 percent were in part-time, auxiliary, or casual positions
- 78 percent were in operating positions
- 58 percent have worked at the university for more than 10 years; 25 percent between five and 10 years; 14 percent between one and five years; and 3 percent for less than a year.
- 60 percent indicated their position was in a faculty and 32 percent in a central unit (the other 8 percent weren't sure)
- 27 percent of respondents identified as belonging to an equity-seeking group

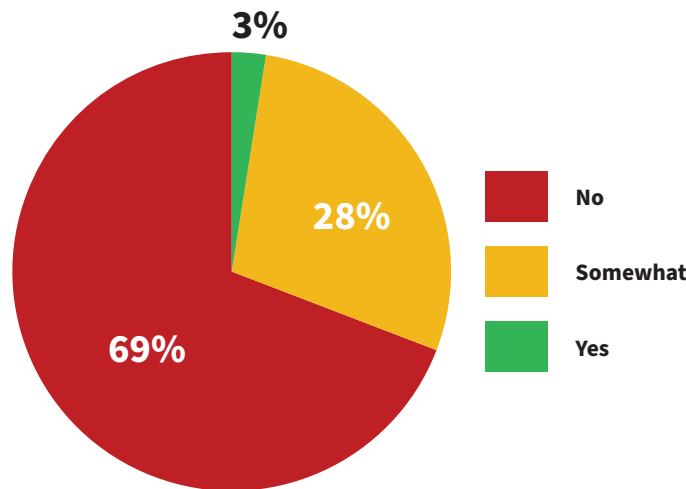
Of the members who participated in the survey, almost 70 percent left comments or examples of the impacts of the restructuring to date.

The questions in this survey were based on a similar survey released on February 17, 2022 by the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta (AASUA) in order to allow for comparison between the two organizations.

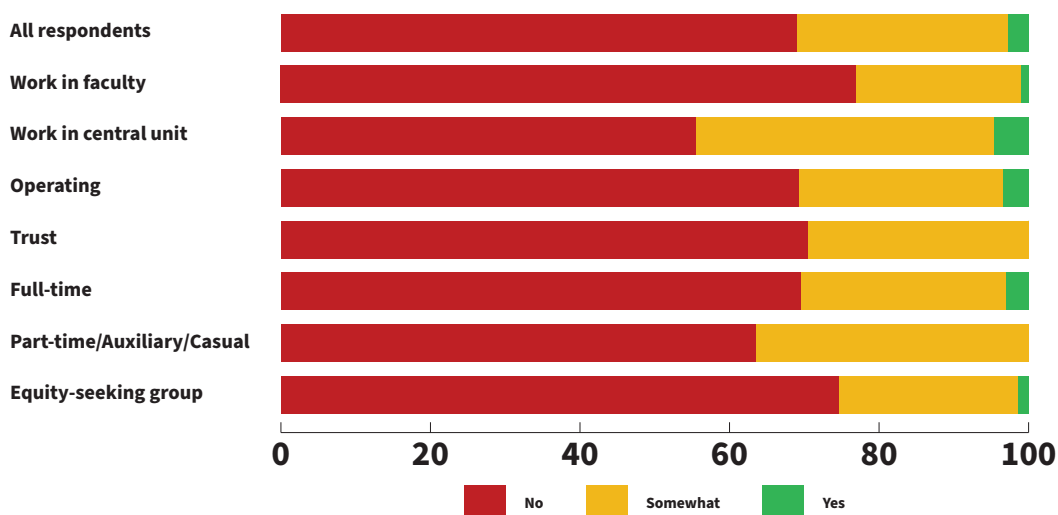
# Satisfaction

We asked members about their level of satisfaction with the restructuring process to date, and the response was overwhelmingly negative, with almost 70 percent indicating they are not satisfied with restructuring, and just 31 percent saying they were somewhat satisfied (28%) or satisfied (3%).

