

# Fall 2023 Commute Survey Results Summary Report

Dec. 12, 2023

*The Office of Transportation and Mobility*

*The Office of Data and Strategic Analytics*

## Introduction

The Office of Transportation and Mobility in partnership with the Office of Data and Strategic Analytics conducted a survey in October 2023 to determine the commute and transportation practices of the Vanderbilt University community. Similar surveys in 2019 and in 2022 have guided the programs related to [MoveVU](#), Vanderbilt's strategic transportation and mobility plan that falls under the [FutureVU](#) comprehensive campus planning effort.

This annual survey project increases the understanding of the Vanderbilt community's commuting patterns and is used to track the results of MoveVU efforts and how transportation and commute patterns change over time.

The implementation of MoveVU is a collaborative partnership of Vanderbilt's School of Engineering, the Division of Administration and the Office of Transportation and Mobility. The vision of MoveVU calls for a transformation in how the Vanderbilt community commutes to campus, with less reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and parking lots and a greater focus on sustainable commute modes and green spaces.

## Survey Methodology

### **The Fall 2023 Commute Survey had a 42 percent response rate.**

The 2023 commute survey was sent to all faculty, staff, graduate/professional students and postdoctoral scholars, a total of 13,612 people. The Office of Transportation and Mobility and the Office of Data and Strategic Analytics received 5,661 responses (partial completes included), a 42 percent response rate. Staff/faculty/postdocs had a 50 percent response rate, while graduate/professional students had a 32 percent response rate.

This response rate is in range with recent past DSA survey efforts, including the 2022 commute survey.

### **Demographics of participants and limitations of the sample**

Similar to the 2022 commute survey participation, the proportions of reported Black, Hispanic/Latino and international respondents were slightly lower than those of the overall population, while the proportion of white respondents in the sample was slightly higher. The lowest pay band was less represented in the survey sample, while the other three pay bands were slightly overrepresented.

26 out of the 33 business units had 50 percent or higher participation rate. Participation was high in several business units (>70 percent), while other units showed lower participation rates (e.g., Business

Services, Athletics and Student Recreation, and Facilities). Based on 2022 commute survey participation, the Office of Transportation and Mobility anticipated that employees within Facilities, Dining Services and Vanderbilt Public Safety might have a lower response rate. The Office of Transportation and Mobility worked with supervisors within these units to encourage participation.

