

Profile of a State Authorization Professional: An Analysis of a Growing Field in Higher Education

Tyson Heath
Manager of State Authorization
Western Governors University
tyson.heath@wgu.edu

Liz Carney
Compliance Coordinator
Western Governors University
liz.carney@wgu.edu

Trevor Jonsson
Compliance Coordinator
Western Governors University
trevor.jonsson@wgu.edu

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction	3
State Authorization General Tasks & Knowledge	3
Methodology.....	4
Results.....	5
Limitations	10
Conclusion.....	10
Appendix 1 – Survey.....	11
Appendix 2 - All Titles.....	19
Appendix 3 - All Departments.....	20
Appendix 4 - Daily Tasks.....	21
Appendix 5 - Salary by U.S. Region Expanded	22

Abstract

This paper presents and analyzes results of research into occupational data from state authorization professionals across the country. State authorization regulations have only recently been enforced for distance education, and no research into the employment expectations of this growing field exists. The authors created a survey addressing topics from the participants' salary to institutional and positional information and analyzed the data to find commonalities of the position across the United States. The results showed that there are shared and variable traits in salary, tasks, position title, and department. The results encourage further research to shape the field as it continues to grow.

Introduction

While State Authorization is a relatively new term for most institutions of higher education, the laws and rules have been around for quite some time. As Alan Contreras notes in *State Authorization of Colleges and Universities: A Handbook for Institutions and Agencies*, “state authorization is the normal method through which degree-granting colleges are established” with authorizations generally separated into three areas: public institutions, non-public institutions, and religious institutions.¹ A physical presence (e.g., building/address, faculty/staff, local marketing) was the trigger to require the need for an institution to seek formal authorization. However, as distance education continued to grow, so did the need for states to update authorization regulations.

Due to the rapid growth of distance education and the lack of authorization enforcement by the states, the United States Department of Education issued regulation 34 CFR 600.9 (c) in 2010, requiring an institution to be authorized in a state in order to offer federal financial aid to students in that state.² This regulation brought greater attention to state authorization, and institutions had to determine if and where they would need to seek authorization for their current (and future) operations. Some institutions had to scramble to figure out which department should be responsible for completing the work. Obtaining initial authorization can be complicated and time consuming and many states require additional reporting throughout the year or annually. Ultimately, the federal regulation was vacated by a federal court ruling on procedural grounds making the rule unenforceable, but by then institutions had begun submitting work to receive authorization and many states had begun to enforce their already governing regulations. This increased activity in state authorization meant that new departmental positions needed to be created, but most institutions were wondering where the responsibility should lie. Institutions were asking, *who should complete this work? How much does it entail? What are the staff qualifications?* These are the same questions that influenced the survey design.

State Authorization General Tasks & Knowledge

An individual overseeing authorization is responsible for many projects and tasks, ranging from mission critical to minor maintenance. Typical tasks required of these positions include: researching institutional offerings and placement programs; analyzing current regulations, new regulations, or changes in existing regulations; completing applications (initial, renewals, exemptions, data reports); site visit preparation and execution; working with other university departments to obtain engagement, data, and support for compliance activities; tracking and reporting curriculum changes, new programs, or other changes to approval agencies; and acting as the institutional liaison between state entities and the institution. All these tasks demonstrate the importance and the need for a qualified individual who can manage projects, understand regulations through proactive research, and communicate effectively to internal and external audiences.

In addition to the typical tasks, an individual who wants to be successful in this area of focus needs to be knowledgeable in the following key areas: general university governance; curriculum structure, faculty

