

Part-Time Poverty: Hourly OPS Workers at UF

Alachua County Labor Coalition

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There are over 15,000 workers in 56 job titles classified under Other Personal Services ([OPS](#)) at the University of Florida, ranging from medical residents and interns to clerical workers and adjuncts. What all of these workers have in common is the precarity of their positions. None of these workers receive paid vacation or paid sick leave and all are mandated to pay into the [alternative FICA](#) system, with the University contributing no money to their Social Security. Arguably the most exploited OPS workers are the 3,320 who are Nonstudent Hourly OPS (N-HOPS). While the 628 adjuncts and 4,119 graduate workers have their own unique set of challenges, the focus of this report will be on Nonstudent Hourly OPS workers ([see chart 1](#)).

Two common misconceptions persist about OPS positions. First, that these jobs are mostly short-term, temporary work, and second, that the workers who fill these positions are mostly college-aged. In fact, the average N-HOPS worker has been employed at UF for nearly 4 years, with 47% employed for more than 2 years ([see chart 2](#)). The median age of N-HOPS workers is 29, with 68.5% being older than 25. ([see chart 3](#)) Thus, N-HOPS positions are often long-term jobs, many of which may support families and dependents.

There are 3,320 N-HOPS workers, 59.9% of whom are white and 56.8% female. According to the [UF-BEBR 2018 Study](#) the Alachua County Community is 62.1% white non-Hispanic and 49.3% male. In OPS positions, nonwhites are overrepresented by 2.2% and females by 5.1%, compared to Alachua county as a whole. The difference in pay across race and gender lines within OPS positions is stark, and contributes a compelling argument for replacing the classification entirely. While 50.6% of N-HOPS white workers earn over \$15 an hour, only 40.3% of nonwhite N-HOPS workers earn this wage ([see chart 4](#)). The median hourly wage for a white female is \$15, \$12 for black males, and \$12.60 for Hispanic males. For every dollar a white female N-HOPS worker makes a black male worker earns 80 cents and a Hispanic male earns 84 cents ([see chart 5](#)).

This issue is further compounded by OPS workers being skipped over in the [January 2016 UF policy change](#) that moved the starting wage for Technical, Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Support (TEAMS) workers to \$12 an hour. Those left behind include 2,676 N-HOPS workers currently making below \$12 an hour. Disproportionately, those workers earning less than \$12 an hour are nonwhite and female.

Due to the Affordable Care Act, the University is required to offer state health insurance to employees averaging over 30 hours a week. A full 35.6% of N-HOPS workers meet this requirement and are eligible for state health insurance, yet only 21.7% are covered. And while 39.7% of nonwhite and 32.8% of white workers are eligible, only 16.2% of nonwhite eligible workers have state health insurance compared to 67.4% of eligible white workers ([see chart 6](#)). The impact of this precarious arrangement was profound for one anonymous worker, who lost his state sponsored healthcare because of lost hours from Hurricane Irma.

OPS workers are denied benefits based on [Florida state statute 110.131](#) which states “other-personal-services employees are not eligible for any form of paid leave, paid holidays, a paid personal day, participation in state group insurance or retirement benefits, or any other state employee benefit;” effectively creating a permanent underclass of workers. OPS workers are denied vacation and sick leave, which is a major point of contention in a January 2018 survey conducted by the Alachua County Labor Coalition ([see appendix](#)). For one worker, losing “...over a week’s worth of wages and zero compensation led me to lose my residence and become homeless”. Another anonymous worker wrote “Losing time means I have to decide between rent and bills or food. Working a full work week means I scrape by, but even a few hours lost can make a serious impact.” OPS workers view UF holiday closings with dread, not the excitement other UF employees feel. It is important to note that, while the state statute bars paid sick or vacation time, it is perfectly legal to pay workers for hours not worked due to other circumstances. The Alachua County School Board paid OPS workers for time lost due to Hurricane Irma. The University of Florida chose not to do so.

The Alachua County Labor Coalition was unable to estimate the exact amount of pay workers missed out on due to Hurricane Irma. Biweekly checks were an average of \$106 less than the previous pay periods without a holiday and while some workers were able to make up lost time, many were not due to strict overtime rules, departmental regulations, or family obligations, leaving many to suffer economic hardship ([see chart 7](#)).