## Overall, are you satisfied with the restructuring at the U of A?



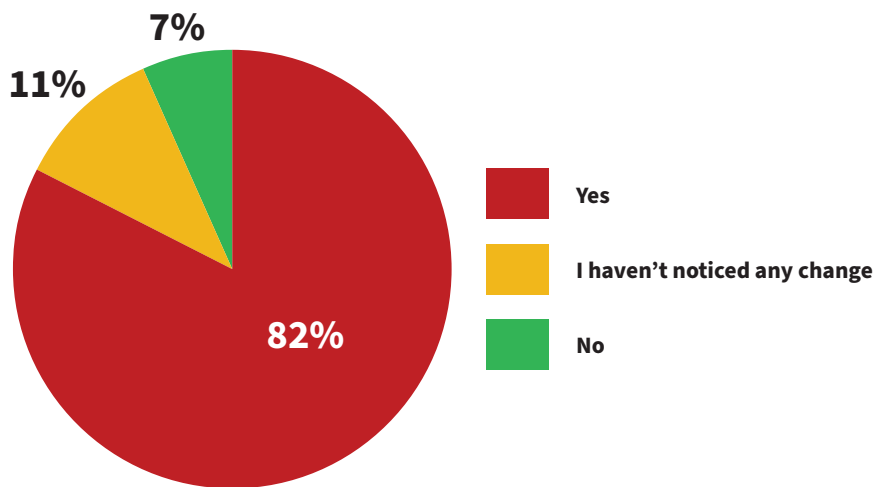
Support staff who worked in faculties were much more likely to say they were not satisfied (77%) than those who worked in central units (55%). Full-time staff were slightly more likely to be dissatisfied (69%) than staff in part-time, auxiliary, casual positions (64%). Those who identified as belonging to an equity-seeking group were more likely to say they were not satisfied with restructuring (75%).



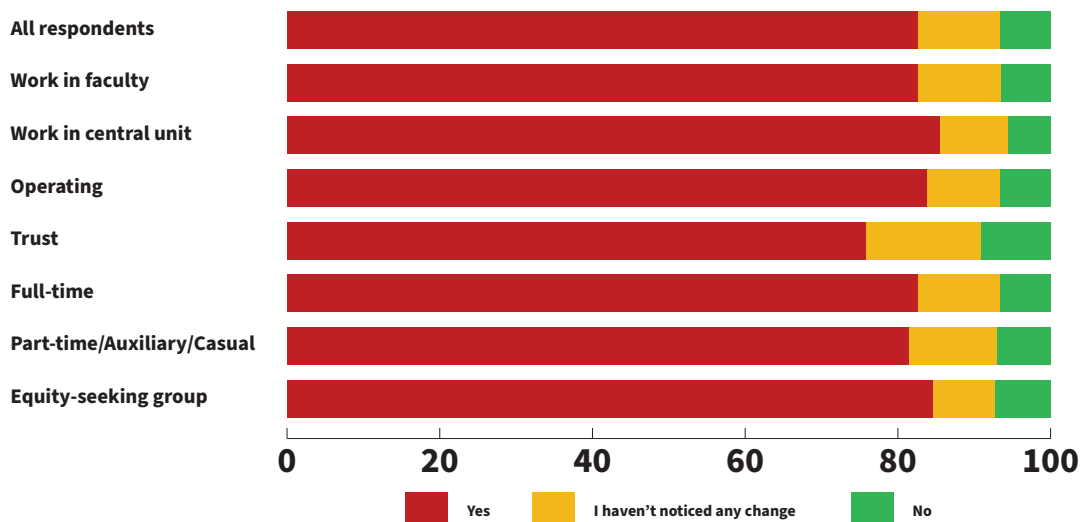
# Impact

We also asked members if they had been directly impacted by restructuring. More than 80 percent of respondents indicated they had been impacted by the changes that have been implemented to date.

## Have you been impacted by UAT/SET?



More than 80 percent of respondents in all but one subgroup indicated they had been impacted by the restructuring. Staff in trust positions were the least likely to say they had been directly impacted by restructuring, with only 76% indicating they had been affected by the changes. Those working in central units (85%) were slightly more likely to say they had been impacted than those working in faculties (82%).



# Member Comments

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More than 70 percent of respondents left comments or shared their experiences with the restructuring process. While some were positive, the overwhelming majority reflect a negative experience. A number of common themes emerged, which are indicated below with some representative comments for each.

## Rushed, poorly implemented process

These changes happened way too quickly. The plan was too grand for the timeline we had. It would have been better to make slower changes instead of turn everything on its head. Absolutely NO consideration was given to staff and staff morale.

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People are making decisions who have no idea about the work that actually gets done on the ground. Things are getting changed in the name of efficiency when they have actually become less efficient.