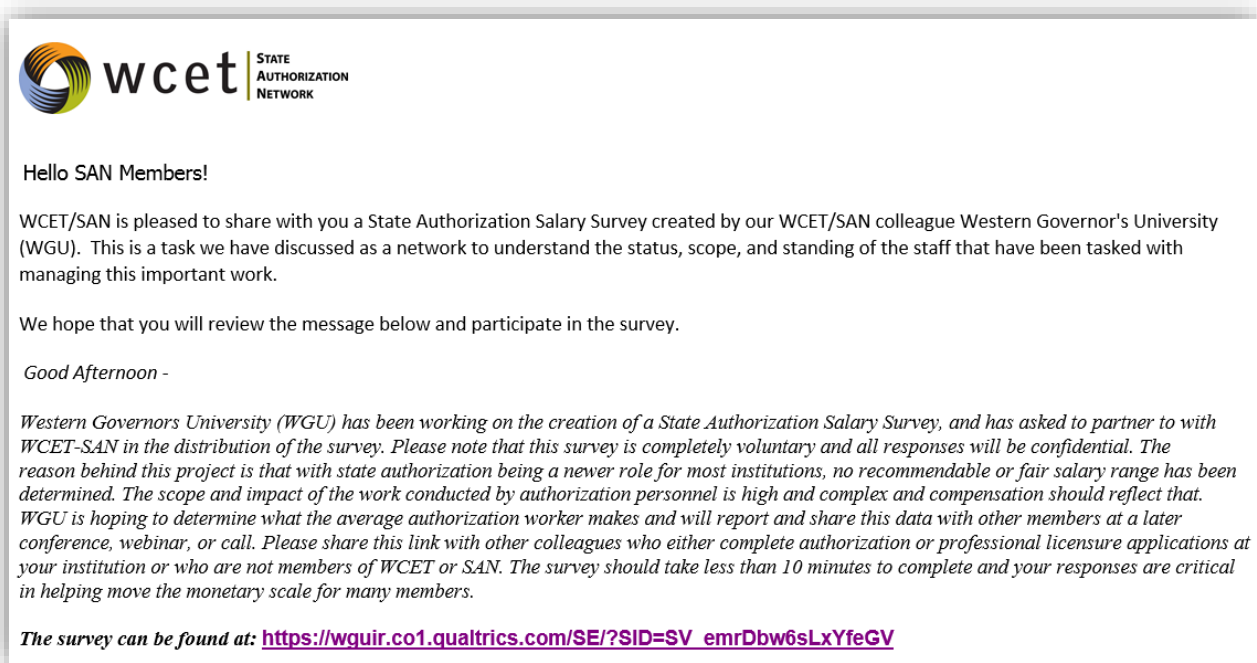
¹ Contreras, Alan, et al. *State Authorization of Colleges and Universities: A Handbook for Institutions and Agencies*. Oregon Review Special Editions, 2017, p. 13.

² State Authorization. <https://wcet.wiche.edu/focus-areas/policy-and-regulation/state-authorization>.

model, and academic services (financial aid) used at the institution; knowledge of where students are located and where they will be at all times in their program (NC-SARA, federal regulations); and an understanding of who owns the data and policies for each area (student notifications, complaints, disclosures).

Methodology

State authorization experts from Western Governors University (WGU) designed the survey to gather information regarding the makeup and compensation of professionals working in the field of state authorization. The survey utilized Qualtrics software for presenting the questions and collecting responses. WGU partnered with WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies – State Authorization Network (WCET-SAN) to distribute the survey to member institutions. The email message sent to SAN members is shown below.



In addition to the email distributed to SAN members, WCET and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) sent a unique email to member institutions asking for their participation. The survey was open from January 30, 2017 to March 17, 2017, and received 220 responses.³

The survey consisted of 34 fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions. The questions covered the following areas: institutional information, personal qualifications, position and background, job responsibilities, and compensation and benefits. To better understand the scope of state authorization professionals across the country, questions such as “What percentage of your time is dedicated strictly to State Authorization” and “In what department does your position reside” were asked to see what a

³ Individuals from WGU did not participate in the survey.

typical state authorization professional looks like. It is important to note, not all participants answered every question. Appendix 1 includes a complete copy of the survey.

Results

Participants were asked a variety of questions about the institutions at which they work. Table 1 shows the demographics of those institutions. Most of the participants were affiliated with small public institutions of 100–1,500 employees and student enrollments of 1,500–15,000. The majority of participants were from institutions located in the South.

Table 1: Institutional Demographics		
Category	Survey Options	Percentage
Institution Type n=198	Public	73%
	Private, Non-profit	22%
	Private, For-profit	5%
	Other	<1%
Employees n=191	Less than 100	5%
	100-500	28%
	500-1,500	27%
	1,500-3,000	10%
	3,000-5,000	12%
	5,000-7,500	7%
	7,500-10,000	3%
	10,000+	9%
Enrollment n=194	Less than 1,500	7%
	1,500-5,000	24%
	5,000-10,000	18%
	10,000-15,000	14%
	15,000-25,000	11%
	25,000-35,000	12%
	35,000-50,000	7%
	50,000+	8%
Institutional Region n=191	West	19%
	Northeast	13%
	Midwest	25%
	South	43%

Participants were asked about their personal qualifications: highest degree obtained, area of degree concentration, time employed in higher education, and time employed in their current position. The most common degree-level among participants was a Master’s degree and the most common area of concentration among all degrees was education at 38%. Other common fields were business, administration, and law (Table 2, n=169). The average participant has worked in higher education for

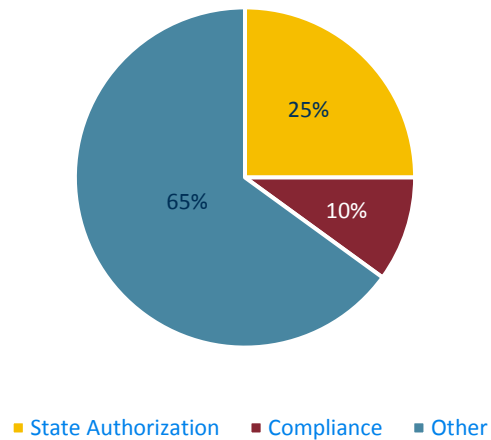
over five years (87%, n=177) and has been employed in their current position between two and five years (43.5%, n=177).