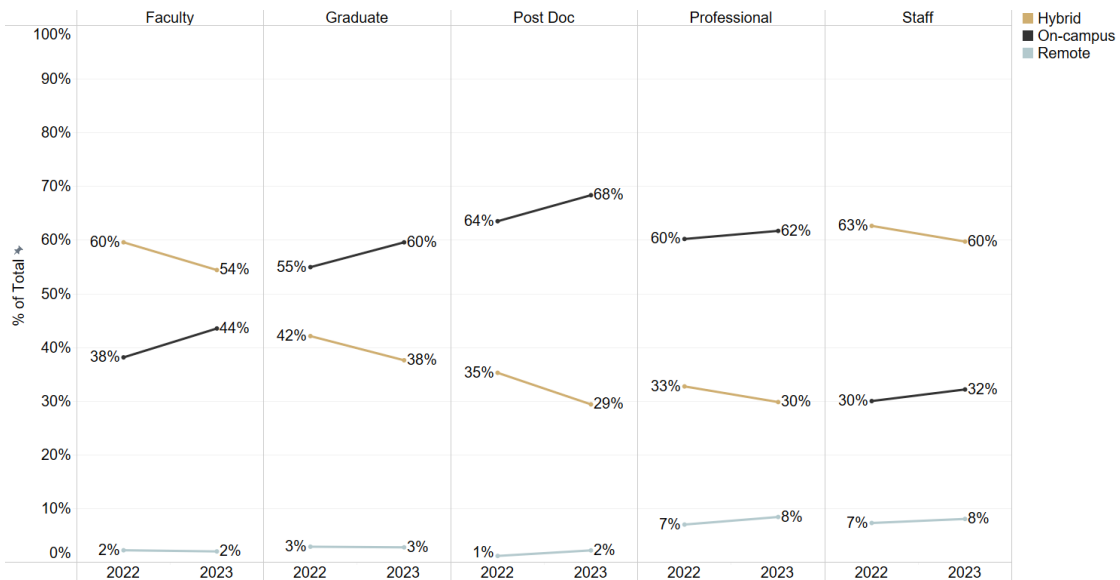
## Key Findings

### 51 percent of respondents reported being “hybrid.”

Overall, 43 percent of respondents reported they worked entirely on campus, and 51 percent selected “hybrid” as their work status.

### Work arrangements remain similar to 2022 by university role

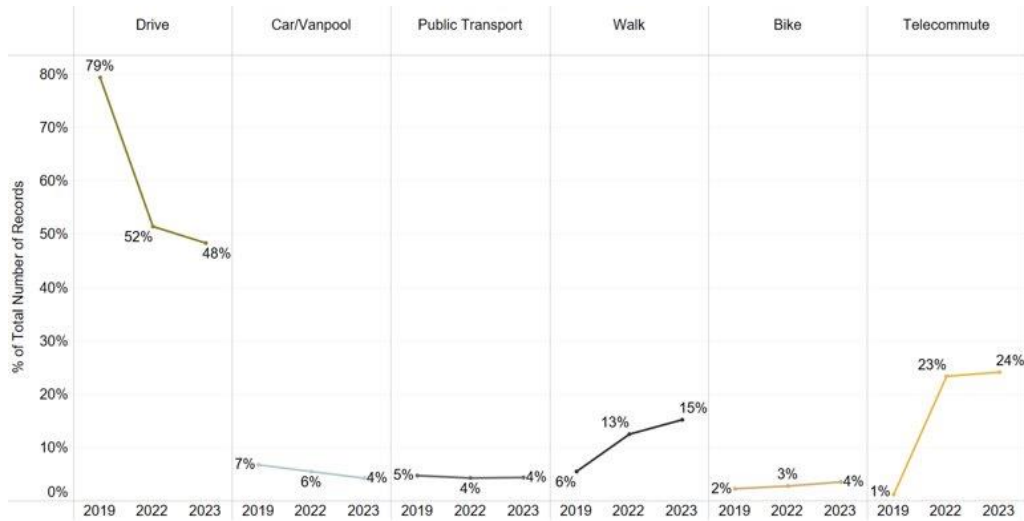
The type of work status reported depended on one’s role at the university. Consistent with 2022 findings, staff are less likely to work entirely on campus compared with other roles. Postdocs, graduate students and professional students are more likely to report being entirely on-campus than faculty and staff. Staff are more likely to report entirely remote status relative to faculty and graduate students.



### 15 percent of respondents say walking is their primary mode of transportation to campus.

Compared with 2019, the percent of commuters driving alone to work decreased from 79 percent to 48 percent. The percent of commuters reporting walking as their primary mode of transportation increased from 6 percent to 15 percent. **These sustained shifts in mode share are an indication that commute behavior has permanently changed since the COVID-19 pandemic.**

