

# A Qualitative Evaluation of Dental Faculty Members’ Motivations for and Experiences with Teaching

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## BACKGROUND

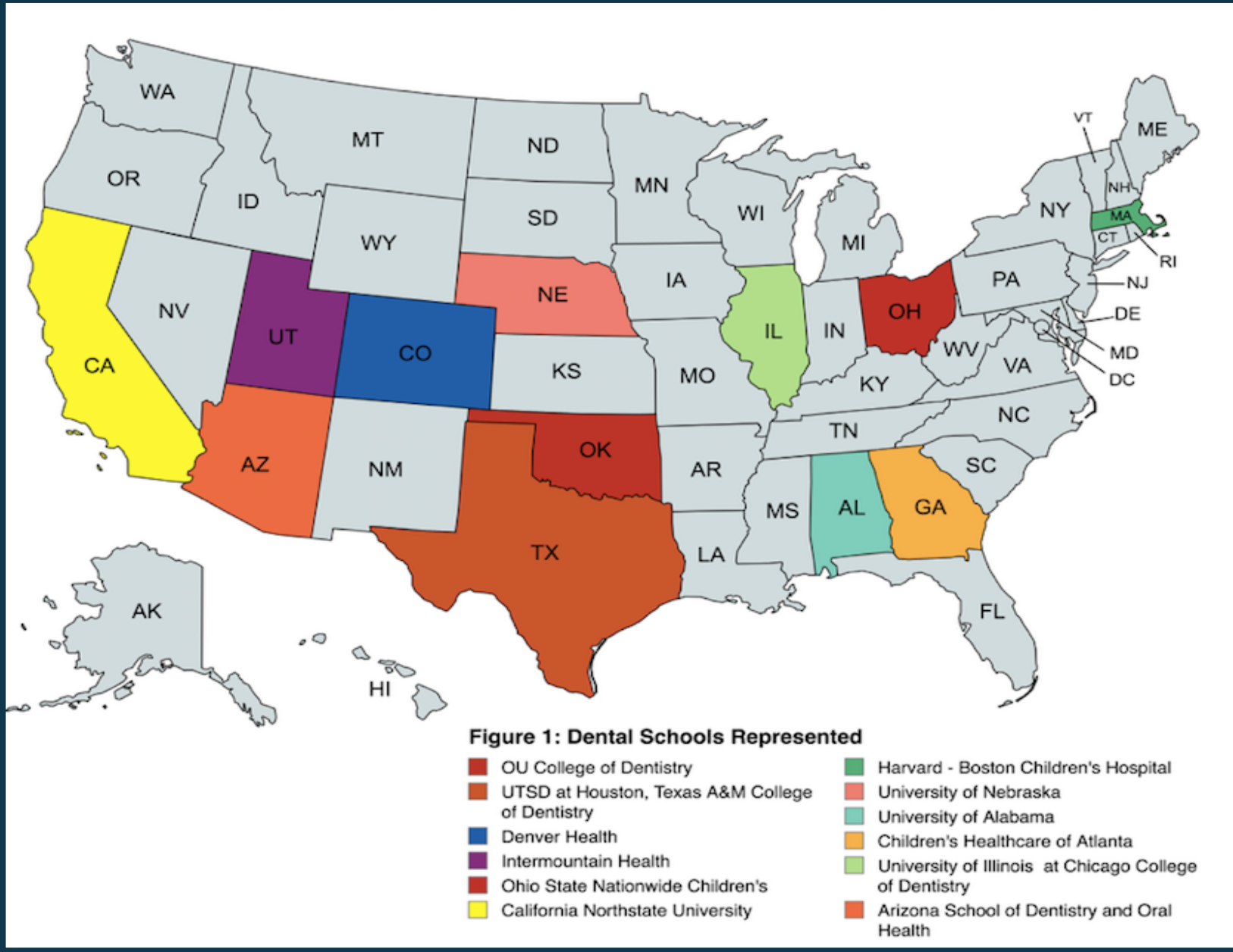
The foundation and future of dentistry relies heavily on the inclination and motivation of dentists to teach. Dentists must be willing to contribute their time and expertise to educate, instruct, and guide future dentists for the profession to grow and thrive. In 2017, The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) annual survey of graduating dental students showed that 50% of students expressed interest in teaching at some point during their dental career, but only 0.4% intended to pursue involvement in academia immediately after graduation<sup>1</sup>. While each individual has diverse and unique motivations for beginning a career in dental academia, analyzing the trends and themes for these motivations can provide valuable insight and improve recruitment and retention of dental faculty.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Explore dental faculty members’ exposure to academia prior to starting their professional career.
2. Understand motivations behind the decision of dental faculty members to pursue a career in academia.
3. Identify positives and drawbacks of a career in academia based on opinions of dental faculty members.
4. Identify potential experiences that could influence students toward involvement in dental academia during his or her career.