In order to address the gross inequities within N-HOPS, the University of Florida should convert as many Nonstudent OPS Hourly positions to TEAMS as possible. Many N-HOPS employees work alongside TEAMS employees with identical duties so there would be only minor disruptions to job responsibilities. This change in classification would improve the lives of thousands of workers near or below the poverty line, and help to address UF's responsibility in the massive racial disparity in Alachua County.

For a full [copy of the data](#) used within including the survey results please email us at info@laborcoalition.org or visit us at laborcoalition.org/livingwage.

Chart 1: Nonstudent OPS Worker Classification

Source: Information request from 12-21-17

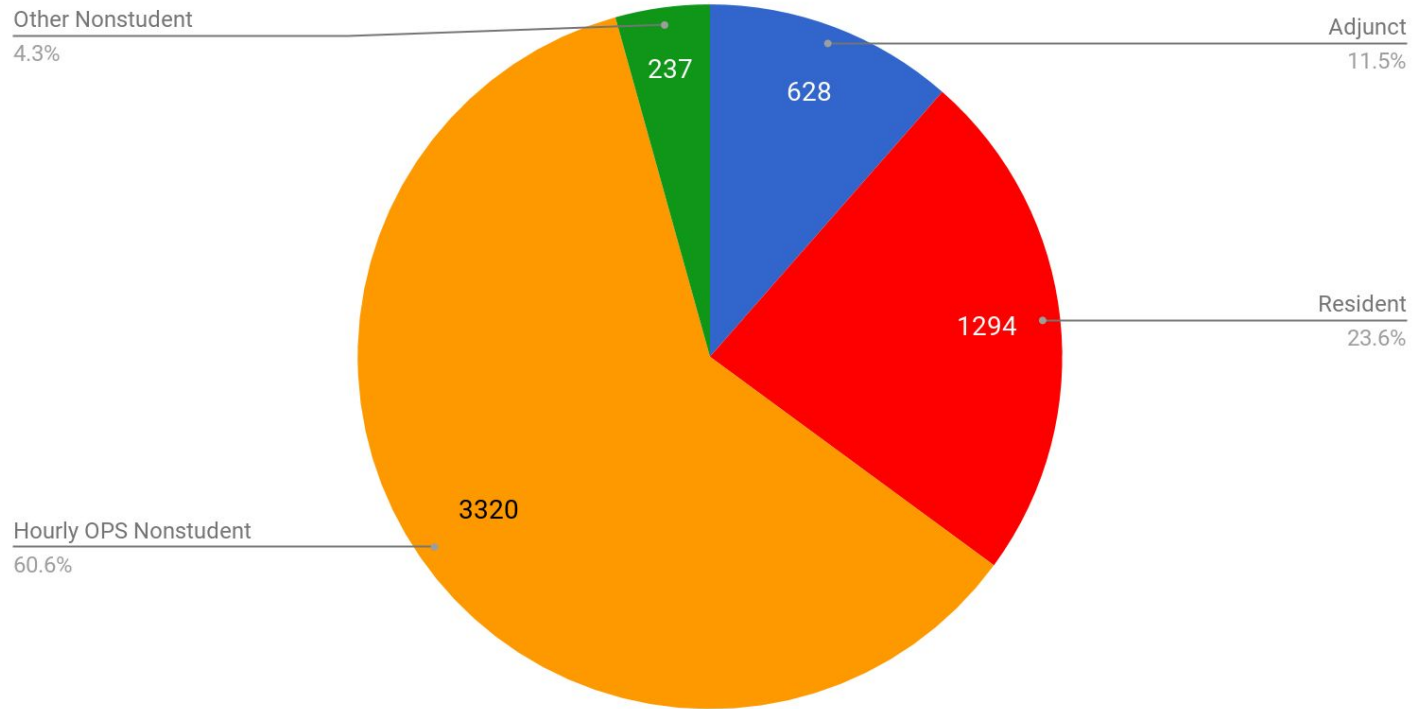


Chart 2: Nonstudent Hourly OPS Worker Length of Employment

Source: Information request from 12-21-17

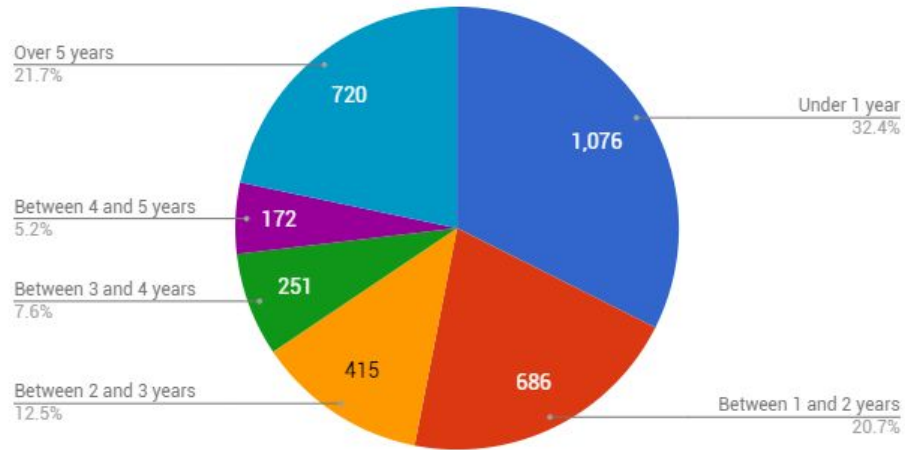