Table 2: Area of Degree Concentration		
Degree	Common Areas of Concentration	Percentage
Graduate (MA/MS)	Education, Business/Management, Administration	47%
Terminal Academic (PhD/EdD)	Education, Arts, Science/Engineering, Administration/Public Policy, Business	29%
Undergraduate (BA/BS)	Business, Pre-law/Criminal Justice, Education	17%
Terminal Special (JD)	Law	6%

Participants were asked about their positions within their institutions. Thirty-two percent indicated their job title was Director, 19% were Coordinators, 7% were Managers, and the rest had various other titles including Specialist, Assistant Director, or Associate Director (n=171). The placement of their position within the institution varied drastically. Twenty-one percent of state authorization professionals were housed within a Distance Education or Online Learning department. Another 19% were in Academic Affairs; 13% were in an Academic, Teaching, or Learning Department; and 9% within the Office of the Provost. The remainder were in departments ranging from Faculty Support to Disability Services (n=171). See Appendix 2 and 3 for a complete list of participants’ titles and the departments in which their positions were housed.

Over 80% of participants indicated that they have additional responsibilities outside of state authorization or general compliance (n=174) and over 60% said that there were no other team members assigned to assist with state authorization (n=173). Each participant was asked how much time they spend on state authorization, compliance, and state licensure work. Chart 1 shows that the average participant spends 10-25% of their time on state authorization work and 10% or less of their time on other compliance work (n=176). Most of the average participant’s time is spent on something else entirely, with no involvement in state licensure at all. Only one in three (33%) participants are also responsible for professional licensure compliance at their institution (n=167). See Appendix 4 for a more thorough breakdown of daily tasks.

Chart 1: Daily Tasks

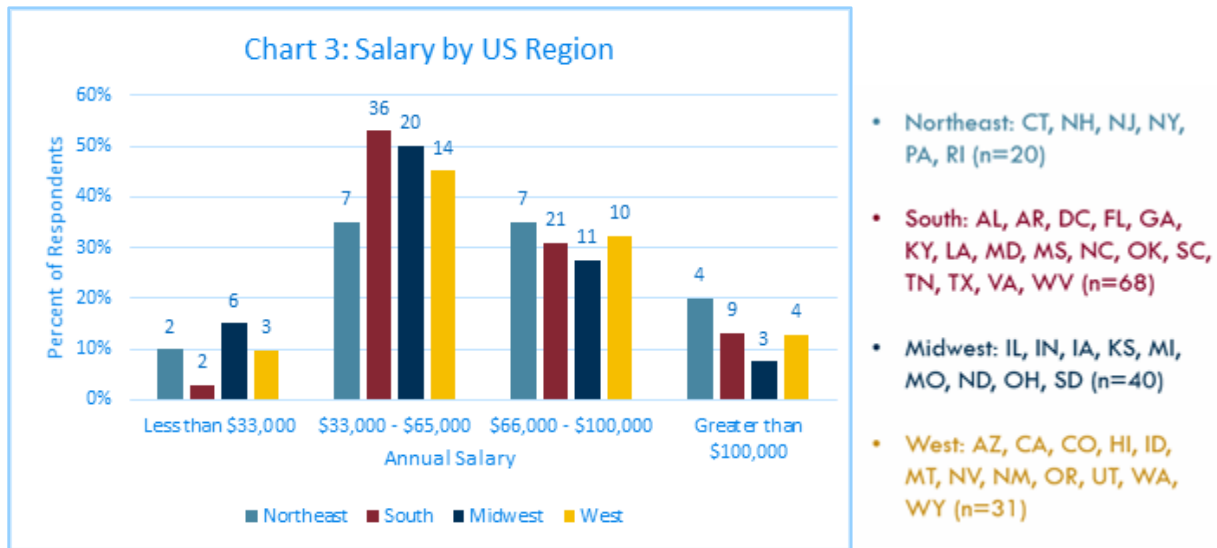


A primary goal of the survey was to ascertain salary levels of those individuals who work in state authorization. Of the 164 total participants who entered salary information, most earned over \$53,000 annually, as shown in Chart 2, with the most common bracket earning \$72,000 to \$100,000. Nearly 13% of participants earned over \$100,000 annually; however, over a quarter of these participants were executives and provosts at their institutions who spent less than 10% of their time on state authorization work. Some of the lower salaries can be attributed to the 12 participants (roughly 7%) who work part-time.