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My frustration stems from the fact that this was very much a top-down approach; no one actually doing the work was consulted on where the efficiencies would be/are. As a result, new systems have been implemented that are much more labour intensive than before

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SET was not effectively planned or executed. Faculties and departments feel lost and do not have any support in their faculty on the six SET streams. Also, this has left the university very top-heavy. More directors/managers, less workers.

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This is happening too fast and they have no idea yet what knowledge has been lost and I don't think that central management cares.

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Too fast and not enough training. Poor senior leadership with deadlines and flexibility

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I like the idea of SET, we do have a lot of waste and problems we could fix. I don't think the actual implementation of SET has addressed most of these things very well. It feels like we are trading one inefficient system for another, rather than fixing things.

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**“The SET process has been excruciating, to be honest.”**

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A whole vital unit was dismantled with pretty much no planning and vision on what needs to be put in place as viable support for the services that were disrupted along with that cut. The higher management could probably say it was carefully transitioned but in practice, students, staff, instructors, and faculty involved were left alone to figure it out themselves with very little support, to say no support at all.

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While I have said for years that the university has been overdue for a shakeup to streamline processes, the UAT/SET process has been excruciating.

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In my opinion, the restructuring was done too fast and without taking the time to plan properly. The proposed changes do not seem to create the expected savings, there seem to be more hierarchies (and therefore high salaries) that are not necessary than before.

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Centralization of some services for simple cost savings was arguably a good idea. A whole-cloth approach to it and the rushed implementation leads to a mess. Once again, workers are expected to simply pick up the pieces when exec drops the ball.

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It's highly disorganized and not well thought-out.

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My team has been waiting two years to hear what will be happening to us. That is two years of being in limbo. It's not good on one's mental health at all. And the group that is supposed to be deciding is so busy trying to fix past mistakes that they still aren't focussing on proper implementation strategies.

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Some changes make sense and are working well (centralized IST support makes sense and has been helpful). However, there are a lot of babies being thrown out with the bathwater. Institutional knowledge, history, expertise are being thrown away, apparently without much concern for the long-term consequences.

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I would agree that centralization can provide a consistency, common procedures and common policy. However, removing/terminating staff before the new ways are in place is not helpful.

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**“The group that is supposed to be deciding is so busy trying to fix past mistakes that they still aren’t focussing on proper implementation strategies.”**

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I think it's overdue for the university to have an overhaul and a refresh, as there were a lot of inefficiencies, redundant procedures, and waste. Tightening things up, getting more aligned, and moving forward with a clearer vision was needed. I think it could be good to have things centralized to a degree, but I'm also not certain that the structure in place isn't full of more red tape.

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While I can appreciate that the centralizing of some core functions to a central level is improving overall efficiency and understanding of just who is taking on general kinds of tasks, the level of uncertainty and disorganization of the changes has been overwhelmingly bad.

## Unsustainable workloads

Prior to the cuts from the UCP and then SET, I had a workload that already exceeded the number of hours I am paid to work. Thanks to the restructuring, I had 50% more work added to my plate. Absolutely NOTHING has been removed from my previous workload, and various other duties have also been added. It is now impossible to be outstanding at my job; mistakes affecting students and staff are inevitable which is a completely horrible situation. Anyone saying that this is "service excellence" is fooling themselves—this change is nothing but worse service for students.

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Many of our faculty staff left for centralized positions, and we scrambled to get their work done as well as our own. The burden on smaller offices has been staggering.

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The restructuring has overloaded many workers with more than they can handle. The unrealistic expectations are making me doubt whether I will be staying with the university.

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With the SET program, I can't find anything and/or find the correct people to speak with, IF, that is, there is even a live voice. I am not sure IF I am completing forms in the correct way and because of all the cuts, to get a reply from the few people I can actually speak with is along time coming. My workload has increased exponentially, and the time it takes me to actually get a task completed is double!!! The SET program has been my nemesis.

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**“I am the only support staff person in the office where there used to be over 20 people on the floor.”**

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We are constantly being told to do more with less. I say we do less with less. Meaning I often assist staff who tell me how overworked and stressed they are. Example: I know a unit that went from 17 people down to a two-person unit. I recall the person telling me they believe they are now expected to doing the work of eight people.

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I am the only support staff person in the office where there used to be over 20 people on the floor.