Chart 3: Age of Nonstudent Hourly OPS Workers

Source: Information request from 12-21-17

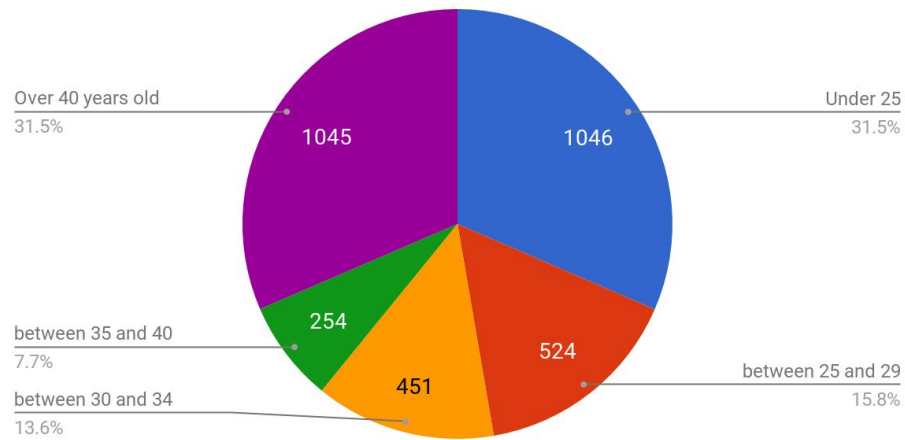


Chart 4: Nonstudent OPS Workers Race/Ethnicity by Pay

Source: Information request from 12-21-17

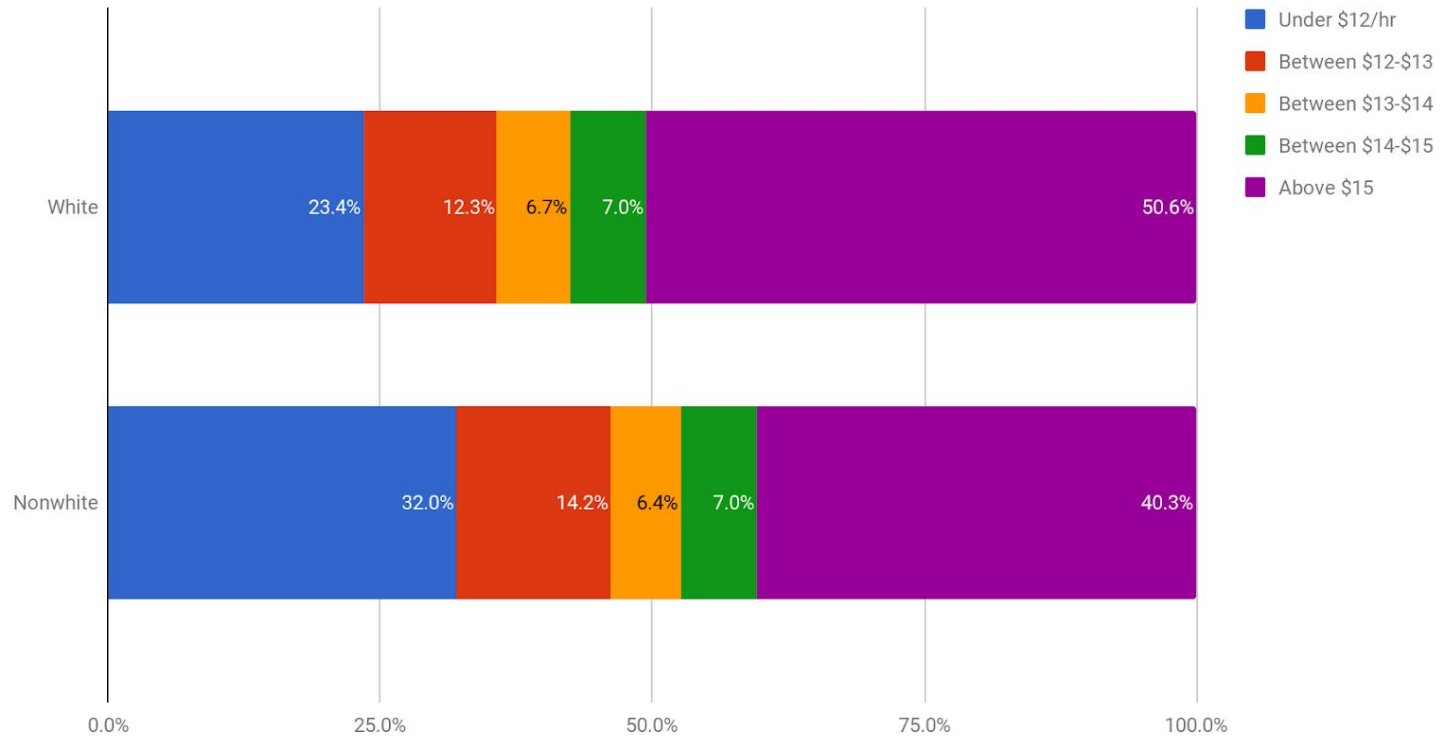


Chart 5: Nonstudent Hourly OPS Worker Median Hourly Wage

Source: Information request 12-21-17

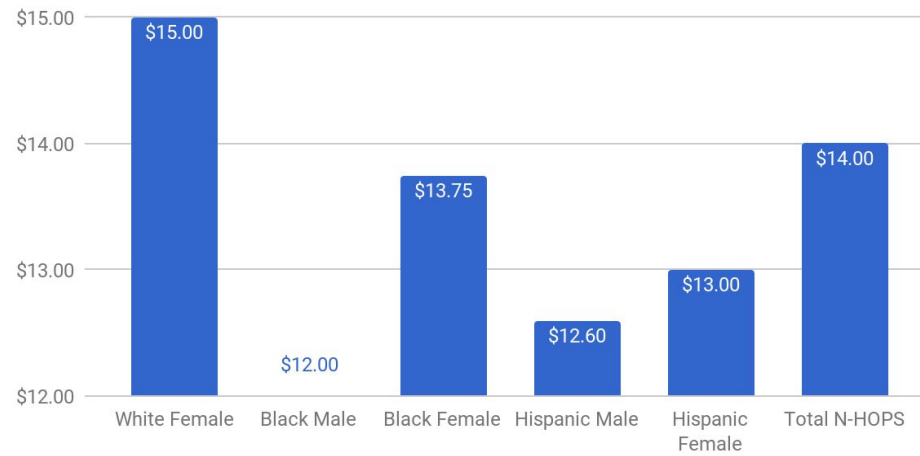


Chart 6: Number with state health insurance and number eligible for state health insurance