Chart 2: Compensation of State Authorization Professionals

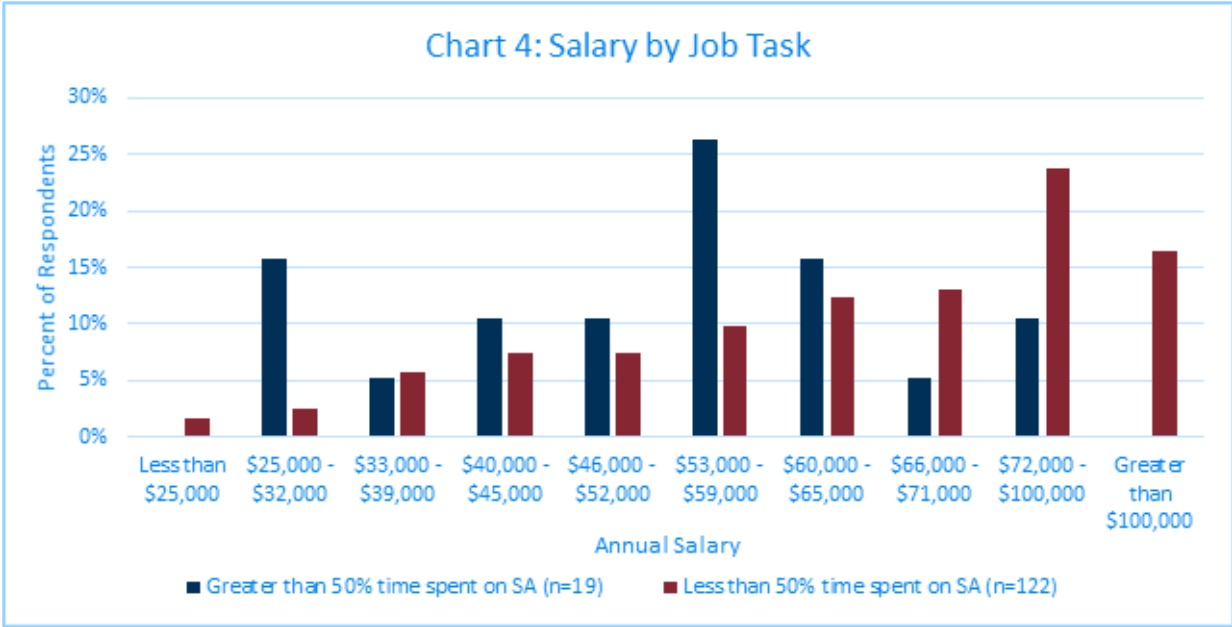


To better understand the current positions of state authorization professionals around the country, WGU completed an analysis of salary data by U.S. region. Chart 3 shows the salary brackets by the region in which the institution is located. The brackets have been consolidated so that each contains roughly the same range in salary. To view the original expanded salary brackets by region, see Appendix 5. The states are distributed according to the four National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) regional compacts: the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). About 43% of participants' institutions were in the South, 25% in the Midwest, 19% in the West, and 13% in the Northeast.