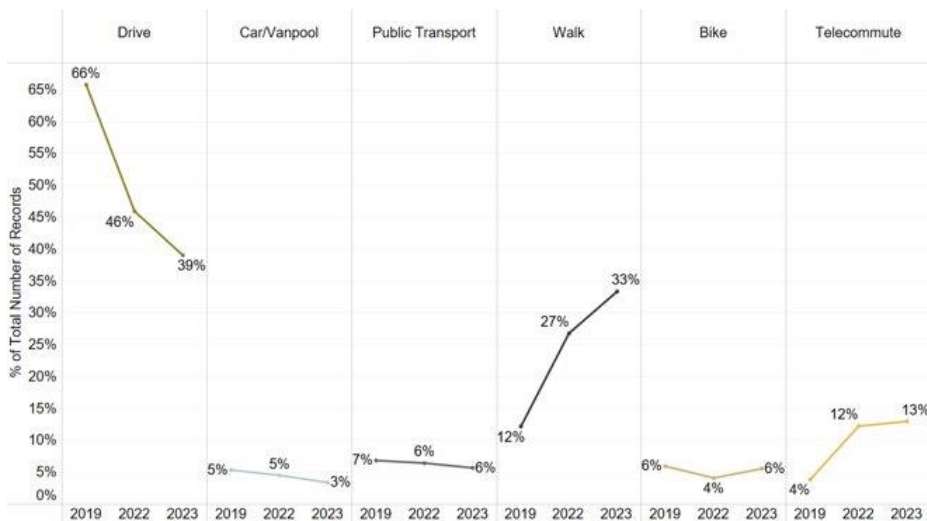
The Office of Transportation and Mobility will continue to administer programs that support and sustain this increase in walking, while working to identify strategies to spur similar increases in the other sustainable transportation modes. While the sustained increase in walking and telecommuting represents significant progress toward MoveVU goals, more will need to be done to increase levels of public transit, car/vanpool and biking use.



[Visit the interactive Tableau site to see the commute survey results from 2019, 2022 and 2023.](#)

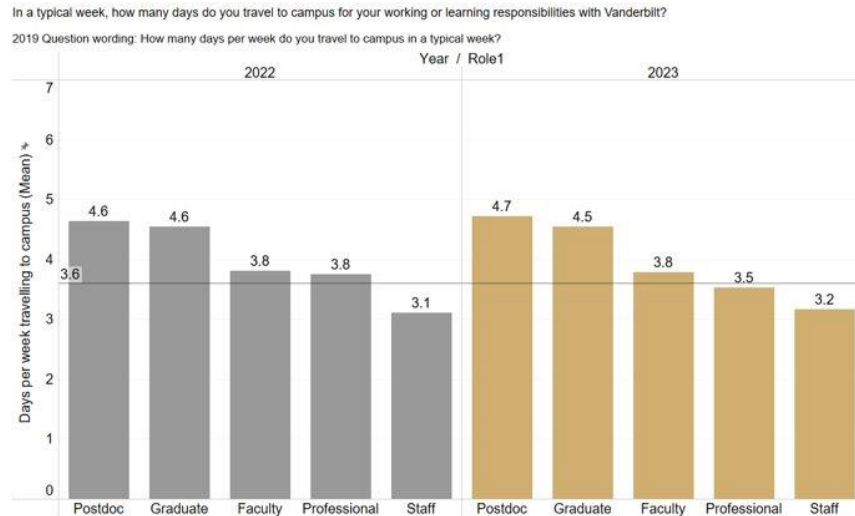
### Graduate/Professional students and postdocs showed the largest shift to walking among university roles.

For graduate/professional students and postdocs, the mode share for **walking increased** from 12 percent in 2019 to 33 percent in 2023, while the **driving alone decreased** from 66 percent in 2019 to 39 percent in 2023. Overall mode share for biking, walking, public transit appears relatively consistent through the three survey years.



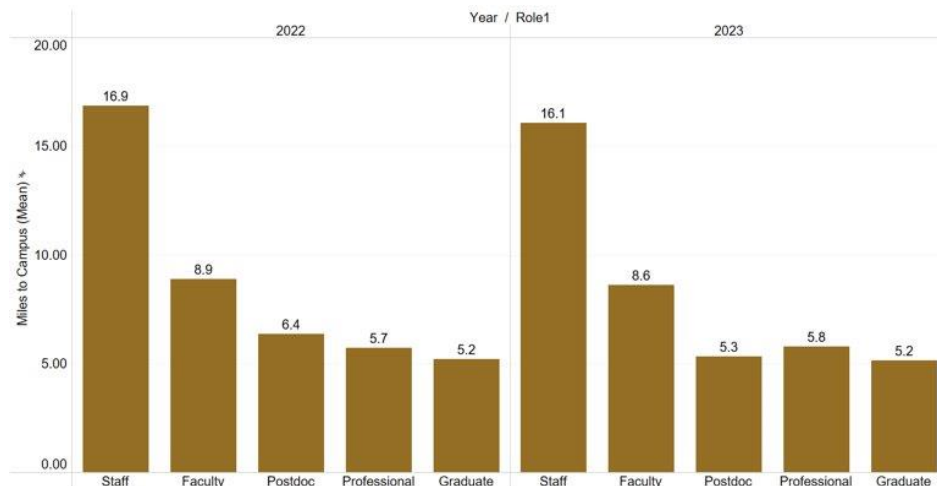
## Consistent with 2022 findings, staff have the longest commutes but are on campus (on average) fewer days per week.