Source: Information request 12-21-17

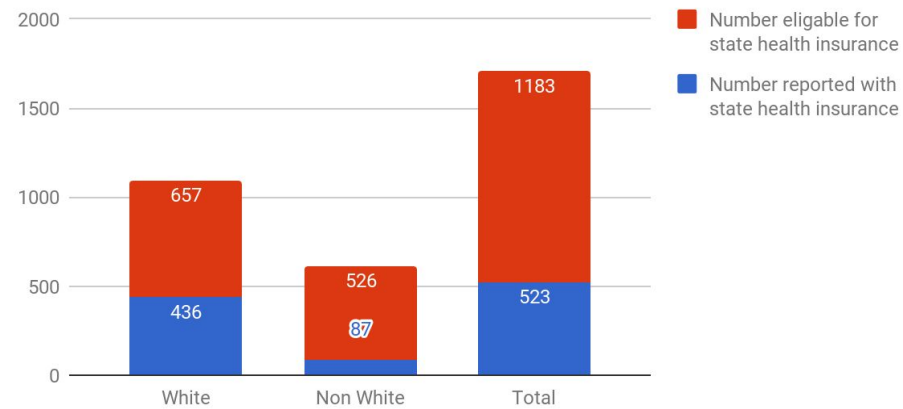


Chart 7: University of Florida Nonstudent Hourly OPS Workers' Average Biweekly Paycheck *Source: Public records request 12-21-17*

Dates	Holiday's	Days missed	Total wages	Average biweekly paycheck
5/19-6/1/17	5/29: Independence Day	1	\$724,328.67	\$894.34
6/2-6/15/17	No UF holidays		\$1,792,255.05	\$907.44
6/16-6/29/17	6/19-6/23: Summer Break	4	\$1,850,277.72	\$845.13
6/30-7/13/17	7/4: Fourth Of July	1	\$1,749,418.41	\$908.43
7/14-7/27	No UF holidays		\$1,944,049.69	\$891.20
7/28-8/10	No UF holidays		\$1,902,719.30	\$908.15
8/11-8/24/17	End of Semester		\$1,980,680.54	\$867.34
8/25-9/7/17	9/4: Columbus Day	1	\$1,997,488.42	\$759.70
9/8-9/21/17	9/11-9/13: Hurricane Irama	3	\$1,768,583.61	\$896.48
9/22-10/5	No UF holidays		\$2,234,915.09	\$904.16
10/6-10/19/17	10/6-10/7: Homecoming	2	\$2,320,966.61	\$917.70
10/20-11/2	No UF holidays		\$2,421,820.27	\$884.77
11/3-11/16/17	11/10: Veterans Day	1	\$2,311,018.24	\$860.68
11/17-11/30/17	11/22-11/25: Thanksgiving Break	4	\$2,291,134.80	\$806.70

Appendix: Quotes from the ACLC's OPS Survey

In January 2018 the Alachua County Labor Coalition sent out a questionnaire to 4,943 nonstudent OPS workers email addresses with 519 responding by January 23rd, 2018. Below are some of the highlights from this survey. For the complete survey please email us at info@laborcoalition.org or visit us at LaborCoalition.org/livingwagereport.

Please describe some of the experiences you had related to loss of work/wages due to Hurricane Irma and/or the Spencer speaking event.

"I lost a significant amount of money at this time and I am still paying off the debt from the groceries/hurricane prep costs. We had just moved into the area and had nothing for power outages, etc. I was not scheduled to work during the Spencer speaking. I have also lost a number of hours due to school holidays (Mondays off, break weeks, etc) "

"Between Hurricane Irma, Richard Spencer, and holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, I'm at least 1K in credit card debt. "

"Over a weeks worth of wages and zero compensation led me to lose my residence and become homeless"

"I was unable to make up all of the hours, but I was told I could make up as many hours as possible. Unfortunately, it affected my children and their care and created a financial struggle that I still haven't recovered from. I've been in a financial crisis since Hurricane Irma and Richard Spencer didn't help anything."

"Stressed of not having a full paycheck when you are a single mother. I had to go to food banks, due to the decrease in pay. I am having financial hardship, I couldn't afford to buy food and pay bills. It is difficult when you are the sole provider. "

"Due to loss of hours which means loss of pay, I was and have been struggling month to month just to support myself. Life is hard just getting up and trying to arrive to work safe, due to the countless number of cars. When you add the hardships of losing out on money to help support yourself, let alone anyone else you have in your family, life starts to become dreary. I am struggling. I need help."