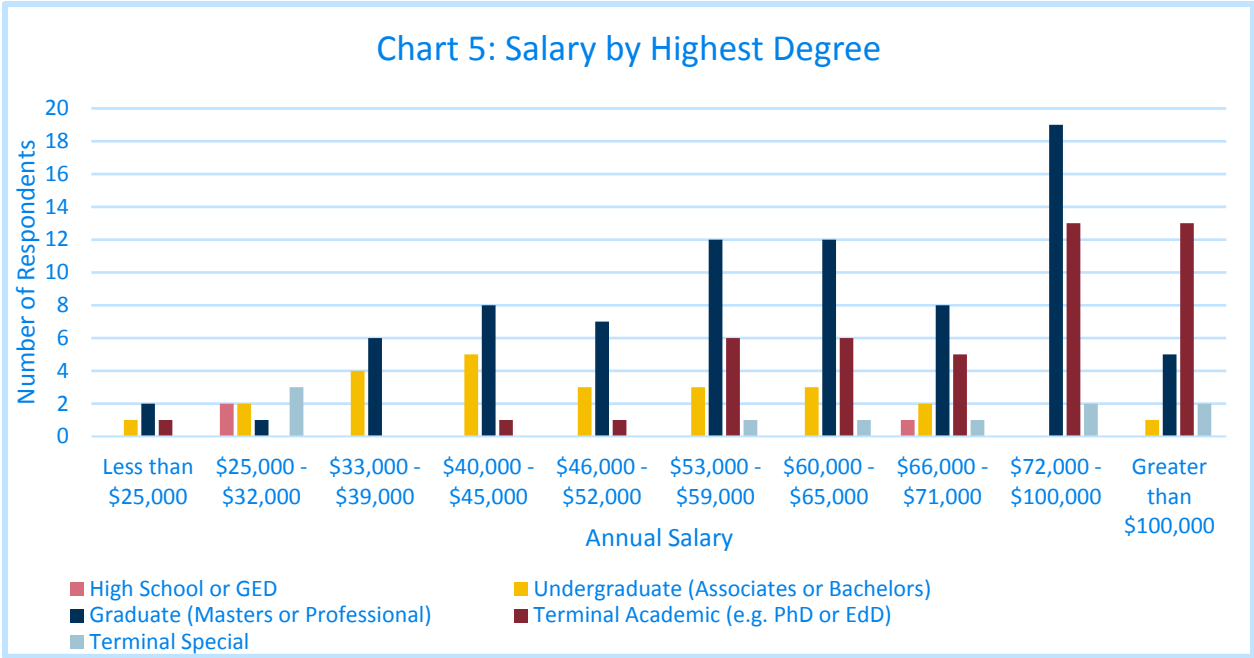


Fifty-three percent of participants in the South fall into the second bracket, earning between \$33,000 and \$65,000 a year, whereas only 35% of those in the Northeast make that amount. If an institution is in the South, Midwest, or West, salaries for state authorization professionals peak between \$33,000 and \$65,000. For those in the Northeast, the most common salary brackets were \$33,000 to \$65,000 and \$66,000 to \$100,000, with 7 participants in each.

Chart 4 shows participants split into two groups, those that spend greater than 50% of their time on state authorization (blue) and those that spend less (red). Those that spend more time on state authorization skew lower on the salary range; their peak salary bracket is \$53,000 to \$59,000. Those that spend less time on state authorization (and presumably more time on other tasks) skew to the right; their highest salary bracket is \$72,000 to \$100,000 a year.



As expected, participants with advanced degrees appear to earn higher salaries (see Chart 5, n=163). However, no correlation was found comparing salary by institution type (public, private, non-profit, etc.), or salary by positional history (time in higher education, time at current institution, or time in current role).



Limitations

After analyzing the results, several limitations of the survey were noted and would be taken into consideration if the survey were to be given again. These five limitations include the salary range options, survey distribution, effect of NC-SARA, key terms definitions, and institutional type options.

First, the salary range on the upper-end consisted of one option between \$72,000 and \$100,000. This range could have been broken into smaller amounts for a more accurate picture of average compensation. It was unexpected to have as many participants fall between those amounts (several provosts and executives participated in the survey). Second, distribution of the survey included members of SAN, WCET, and SREB. While these groups include many institutions, many other institutions were missed. Third, the survey did not include any questions concerning the effect of NC-SARA. Ideally, the survey would have inquired about the experiences of institutions before and after joining NC-SARA and how that has affected the amount of time spent on state authorization. Fourth, the survey did not define all key terms. A clearer definition of some terms could have been helpful to participants. For example, some institutions define “compliance work” to include maintaining the institutional catalog, whereas others house that task in a different department. Lastly, while the survey briefly asked about institutional information, it did not ask whether an institution was a 2-year or 4-year institution. This question would have assisted in estimating the extent of state authorization professionals amongst community colleges.

Conclusion

The survey was designed to gather information about the compensation and attributes of state authorization professionals across the country. While the initial emphasis centered on salary, the focus broadened to evaluating the scope of the position. A few commonalities from the results of the survey can be drawn as to what attributes a typical professional brings to the field. These include working for a small- to medium-sized public institution and possessing a graduate degree with several years of experience working within higher education. The individual is often the sole person assigned to state authorization but also completes other tasks for the institution, often outside of compliance.

The researchers were not expecting as much variation among salary, title, tasks, or department. The wide discrepancy makes it difficult to determine an average salary or qualifications of a state authorization professional. As distance education and authorization regulations grow, so will the need for state authorization professionals. With fewer than 10 years since the planned implementation of 34 CFR 600.9 (c), state authorization is still in its elementary phase. Research like this should be continued to help shape the future of state authorization as it grows and matures.