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The departments have no staff and have more work with pressure to meet stricter deadlines. Work is becoming unmanageable as positions are cut and the remaining staff have to bear the load. The university used to be a great place to work but sadly, I am starting to lose my pride.

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There has been a constant staff shortage in the department for a long time, even before SET. So when there were more job cuts required by the university, we were already running on a skeleton crew with little to no redundancy, resulting in a loss of skill and knowledge that we have struggled to replace. This has caused numerous errors, additional workload, and the shifting of NASA duties from NASA members to graduate students and even AASUA members.

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I have been asked to cover roles not in my description. I am being asked to do more tasks that are not in my description. At one point I was being asked to cover 2 roles plus my own at the busiest time of year. This is the lowest morale has been across campus and it is only getting worse.

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More work and less resources. I remember President Flanagan kept emphasizing that we would not be asked to do more, but that was clearly a lie. If you reduce the work force, and make zero changes to outcomes, guess what?

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I have lost several colleagues to both layoffs and restructuring moves. The moves have led to an unequal distribution of work, to the point where some people I know have been putting in an enormous amount of uncompensated additional work because they feel pressured to deliver.

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**“I remember President Flanagan kept emphasizing that we would not be asked to do more, but that was clearly a lie.”**

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## Lack of consultation and communication

When will they learn to include support staff in change management? They have laid off so many support staff that there are very few left to do all the work.

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I agree that some changes needed to be made. However, the lack of meaningful consultation with employees has been disheartening. I have already seen how the changes have not simplified processes but actually made them worse.

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We weren't consulted prior to being forced to take over the additional tasks, and as a result, those who made these changes don't understand or know our business processes and have made decisions about these without fully understanding the consequences. Things are starting to fall through the cracks already.

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I feel that the effects of SET have not been clearly explained. The language appears purposefully opaque. I am reasonably intelligent, but a lot of it reads like twaddle. Regardless, it is a path they have chosen, and by not really involving frontline staff, they are likely to encounter problems not recognized, because nobody asked frontline staff.

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Communication, if it can be called that, from SET is very information-statement driven. Feedback is requested but the communication of where the feedback has driven change is not shared in a manner that supports the feedback is being used in any way to influence positive change.

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SET is for show. Decisions are made by higher management then staff are consulted just for the sake of saying that we were consulted. On certain matters directly affecting our team there was no consultation at all. The new work culture is join us or hit the highway.

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It was conducted from a top-down approach with seemingly little actual, meaningful consultation about how the changes would affect frontline staff and students.

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**“SET is for show. Decisions are made by higher management then staff are consulted just for the sake of saying that we were consulted.”**

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Colleagues have lost their positions with no communication. I can't tell you how many times I have emailed a colleague only to find out their position was cancelled. Compassion, empathy, and team work has been completely eliminated in this process. Processes have not created efficiencies.

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Feeling like being in the dark—don't really know the current structure. Proper communication is missing.

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As much as the SET team claimed to be open and transparent, they weren't.

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The restructuring has been a necessity, I do understand that. But many feel that the leaders in these two initiatives have not met with individual units to share how this affects each unit/department, or how it will improve the specific area. Generalization of direction and overall improvements don't always translate down to each department affected.

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UAT and SET have not been transparent, they share the "big picture" concepts with staff but none of the meat of what it all means, that is discovered when positions are disrupted and changes are implemented. Trying to get answers about how restructuring may affect workloads and responsibilities has been fruitless and frustrating.

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While I can appreciate that the centralizing of some core functions to a central level is improving overall efficiency and understanding of just who is taking on general kinds of tasks, the level of uncertainty and disorganization of the changes has been overwhelmingly bad. Now the skeleton crew that is remaining is constantly scrambling to cover tasks previously not their own (while already overburdened with our own portfolios), because it also appears no one is allowed to hire at this time. I am incredibly disheartened by what is happening to this institution, a place I used to be so proud to be a part of. It's become abundantly clear that support staff are those carrying the brunt of the workload, but also the cuts, and the few that are left are in a constant state of worry over their job security despite no lack of work to complete.

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Communication surrounding the logistics of the restructure are not communicated well and can't very well be because the plan was not properly devised ahead of time. The common theme is "nobody knows."