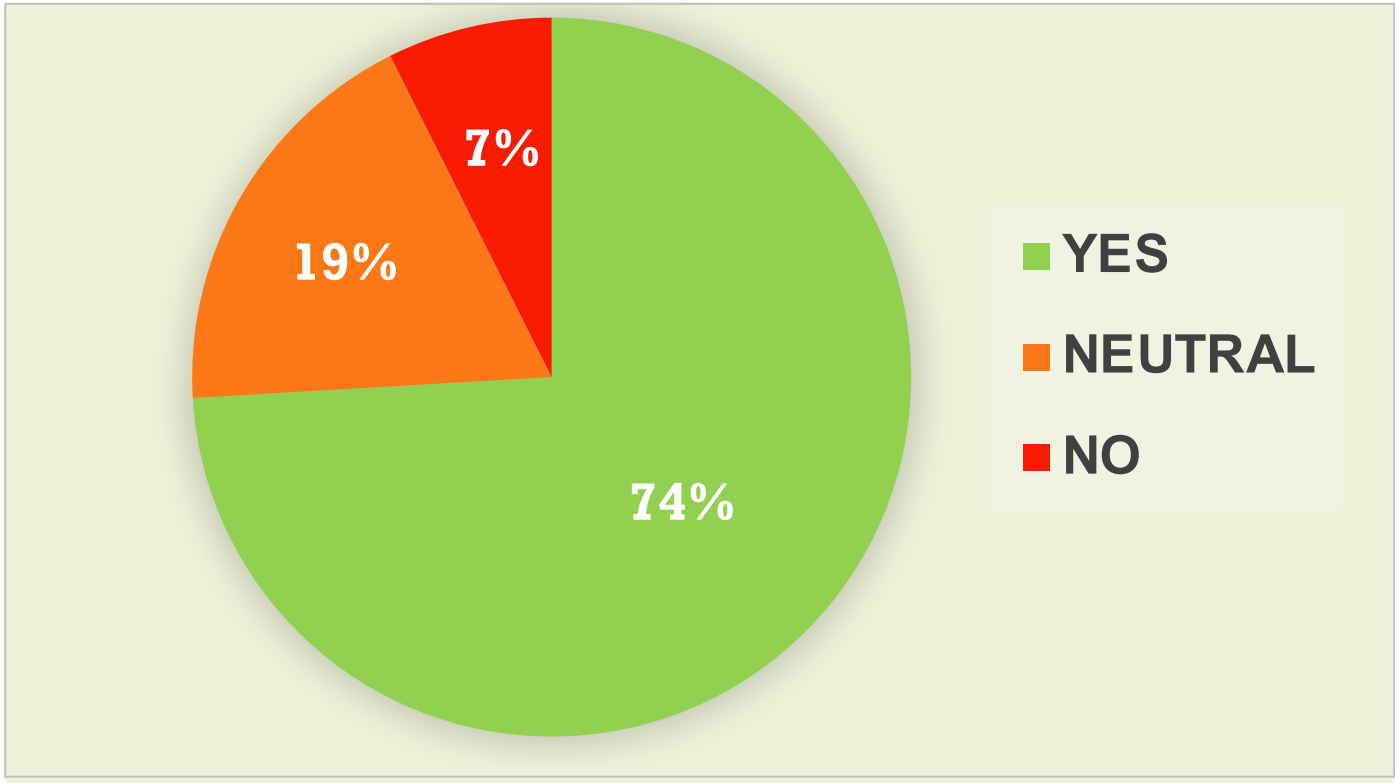
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participation in this study included 30 dental faculty members representing 13 dental schools and residency programs (Figure 1) across the United States. Each participant was asked a series of seven standardized questions. Two interviews were conducted in person, one interview was completed over the phone, and 27 interviews were conducted over the platform of Zoom. Participants were first recruited by an announcement at the pediatric dental residency program directors’ meeting, with a follow-up email sent later. Following this, participants were recruited by word of mouth and recommendations from other current faculty members. All participants were hired within the last five years. All interviews were recorded, and qualitative data was grouped by themes based on each participant’s answers.