On average, people travel to campus 3.6 days/week. On average, postdocs and graduate students travel to campus more than the other four roles. Faculty and professional students travel to campus more than staff.



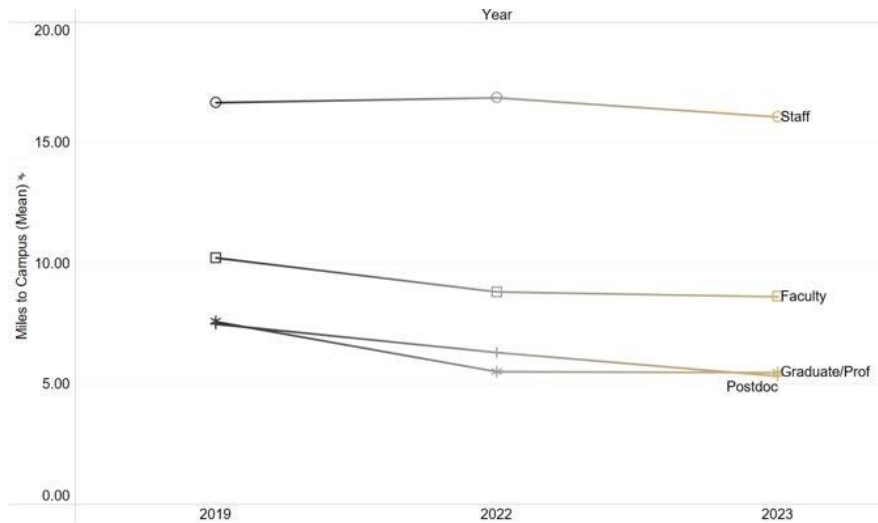
Staff, on average, commute longer distances than the other university roles (average 16.1 miles one-way). Professional (5.8 miles) and graduate students (5.2 miles) have shorter commutes relative to faculty and staff.

## Staff commute longer distances than the other roles



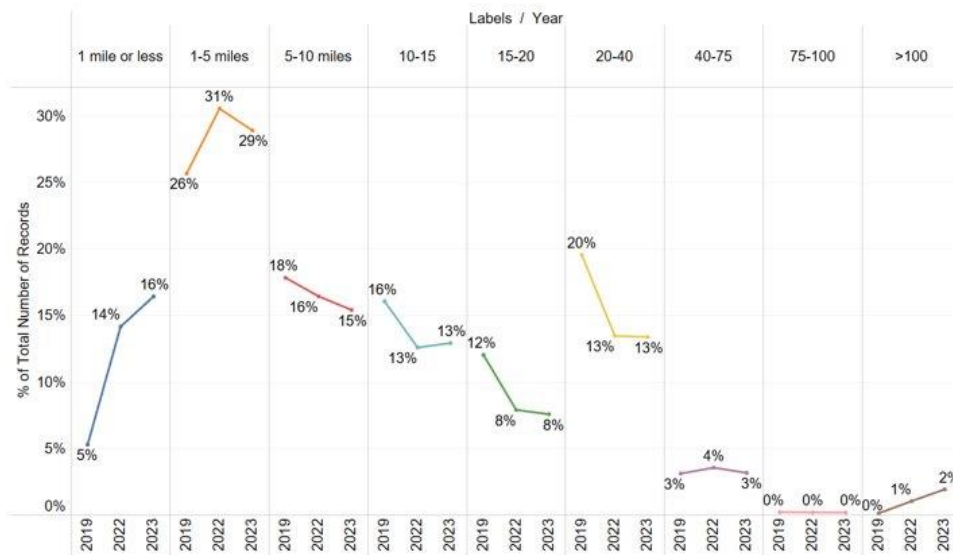
The 2023 and 2022 samples reported slightly shorter commutes than the 2019 sample in terms of miles traveled. Across all survey years, graduate/professional students and postdocs are living closest to campus. Given this sustained difference in commute distance by university role, the Office of