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**“I can't tell you how many times I have emailed a colleague only to find out their position was cancelled.”**

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## Impact on service quality

Especially over the past few months, the impact of losing so many staff has been acutely felt. There is so much on my team's plate, and we have lost so much expertise around us, it's impossible to do our jobs. We are so far past the point of "doing things more efficiently" and are at the point of "xyz cannot be done."

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The restructure has created a significant challenge to offering exceptional service.

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When dealing with the Staff Service Centre it is very frustrating. I have had the tickets closed before I am even responded too. I have asked questions and not got full responses that I find out after I submit the information to them for processing. I am finding that it is taking me more time then it did before to get things completed. When they respond they are slow to respond where it would take a couple of hours to get the questions answered it will take days.

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My unit has lost people over the last few years, and there is work we just cannot do any more and that is at the detriment of the students (and it was some of the extra things that would be good for them). The workload has increased of things that HAVE to be done, the uppers say that technology is supposed to help, but when will that happen?

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I believe the restructuring has handcuffed employees to do more with less and the students are suffering tremendously because of the restructuring.

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With the reduction of staff and the lack of clear processes to replace those staff did, the quality of the services I provide is decreased. I was once proud of the quality of work that was delivered. This is no longer the case.

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Our IT department has been decimated. Operating hours and thus hours accessible to the students has been greatly decreased. General feeling of anxiety as to who goes next.

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**“I believe the restructuring has handcuffed employees to do more with less and the students are suffering tremendously because of the restructuring.”**

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Delays and unavailability of services offered to clients; having to wait weeks, even months to receive a service or an order.

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The idea of streamlining processes is always good but this centralization of services is already showing itself to be unsustainable. Ground-level services that have been eliminated are now being shown to be critical in keeping things moving. I would say the vast majority of people take pride in what they do and these cuts have made it almost impossible to maintain an acceptable standard of service delivery.

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I am more upset about the rhetoric from the administration who continually state that the quality of service we will be able to deliver will not change. I'm necessarily spending more time on the computer doing tasks our office staff used to do, and less time with my students. This is a drop in the quality of service I am able to provide to my clients.

Facilities & Operations has been decimated to the point where all they are doing is responding to emergencies. This can only lead to a collapse of the infrastructure. Failing infrastructure has already led to interruptions in the availability of my equipment for my clients. Another drop in the quality of service I am able to provide.

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Loss of services on our campus has meant that we don't know where to go for support, that everything takes longer and is not done as well, and that the people "supporting" us don't understand the uniqueness of our campus or the fact that our needs may differ from North Campus. There is a complete lack of understanding or consideration and many things that work elsewhere don't work as well here. We had a high level of service and fast response times before. That has not continued post-UAT and SET.

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The general chill that spread through my area caused several people to choose to seek employment elsewhere, exacerbating the layoff crisis, and causing a serious depletion of "institutional memory." We're now in very poor shape to accomplish much at all, let alone any massive restructuring.

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The restructuring is severing the ties between academic and support staff. You can't have a real working relationship with people you only communicate with by email. There used to be a more collegial atmosphere in departments, but now, with support staff centralized, faculty and students feel like the support is impersonal and more difficult to access.

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**“Trying to get things fixed and getting physical things done has been a nightmare since restructuring has occurred.”**

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Trying to get things fixed and getting physical things done has been a nightmare since restructuring has occurred.

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More work and less support to do my job well. The U of A administration departments that have changed are becoming like a call centre.

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People are making decisions who have no idea about the work that actually gets done on the ground. Things are getting changed in the name of efficiency when they have actually become less efficient.

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Interactions with shared services has been very impersonal and transactional—no sense of community or shared ownership over tasks or projects.

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I think that most of the centralization process was rushed and not at all thought out. So many staff are incredibly overworked from taking over duties as team members were laid off.

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Support services have noticeably declined and one-size-fits-all solutions are being offered that often don't fit at all.

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Restructuring is a total failure in my opinion. It has done nothing to improve services to students or staff; in fact, the opposite has happened—restructuring and SET have resulted in degrading the services. All that restructuring has done is to add yet another layer of administration in the creation of the colleges. At the same time it has overloaded staff impositions below the college level due to the fact that so many staff positions were eliminated, thus negatively impacting all services and negatively impacting staff who struggle to handle their workload.

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I understand the purpose of and need for restructuring, but I think they've focused too much on slashing through support staff without much thought to how it would impact day-to-day operations. I now do the work of 4 people and they can't understand why things take longer.