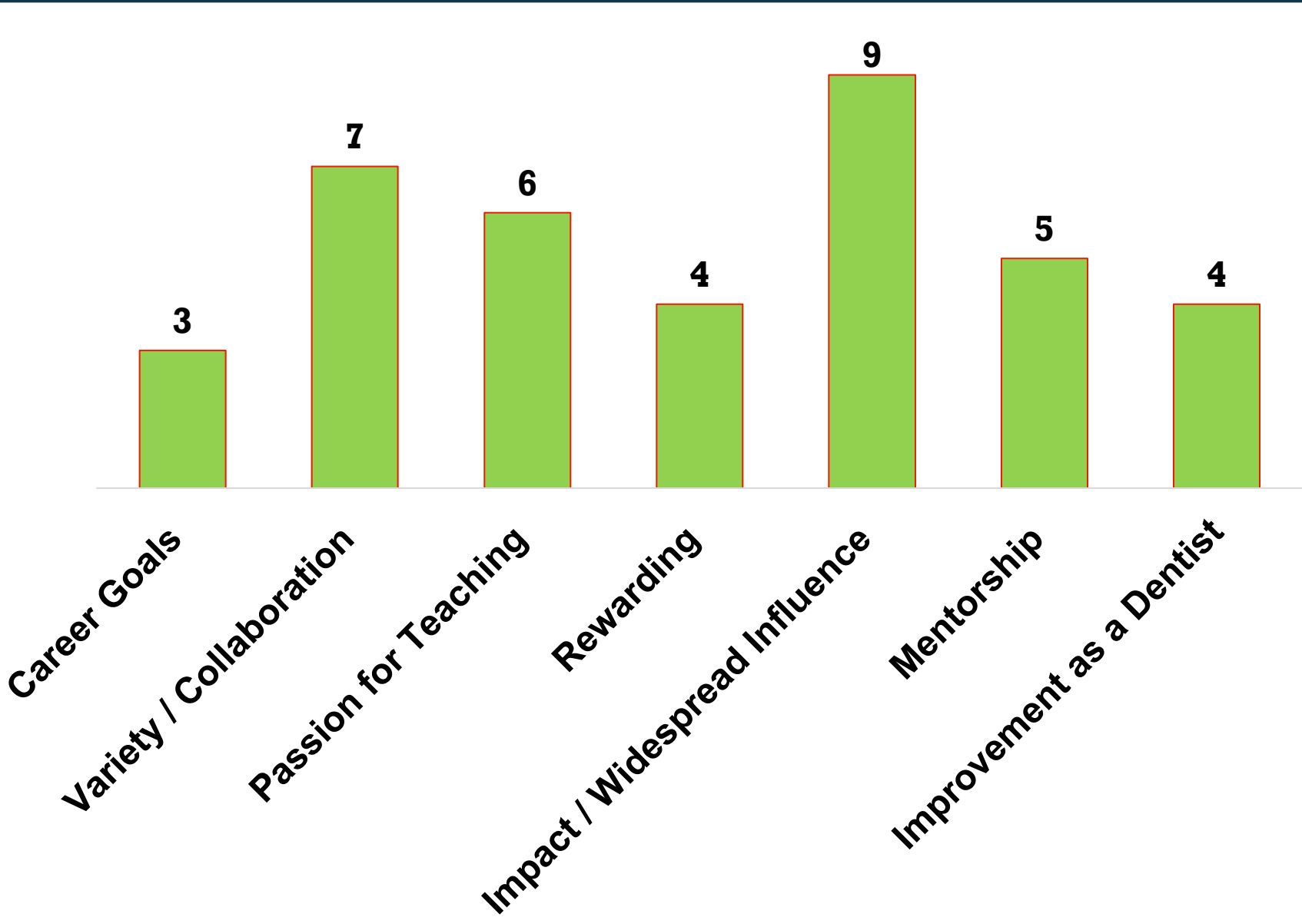


## RESULTS

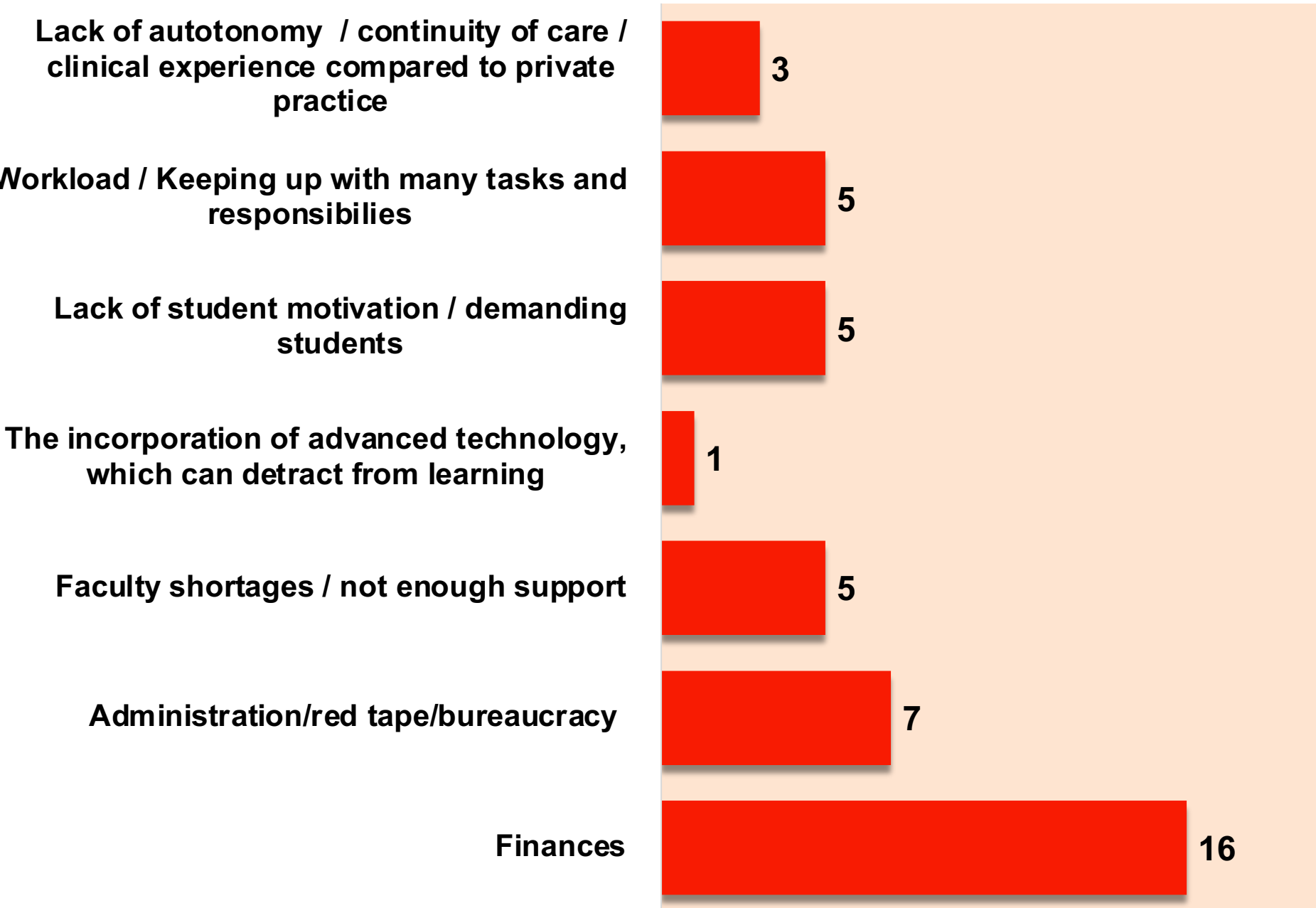
- 73% full-time faculty
- Two faculty completed a teaching certificate or masters in education
- All hired from 2018 to 2023
- Approximately 1/3 are loan repayment recipients
- Age breakdown: 25 to 35 years old (56%), 36 to 45 years old (17%), 46 to 55 years old (17%), and 56-75 (10%)
- Specialty breakdown: 19 pediatric dentists, 6 general dentists, 3 endodontists, and 2 periodontists.
- See following graphics for additional results