Appendix 1 – Survey

State Authorization Salary Survey

Thank you in advance for agreeing to take part in this important survey measuring the annual compensation professionals working within the field of State Authorization receive. This survey is being conducted jointly between Western Governors University and WCET-SAN. This survey should not take more than 8 minutes to complete. Be assured that all answers provided will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Results of this survey will be made available to the network at a future event or blog post.

In this survey, the term "state" means a particular jurisdiction within the United States. It can mean District (DC), Commonwealth (KY), Territory (PR), or State (UT).

In this survey, State Authorization is defined as *the legal and regulatory term for a college's compliance with individual statutes, regulations, and rules in each state in which it operates, has a physical presence, or engages in educational services, programs, or activities.*

Please answer the following questions regarding your institution

In which state/district/territory is your institution headquartered (i.e., where is your main campus)?

Institutional Structure:

- Public (1)
- Private/For-Profit (2)
- Private/Non-Profit (3)
- Tribal (4)
- Other: (5) _____

Current number of full-time institutional employees (faculty and staff combined):

- Less than 100 (1)
- 100 - 500 (2)
- 500 - 1,500 (3)
- 1,500 - 3,000 (4)
- 3,000 - 5,000 (5)
- 5,000 - 7,500 (6)
- 7,500 - 10,000 (7)
- Greater than 10,000 (8)

Current enrollment of institution:

- Less than 1,500 (1)
- 1,500 - 5,000 (2)
- 5,000 - 10,000 (3)
- 10,000 - 15,000 (4)
- 15,000 - 25,000 (5)
- 25,000 - 35,000 (6)
- 35,000 - 50,000 (7)
- Greater than 50,000 (8)

Please answer the following questions regarding your personal qualifications

Highest degree obtained:

- High School or GED (1)
- Undergraduate (Associates or Bachelors) (2)
- Graduate (Masters or Professional) (3)
- Terminal Academic (e.g. PhD or EdD) (4)
- Terminal Special (e.g. JD or MD) (5)

Area of degree concentration:

Any additional certifications/licenses:

Please answer the following questions about your position

Job Title:

Are you a full-time employee:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

In what department does your position reside?

What is your direct manager's title?

Time in current position - relative to State Authorization:

- Less than 6 months (1)
- 6 months to 2 years (2)
- 2 - 5 years (3)
- 5 or more years (4)

Total years of employment with your current institution:

- Less than 6 months (1)
- 6 months to 2 years (2)
- 2 - 5 years (3)
- 5 or more years (4)

Total years working in higher education:

- Less than 6 months (1)
- 6 months to 2 years (2)
- 2 - 5 years (3)
- 5 or more years (4)

Current state from where you conduct at least 50% of your business (*presuming that you work for an institution headquartered in a state separate and apart from your personal office/workspace*):

Please answer the following questions regarding your job responsibilities

Do you have additional responsibilities outside of State Authorization or general compliance:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If so, what percentage of your time is dedicated strictly to State Authorization:

- Less than 10 (1)
- 10 - 25 (2)
- 25- 50 (3)
- 50 - 75 (4)
- 75 - 96 (5)
- 96 - 100 (6)

What percentage of your remaining time is spent on other compliance projects, outside of State Authorization:

- Less than 10 (1)
- 10 - 25 (2)
- 25 - 50 (3)
- 50 - 75 (4)
- 75 - 96 (5)
- 96 - 100 (6)

Are other team members assigned to assist with State Authorization:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If so, what percentage of their time is dedicated strictly to State Authorization (*Please forward this salary survey to any other individuals who work with you in the process of obtaining/maintaining state authorization for your institution*):

- Less than 10 (1)
- 10 - 25 (2)
- 25 - 50 (3)
- 50 - 75 (4)
- 75 - 96 (5)
- 96 - 100 (6)

Are you responsible for professional licensure compliance at your institution:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

What type of professional licensure compliance are you responsible for (select all that apply):

- Teacher Education (1)
- Health Profession (e.g. Nursing, Informatics, Physical Therapist Assistant, Occupational Therapy Assistant, etc.) (2)
- Business (e.g. Accounting) (3)
- Legal (4)
- Other: (5) _____

What percentage of your time is devoted to professional licensure:

- Less than 10 (1)
- 10 - 25 (2)
- 25 - 50 (3)
- 50 - 75 (4)
- 75 - 96 (5)
- 96 - 100 (6)

Please answer the following questions about the compensation and benefits you receive

What was your base annual salary (\$US), as of July 1, 2016, from your primary source of employment?
Do not include overtime, bonuses, or commission.