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I provide excellent service and I was quite offended by the messaging that service excellence was now a new thing. It seems much less efficient to me. It seems like the service is now sub par.

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**“I don't see how this does anything to better support students, research, or employees.”**

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## Stress, uncertainty, and low morale

The stress levels are through the roof. How am I feeling in a nutshell? Overworked, stressed, exhausted, frustrated, confused, disappointed, helpless, and discouraged.

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Morale is low. It just keeps feeling like we have to give and give and then the only thing in return is to be happy about a job that you feel completely overwhelmed by because there is no additional support because everyone is too busy.

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Since the cuts everyone in the office is over worked doing twice as much. Only surface work is completed. People are unhappy and burnt out.

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I feel like the budget cuts and the resulting restructuring is gutting the U of A.

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I have concerns about what the future of U of A looks like. I previously saw myself spending my career with the U of A, and now I no longer do.

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Morale has never been lower in my 17 years working here. It's devastating.

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To be honest, my mental health has suffered significantly since the restructure started as there were more than two years of uncertainty and stress due to the extended process and poor communication from management. I know that many colleagues feel the same way and some are still waiting to hear about their fate.

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It's pretty demoralizing and will be difficult to restore.

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From my perspective, the University of Alberta has been irreparably damaged by these changes.

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I miss how the university used to be.

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**“The university is not the institution it once was. It’s chaos and disorganized.”**

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The restructuring of the university has had disastrous effects on morale, efficiency, the student experience, and the quality of work performed in the university without saving that much money.

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The university is not the institution it once was. It's chaos and disorganized.

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Feeling anxious and confused. Unsure of what my future will be.

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It's been several years now of just waiting to be laid off and trying to help prepare things for when I'm gone. My feelings about the institution as a whole have become quite negative.

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I am not against change or having to adapt to a new work environment, but what I am against is feeling devalued.

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The new structure is pure chaos and completely understaffed for the workload. I had to change units to ensure continued employment. The results will not be sustainable.

We are waiting to be restructured. The hurry up and wait strategy is killing staff morale, and creating loads of anxiety and stress for staff. There will be job losses, we just don't know where and how yet. Total disrespect for all of the staff.

## Inefficient processes

It feels like everything takes longer to get done now that some operations have been centralized. It's hard to get the unique support your department might need.

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I have to look for information all the time that would have been readily available if there hadn't been so many cuts and interruptions; lots of time spent looking for answers for other people.

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Process that were suppose to make things easier now take 2-3 times more time to get things accomplished now. No direction. No assistance. Days for responses.

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**“I am not against change or having to adapt to a new work environment, but what I am against is feeling devalued.”**

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There are never any announcements as to who has moved or where, and certainly there never a replacement to manage the work left behind. New systems are rolled out without any announcement, lead time, or training. New systems are touted as “streamlining” but they’re actually more work not less. Everything takes two or three times longer to accomplish than it used to because one has to call multiple places to find out how. Many tasks “left behind” by those moved to central units are not getting done—and usually no one knows they’re not getting done until there’s a crisis. It’s like standing in an avalanche with an umbrella for protection.

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I worked in a department that was very short on resources. There was little information from SET on how to maintain service quality with so few people, especially since processes are unnecessarily complicated and burdensome.

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We no longer have access to local supports—we have to go to shared services or service partners. Service partners seem overwhelmed with the workloads and trying to support so many groups. There hasn’t been any tangible improvements in terms of “relationships across units and levels of the university” via the service partner model. What I have seen in my area is that SET is making decisions by consulting with senior leaders and not actually involving subject matter experts. This is leading to major service holes and work being left behind with no one to take on.

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So many of the processes that have been centralized have become so much harder to navigate and are taking longer than they did before. I have not seen the benefits of the “more efficient” processes that senior leadership talks about.

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Having recently returned to campus, I have found the changes made by SET are frustrating and concerning. You can no longer speak to an actual person in Shared Services and there are no contact numbers to be found on their website. It takes two or three times longer to get answers to questions than it ever did. How is this “streamlining” anything?

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Everything is fine when everything is fine. But if there is a problem, it’s really difficult to find out who to talk to and how to solve the problem. Dealing with a faceless/nameless group at the end of a trouble ticket is really slow and often unsatisfying.