“Did you participate in didactic or clinical teaching of pre-doctorate students during dental school or residency and did that influence your decision to pursue teaching?” Of the 27 faculty members who confirmed they had early experience teaching, 74% said that it had a substantial or moderate influence on their decision to pursue a career in teaching.



“What influenced your decision to pursue teaching the most?” There were multiple factors that influenced the decision to pursue a career in teaching. The most frequent answer involved the widespread impact one can have by influencing students who then go and practice dentistry across the world.



“What is the greatest drawback to teaching?” Many described multiple drawbacks. The most frequent answer involved financial compensation, followed by concerns with administrative difficulties / “red tape” / bureaucracy.

“What advice would you give to a new dental school / residency graduate who wants to pursue a teaching position?” Below are quotes, and the highlighted words represent sentiments shared by many faculty members.

- "I would encourage someone to do it to keep [their] **skills sharp**... you **don't have to wait** till you're in your 60's to give back"
- "**Get experience** in private practice first"
- "Do a little bit of **both private practice and academia** at first rather than just full academia"
- "**Go for it!** It's very rewarding"
- "**Just do it!** There's such a need and [your] passion will outweigh any little knowledge gaps you might have"
- "Find really good **mentors**...one of the biggest perks of an academic environment is having people around who can help you in clinic or answer questions"
- “There are a lot of options with an academic career. I love the **flexibility** that I have...there are a lot of **different avenues** you can take: academic focused, teach more heavily, research focused...it gives you a lot of different pediatric dentistry careers to consider”

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

When each faculty member was asked why they pursued a career in academia the responses were varied and diverse, but overwhelmingly positive. Among the most common reasons were flexibility, freedom, proximity to hospital dentistry, schedule variety, personal growth, mentorship, desire to give back, escaping the stress of private practice, improving dental skills, passion for educating the next generation of dentists, and the desire to make a far-reaching impact. **These positive aspects of teaching need to be made known and spoken of more frequently to encourage dentists across the country to consider a teaching position.**

In addition, early exposure to teaching through specific programs or fellowships during dental school and residency can give students the opportunity to begin contemplating whether teaching might be something they would excel in.

## REFERENCES

1. Wanchek T, Cook B, Valachovic R. Annual ADEA Survey of Dental School Seniors: 2017 Graduating Class. *Journal of Dental Education*. 2018;82(5):524-539.Doi:<https://doi.org/10.21815/jde.018.059>
2. [www.mapchart.net](http://www.mapchart.net) was used to create figure 1