"Huge burdens of financial stress to the point where I might lose my apartment "

“Losing time means I have to decide between rent and bills or food. Working a full work week means I scrape by, but even a few hours lost can make a serious impact. “

In the past three months, have you taken any personal time off (e.g. sick day, doctor appointment, family matters) for which you weren't paid? If so, how many hours did you take off?

“Yes, absolutely. I had an emergency dental procedure (abscessed tooth) and I missed 3 days from it due to the surgery right before Christmas. Then I missed the week UF was closed (last week of the year), so I've gotten the smallest paychecks ever and I cannot support my family of 4 on this. I've been looking for a job outside of UF for more security, which breaks my heart because I love my job. I'm happier in my job than I've ever been anywhere.”

Has your position changed since you were hired (workload, responsibilities, etc.)?

“My workload has increased exponentially. I am on a team of four for Administration and myself and my supervisor are the only ones that handle the portion of administration we handle. I am one of two people that everyone relies on and my job is insanely busy, whereas my job started as me just greeting people and answering phones.”

“I had to work late almost every day, sometimes includes holidays and weekends. Many times, I could not put the real working hours at the record, my supervisor would be pissed off and complain a lot. I worried about my position, so I did not dare to record the real working time every day. In terms of the responsibilities, 90% of my work was different from the job description at the recruit and interview.”

“Workload drastically increased and I even became responsible for supervising due to the previous supervisor being fired. Despite being told to do this and despite being told that a new position could be made for me with increased pay, I was never offered such a position. I was the de facto supervisor for around 8 months, that caused me a lot of turmoil, and all of the discussion about how a position could be made for me was done for nothing.”

Have you spoken with a supervisor about moving into a TEAMS position? If so, what were you told?

“Yes. I was told that the dean of the college doesn't see my position as important enough to make full time and that I would likely never be seen as important enough to make into a TEAMS employee. It's hard to hear that the dean of my entire college specifically thinks that an administrative

assistant isn't important when she has an assistant directly dedicated to her.”

“Repeatedly! With the past and current supervisor! I also applied for multiple positions in my department, for which I was told either, they don't make enough money to put me in a TEAMS position, or that when being interviewed for positions for which I was HIGHLY QUALIFIED, that they had to make the best decision for the company. Which in my opinion was to keep me ‘locked’ into my current position because no one else here can do my job and they could not hire anyone for as little as they pay me!”

What brings you joy in your work at UF?

“Working with the students and being available to assist them at such a vulnerable time in their lives. The students are my passion. The school is a passion of mine, as well, as I love what we do and what we represent. I love every part of my job, other than the instability. “

“I like solving problems, catching and fixing mistakes. I catch a lot of mistakes. It's very galling that I'm OPS and underpaid while others who do a sloppy job are TEAMS and have more financial security than I do. “

Are there any other aspects of being an OPS worker at the University of Florida that you care to share with us?

“Why is it that we do not have paid time off if OPS has been budgeted at the beginning of the year and where is this money going?”

“I would not have taken the position if I had known how many days I would lose. It has cost too much and has added a significant amount of stress to my household as we depend greatly on my income “

“The lack of any benefits, the insecurity of the job, the being forgot/unknown/underappreciated as an adjunct faculty is pretty gross.”

“It's quite frustrating to be reminded of how ‘optional’ you are to the University... it doesn't help morale to know that you really don't matter to UF. It's also not good for morale to know that you aren't going to ever make TEAMS because you aren't financially worth the investment. It's amazing to me that someone would work as hard as I work, just to be told that we aren't valuable and have no chance of gaining value in anyone's eyes. “

“I personally felt like I did not count as an actual employee and was not afforded simple things like being able to call in sick if I was sick. I worked sick. Because of the position I was in it was difficult to run to the restroom and ended up with 2 kidney infections and multiple UTI's. I felt taken advantage of. Other OPS positions are probably not like this.”