Transportation and Mobility is continuing to explore programs and communications efforts to meet the needs of graduate/professional students and postdocs who report shorter commutes and therefore have more transportation options available to them.



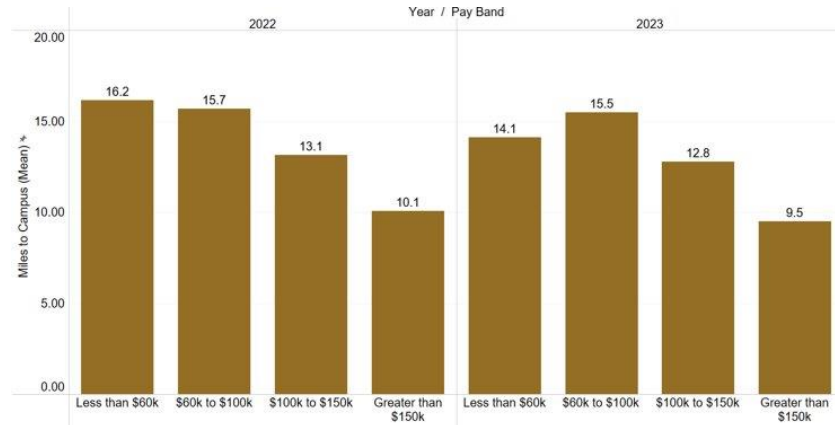
**45 percent of respondents reported commuting less than 5 miles (one way).**

60 percent of respondents commute less than 10 miles. There are significant differences in the proportion of population that lives within 5 miles when considering university role. 25 percent of staff commute less than 5 miles, while 45 percent of faculty commute less than 5 miles and 70 percent of graduate, professional students and postdocs commute less than 5 miles.



## Higher paid employees have shorter commutes.

Similar to 2022 findings, faculty and staff in the lower two pay bands have a longer commute than those in the higher two pay bands.



## Recommendation to market transportation options to the 60 percent who live within 10 miles.

While the Office of Transportation and Mobility understands that sustainable commute options are not an option for everyone, 45 percent of respondents reported commuting less than 5 miles (one way) to campus, and 60 percent reported a commute of less than 10 miles (one way). **Those with fewer miles to travel have more opportunities for shorter and more direct options: walking, biking and WeGo Public Transit trips.**

While staff commute longer distances than other university roles, graduate and professional students have the largest proportion of people with shortest commutes. When excluding fully remote learning programs from the analysis, 70 percent of graduate and professional student and postdocs commute less than 5 miles. In particular, when considering programmatic outreach and strategic communications, **the 70 percent of graduate, professional students and postdocs who commute less than 5 miles presents a significant opportunity to shift more trips from driving alone to sustainable transportation modes.**

The Office of Transportation and Mobility will continue to target programs, as well as marketing and communications efforts, to those commuting fewer than 10 miles (one way) to encourage use of sustainable modes, including using the WeGo benefit, the bike share system and walking.

## MoveVU, Vanderbilt's Transportation Demand Management Program

Recognizing its prominent role as an innovation engine and one of the largest employers in Middle Tennessee, Vanderbilt is committed to rethinking its approach to transportation.