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**“I am a ticket #  
for everything.”**

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The SET restructuring has been a disaster—positions have been eliminated with no awareness of who is left to do the work, no surrounding capacity to take on the extra work, and non-understanding of the work. It seems like the folks making restructuring decisions have zero knowledge of the groups they are upending, despite having everyone fill out 75 forms describing their work.

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I think the SET initiative moving to shared services has been the most disruptive for our department. There have been many mistakes, and numerous delays. No longer can we trust the task is completed as required, and completed correctly, that extra step of checking back regularly and ensuring complete work is added to our plate.

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You need to go through five or six people to complete a task, whereas before you only had to deal with one person. Sometimes it takes up to a week to get a response from anyone and when you do get a response, you are provided an email and no phone number attached to it to call if needed. Takes three times longer to get a simple task done that would have taken me no time at all before. VERY UNSATISFIED.

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I'm the last member of the team I was a part of, production has nearly stopped because there's no one left to do the work, and those who are in new roles created via SET aren't equipped with the tools they need for success.

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All entry-level support is gone.

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We have lost so many key contacts and people that make our jobs more efficient. Centralized structure has made people lose their jobs, those who stay have more work and it's extra steps in each department to get things done. More work and less efficiency.

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Despite several requests for information, I don't know who I report to now, and no one has ever provided me with any information about my current role or when it might end.

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A lot of work has gone into creating new groups supposedly to alleviate workload of others. The only thing this has caused so far is an increased workload because it takes longer to perform the original task as more "hands are in the pie."

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**“The idea of centralizing is to simplify the processes and make them more efficient. The exact opposite is happening.”**

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## Unnecessary new levels of management

I appreciate the need to reduce duplication and increase efficiency. However, I wonder why it seems to involve adding more senior management. That seems counterproductive.

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For a university that stressed the need to eliminate redundancies, there were a lot of new VP-level positions created.

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They cut a lot of positions, mostly NASA, to “save money by centralizing” and it seems they’ve just hired a whole lot of new positions, many at the top levels. The university is just as top-heavy as it was pre-SET but the NASA staff required to support all university functions have been completely decimated.

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The restructuring has resulted in the hiring of many high-paid management positions to oversee the new colleges, and the layoff of many regular employees. Once again, the university is making itself top-heavy—too much management, not enough people to do the work.

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The university has hollowed out the support staff and inflated the upper administrative levels of the institution under the guise of “efficiency,” leaving fewer people to do the work and more people to get the undeserved pats on the back for it.

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I feel that the restructuring that was supposed to create a less top-heavy organization has just recreated the same thing, with different titles. In fact, it seems even more top-heavy than before.

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There are many efficiencies needed at the U of A and to restructure is important, but the added layer of management (new director positions) seems excessive and frustrating with all the support staff layoffs.

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I understand the reasoning for the restructuring, but it seems to me that support staff have unfairly received the brunt of this restructuring. It infuriates me that at a time of restraint senior administration has added another level of senior administration.

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**“It seems top-heavy, with more managers than before, and less regular workers to do the work.”**

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## Confusion

I still have no idea what's going on. I've given up reading the updates because none of them make sense.

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They have been confusing and many people (myself included) have no clear direction as to what their positional responsibilities are.

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There is consistently the feeling that you don't know what is going on in campus because no one is apprised of real actions being taken until it happens. It is a constant game of waiting for the hammer to drop. This has definitely affected my colleagues as they worry about job security and our collective ability to get work done.

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They created another layer of management that is not required and has not created any effective ways of working, but more layers of confusion.

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Confused and out of the loop.

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It couldn't have been more ill-advised and mismanaged. There is still so much uncertainty and unnecessary stress that continues to take a toll on staff. We will not fully understand the full impact of this for at least another year, although the effects will continue long after that.

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There is no understanding on where and who contact to help deal a the variety of issues that come up. It is usually a generic email that you send to and you wait days for a response and then the response is so generic it doesn't help.

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I'm just confused and left feeling stressed about my position as we have not had an update from SET in a very long time and we're all left wondering if our jobs are ending or not.

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I have worked at the university for 14 years and I no longer know who to contact about anything.

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**“It's been a total gong show.”**

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## Vision

A better future for ourselves and others.

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## Mission

To improve the economic, social, and working conditions of our members through representation and advocacy, and to contribute to the improvement of those conditions in society.