“It should be illegal that the State of Florida can remove workers from the Social Security System. It harms the workers and undermines the system.”

“I understand the benefit of having OPS positions, and I understand the realities of budgets, but after having been in my job for this long, not having been transitioned into a TEAMS position--even just automatically--has always felt like a subtle signal from UF that, while UF expects me to care about my job, UF doesn't ultimately care about me. Whether that's true or not, it stifles ambition in the long term. “

“Wished OPS got paid the minimum wage at UF, Just because we are not TEAMS employees doesn't mean we don't do any less work.”

“I haven't been able to save a single dollar towards my future in the 8 months i've been working in my current OPS position. My coworker works less than I do and makes more than double my salary all while performing the same quality of work on the same tasks. I feel taken advantage of by the OPS system. Any time there is a National Holiday, as an OPS employee I take a large pay cut. Even one day of work means so much when we are paid so little.“

“I have been treated unfairly as an OPS worker, and I did not find any way that OPS can submit a complaint or initiate a grievance. I believe unfairness is unacceptable at University of Florida, but there is no option for OPS to speak out without worrying about the position.”

“Being an OPS worker means sacrificing personal feelings over being paid. I often battle taking ‘personal’ days for my spiritual, physical and emotional health, even when I am not feeling my best. I am positive that my job performance would significantly improve if I didn't have to stress so much about reaching 35-40 hours each week and could take time off to recover from the fast pace of a university.”

“I don't think it is fair that we are told we are the face of the institution I work for but we are paid the least and treated the worst.”

“Recently, our center was closed for the first week of Jan. 2018 with no pay, so I lost 40 hours and the next two weeks after that we are only allowed to work 20 hours each week, the rest is no pay. So in three weeks time I am only allowed 40 hours. I am now about to be evicted from my apartment due to lack of work. I don't see how this is fair.“

“I don't get paid for the extra hours I work if its more than 40/week”

“Males, esp white males, automatically get on TEAMS even if they don't do shit. If you are a women, be prepared to be undervalued, underpaid, and go without benefits, even though women are often the ones (forced by male partners) to need time off to handle childcare, family issues, etc..”

“I am very unhappy that I do not pay into Social Security and that there is no way to opt out of the Social Security alternative system. I feel this is unjust and a quiet benefits grab by UF. I work a relatively high-paid and high prestige OPS job by design because it is flexible and allows me to

work from home part-time so I can be there for my kids, but the system is robbing me of retirement credits. This destabilizes women in particular who are more likely to work in these arrangements and who already suffer financially in divorce. “

“I understand needing to have part-time employees, but it's become a way for employers to work around paying for benefits (like health care, retirement, and paid time off.) There's also no recourse for these employees - I could be terminated at any time for no reason whatsoever, I have no job description, and I have a full-time job with full-time job expectations. UF is using the "OPS" umbrella for full-time employees that deserve permanent positions. It's sickening to see my own Alma mater treat people like this.”

Do you feel that the Faculty Senate or any other entity at UF adequately voice the concerns of OPS staff and provide adequate leverage for facilitating change on campus? Explain.

“No. Why change the OPS position where it feels that our time is being exploited and we are being punished if we have medical concerns or having to tend to children etc? If we don't show up for work it is a positive in the eyes of UF because they get to keep the extra change.”

“No, I don't think that the OPS employees are valued as highly as TEAMS employees and are often regarded as replaceable. For this reason, I do not believe it is a priority for those in power to facilitate change to benefit this class of workers.”

“I don't think non-OPS employees understand what it's like taking a day off and not stressing about a whole day of pay out the window. Every holiday that my department is closed, I lose 1 whole day of pay. I don't think it's fair for an OPS employee that has been loyal and responsible for over a year, should have to remain as OPS. I think 12 months and over is adequate for a supervisor to accept an OPS employee to become TEAMS.”

“No. OPS workers have been dealing with these conditions for years, some OPS workers have remained in their status for decades. Real change has not been made.”

“Honestly, this is the first time I know that there might be someone at UF cares about OPS staffs. I sincerely wish there will be a change in the future. However, according to my experience and HR/supervisor's attitude, I could not feel anything indicating any changes.”