- Less than \$25,000 (1)
 - \$25,000 - \$32,000 (2)
 - \$33,000 - \$39,000 (3)
 - \$40,000 - \$45,000 (4)
 - \$46,000 - \$52,000 (5)
 - \$53,000 - \$59,000 (6)
 - \$60,000 - \$65,000 (7)
 - \$66,000 - \$71,000 (8)
 - \$72,000 - \$100,000 (9)
 - Greater than \$100,000 (10)
 - Other: if comfortable, include exact amount, please: (11)
-

How much additional cash compensation (\$US) did you receive in the last year from your primary source of employment? Include bonuses and commissions, but do not include overtime:

- None (1)
- Less than \$499 (2)
- \$500 - \$1,499 (3)
- \$1,500 - \$2,999 (4)
- \$3,000 - \$4,999 (5)
- Greater than \$5,000 (6)

If applicable, how many hours of overtime did you receive in the last year:

Does your institution offer any amount of tuition reimbursement:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If so, how much:

Does your employer contribute to your retirement:

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If so, how much do they automatically contribute (in percentage):

Insert the number of Paid Time Off "PTO" days you receive per year (PTO refers to sick and vacation for the purpose of this survey):

The following supplemental questions relate to your opinions regarding your position

The task I most enjoy about my job is:

I wish I did not have the responsibility for/oversight of:

Any additional comments:

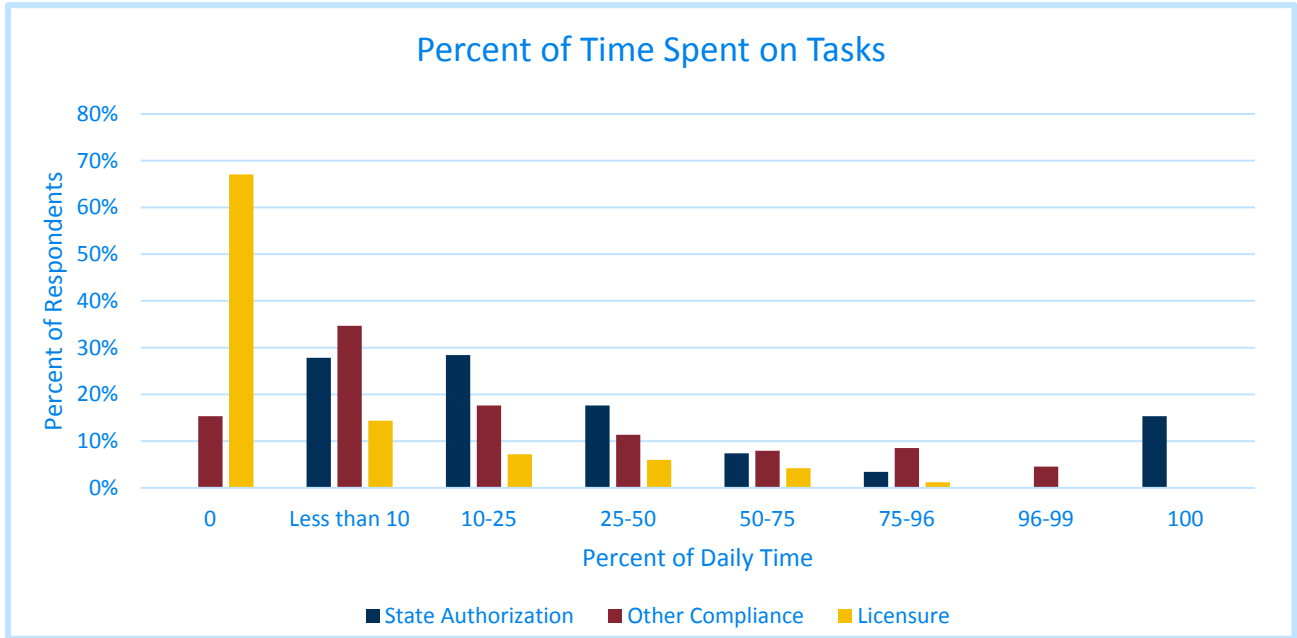
Appendix 2 - All Titles

Job Title	Count	Percentage
Director	55	32.2%
Coordinator	32	18.7%
Manager	12	7.0%
Assistant Director/Associate Director	11	6.4%
Specialist	11	6.4%
Assistant/Associate Provost	7	4.1%
Learning Development/Instructional Design	7	4.1%
Dean/Associate VP	7	4.1%
Administrative positions	6	3.5%
Executive Director	5	2.9%
Provost	4	2.3%
Associate Dean	4	2.3%
Faculty/teaching positions/research	3	1.8%
Admissions Counselor	1	0.6%
Assistant VP	1	0.6%
CEO	1	0.6%
Deputy Director	1	0.6%
Deputy General Counsel	1	0.6%
Technician	1	0.6%
No Title	1	0.6%
	171	100.0%