MoveVU, built on the foundation laid by [FutureVU](#), is that approach.

In pursuit of the FutureVU goals, the Office of Transportation and Mobility was created in 2018 to implement a comprehensive Transportation Demand Management program, detailed in [MoveVU](#), Vanderbilt's strategic transportation and mobility plan. MoveVU elaborates upon the transportation-focused components of the broader FutureVU goals. MoveVU goals align with Vanderbilt's overarching sustainability strategy to beautify the campus, expand green spaces, create a walkable and sustainable campus and reduce carbon emissions from vehicles.

The Office of Transportation and Mobility has prioritized three core programs related to parking and commute behaviors:

- **MoveVU Commute Hub** – Launched in February 2020, the Commute Hub provides a website and mobile app that helps commuters track their trips and connect to other carpoolers and vanpoolers.
- **Daily Parking Program** – Launched in September 2020, the daily parking program has over 3,200 community members participating with access to 1,630 parking spaces. Participants in the daily parking program only pay for days that they park on campus, increasing the financial motivation associated with considering other modes on any given day. Users can see their parking deductions and receive statements that summarize their trips and parking charges in the MoveVU Commute Hub. Daily parking also utilizes campus parking spaces more efficiently, allowing for land use changes and facilities re-development that support Vanderbilt's academic and research missions.
- **Commute Incentives** – Incentive payments for sustainable commutes launched in September 2021. Commuters who take a sustainable commute such as walking, biking or riding the bus receive a \$1 incentive per weekday, up to \$20 per month. These incentives are applied to faculty and staff's paychecks and graduate/professional students' and postdocs' Commodore Cards.

Vanderbilt's comprehensive Transportation Demand Management program also provides commuter benefits, including free transit passes that allow all students, faculty and staff to ride WeGo Public Transit Buses, Train and Access free of charge, a guaranteed ride home program, and access to commute planning assistance from a Commute Concierge. Demonstrating the success of these programs, commuting emissions decreased 25 percent in FY21–22 compared with FY20–21, and 58 percent compared with FY19–20. This decrease reflects the Vanderbilt community's shift in commuting and remote work patterns.

In addition to encouraging use of sustainable transportation modes through these TDM strategies, Vanderbilt has committed to making infrastructure improvements that facilitate the use of sustainable transportation options for commute trips and for greater on-campus mobility.

Vanderbilt is planning and has partially constructed a "Walk-and-Roll" loop around the campus edge, providing a comfortable walking/biking transition to the broader Nashville transportation network.

## Parking Policy

Campus parking—because of its inefficient use of space and high property value—was identified as an underutilized asset while implementing FutureVU and MoveVU strategies. While the VU parking lots and garages have transformed as the VU campus has transformed, there is still enough parking for everyone on campus. As recently as 2018, Vanderbilt had one parking space per faculty, staff and student. This

ratio is highly unusual among universities, and MoveVU is rightsizing the parking needs to use spaces more times throughout a single day.

Understandably, with the major capital construction projects in recent years, along with MoveVU's efforts to rightsize the parking inventory, for some members of the Vanderbilt community, parking is no longer close to their office or academic building. Some parking requires a longer walk, a need to factor in more time into one's commute and additional distance for those with mobility needs. In 2019, Parking Services began offering the Mobility Rides service to assist those with mobility needs to get from their parking space or on-campus residence to where they need to go. Since its initial launch, the number of requests for Mobility Rides have grown significantly. There were 192 Mobility Rides in FY2020 and 3,030 rides in FY2023.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

The Transportation and Mobility Office will use the data from and feedback received through the commute survey to shape programs and adjust goals. This information will shape mobility and transportation programming and determine the most effective programs to support the community.

As the campus continues to transform based on FutureVU and MoveVU plans, there is a strong need to understand mobility challenges and the role that programs and transit services can fulfill. Identifying these challenges and considering how they affect Vanderbilt's values involving equity and inclusion will be vital to ensuring that campus infrastructure and mobility programs work for all people.