Appendix 3 - All Departments

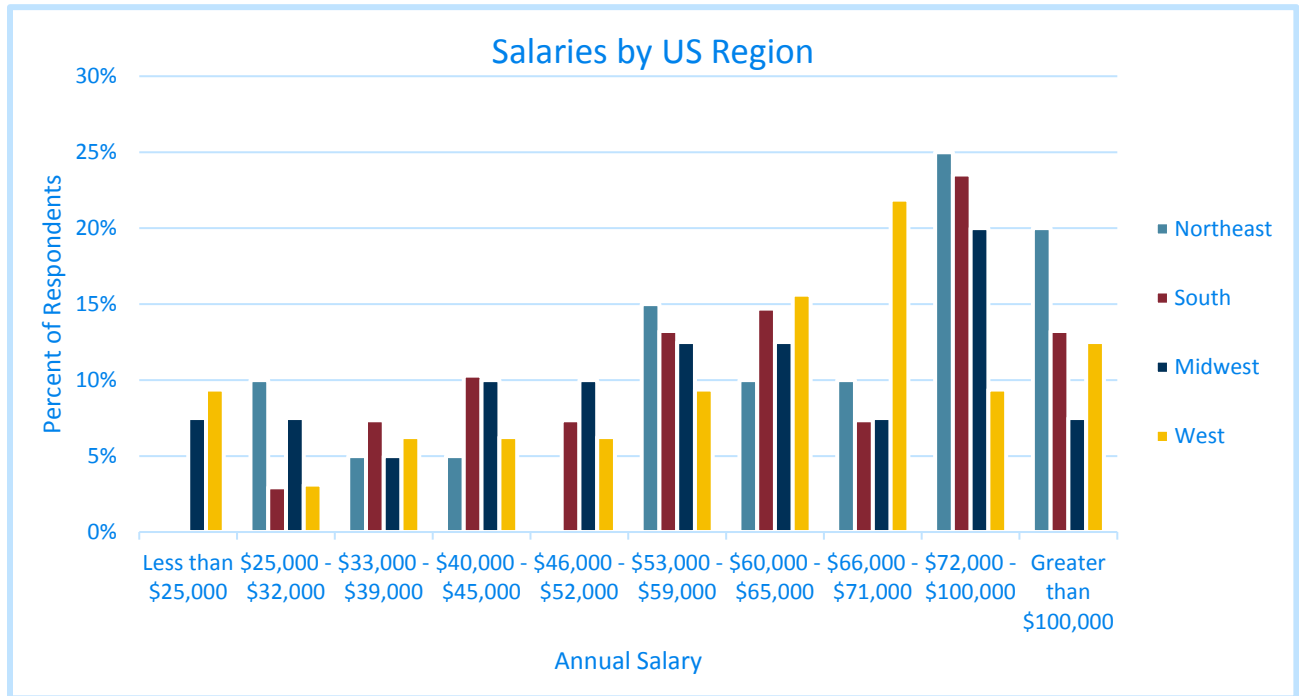
Department	Count	Percentage
Distance Ed/E-Learning/Online Ed	35	20.5%
Academic Affairs	32	18.7%
Academics/Teaching/Learning/Academic Resources	22	12.9%
Provost	15	8.8%
Faculty Support/Instructional Support	11	6.4%
Continuing Ed/Graduate Studies	10	5.8%
Accreditation/Institutional Effectiveness/Compliance/Licensing	9	5.3%
Legal	6	3.5%
IT	5	2.9%
Assessment Services	4	2.3%
Financial Aid	3	1.8%
Outreach	3	1.8%
IR	3	1.8%
President's Office	2	1.2%
Education	2	1.2%
CIO	1	0.6%
College of Computing	1	0.6%
Disability Services	1	0.6%
Distributed Learning	1	0.6%
Library	1	0.6%
Military Programs	1	0.6%
Operations	1	0.6%
Registrar	1	0.6%
School of Business	1	0.6%
Total	171	100.0%

Appendix 4 - Daily Tasks



This graph illustrates the percent of daily time participants spent on state authorization, licensure, or other compliance tasks. The percent of time spent on state authorization varied greatly. Fifty-six percent of participants spent less than a quarter of their time on state authorization while another 15% spent all their time focused strictly on state authorization. Most participants did not spend a great amount of time on other compliance work; almost 80% spent less than half of their time on that task. Sixty-seven percent of participants did not work with professional licensure at all.

Appendix 5 - Salary by U.S. Region Expanded



This graph shows the original expanded view of salary brackets by U.S. region. The most common salary bracket for those in all regions except the West was \$72,000-\$100,000. The most common salary bracket for participants in the West was between \$66,000 and \$71,000.