



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

TO: Rodney D. Bennett, President

FROM: Steven R. Moser, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

DATE: August 16, 2018

SUBJECT: Proposal for Maximizing Operational Efficiency in Academic Processes

As reported and verified by Academic Reorganization Implementation Committee (ARIC) chair, Jeffrey Wiggins, this initiative has been revised through broad engagement, communication, and feedback from stakeholders, administrators and governing bodies since your initial approval of the proposal framework in February of 2018. ASSC and ARIC have collated, discussed, reviewed and modified the document to achieve compromise between stakeholder responses while preserving the aspirational merits of the original proposal.

The overarching goal of this proposal is to eliminate the “Southern Miss Shuffle” culture. The “Southern Miss Shuffle” occurs when students, faculty or staff are shuffled around to various campus offices, often unnecessarily, to resolve an issue instead of having someone proactively assist them.

As Provost, I have engaged Deans and Academic Leaders in a final review process and adjustments were made to the proposal based on that feedback and my input. The document is ready for your review.

I recommend that the Proposal for Maximizing Operational Efficiency in Academic Processes be approved.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steven R. Moser", is written over a horizontal line.

Steven R. Moser, Provost
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Approval:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rodney D. Bennett", is written over a horizontal line.

Rodney D. Bennett, President
The University of Southern Mississippi

8/20/18
Date

Maximizing Operational Efficiency in Academic Processes

INITIATIVE #10

Academic Reorganization Staff Structure Committee

June 28, 2018

Academic Staff Structure Committee

Chair – Kelly James-Penot

Anna Barrett, Darcie Conrad, Elizabeth Cranford, Sally Downey, Darcie Graham, Heather Miller, Quentisha Jones, April Jordan, Sharon King, Gina McCarty, Martha Resavy, Michelle Shows, David Sliman, Carlos Sterling, Debbie Stoulig, Tameka Sullivan, Danielle Sypher-Haley, Terry Whittington

Aspirational Aims

This initiative makes recommendations to maximize the operational efficiency of the University. Developing more efficient processes will lead to faster results, improved academic service, and cost savings for the institution. One overarching goal of this proposal is to recommend changes in processes that could eliminate the “Southern Miss Shuffle” culture, which occurs when students (or even faculty or staff) are shuffled around various campus offices, often unnecessarily, to resolve an issue instead of having someone proactively assist them.

The development of this initiative involved a thorough evaluation of the inventory of work conducted by academic staff. Many current processes and procedures are not effective for staff, faculty, administration, or affected students. The inefficiency of current processes has led to many of the suggestions in this proposal. Even minor improvements in current academic processes could reduce wasted effort, time, and money.

Statement of Objectives

Improvements are needed in communication, collaboration, and training in academic processes. This initiative identifies and recommends processes that will maximize operational efficiency and develop best practices that can be used by all academic staff.

Identifying best practices through information-sharing will foster collaboration among academic offices. Collaboration should occur between schools within a college and also between academic units and academic support offices (e.g., business office, registrar, HR, payroll, graduate school, ORA). Efficiency in processes will create cohesiveness throughout the University and help eliminate the “Southern Miss Shuffle” culture.

The committee recommends the following best practices to increase efficiency:

- **Cross-training.** Increase breadth of knowledge among multiple staff within Colleges/Schools. Staff within units should be cross-trained, so that business processes are uninterrupted and job duties are covered when staff members are out of the office or unavailable. This will create efficiency and encourage teamwork in academic units. The “Academic School Staff Operations Manual” could serve as a reference to assist with staff cross-training. Cross-training should allow issues to be resolved efficiently, improve customer service, and build teamwork. Proximity issues must also be addressed when academic units are located in more than one area (e.g., different buildings on one campus or different campuses) and staff must be present at each location.

Newly hired staff members must be adequately trained to perform regular job duties, in addition to cross-training duties. The “Academic School Staff Operations Manual” can be a vital resource to assist with this training. Training should include regular university academic and business processes, as well as specialized functions of the academic unit.

- **Electronic Processes.** Develop electronic and/or online procedures and protocols for business and academic processes. Electronic processes will increase productivity with improved tracking mechanisms, faster processing times, and a reduction in costs and errors.

- The committee investigated the purchase of a university site license for Adobe Acrobat to make it universally available for faculty and staff to implement electronic paperwork processing. The cost has been investigated for a university site license. The committee has consulted with the Procurement Office to investigate purchases and total spending on Adobe software in recent years. While we have no information available from purchase orders, in the past six months there were approximately 80 transactions on procurement cards for Adobe. Another query found that \$30,958 was spent university-wide on Adobe licenses between August 28, 2014 and May 8, 2018. The ASSC has identified that a university Adobe license is cost prohibited and recommends the university identify a more affordable software. The university should also provide training for this new software system.
- Require electronic signatures on all paperwork to increase efficiency and reduce paper use and storage.
- For paperwork that requires notarization, electronic notarization options were investigated by the committee. While the State of Mississippi does allow notaries to sign electronically, the signer must be physically present at the time the notary notarizes the paperwork. This information can be found in the Mississippi Code of 1972, Title 75, Chapter 12, Uniform Electronic Transactions Act in section 75-12-21 at the following link: <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ch12.pdf>.
- The committee recommends the development of a universal website that contains all university forms for faculty, staff, and students. Individual offices that “own” the document should be responsible for ensuring the most up-to-date version is available. See ARIC recommendation #13 – Academic School Staff Operations Manual. In the implementation phase of this initiative, the ASSC committee approached many of the non-academic units to gauge their willingness to collaborate with the creation and maintenance of this manual. All units approached expressed their willingness to collaborate on this venture.
- In the implementation phase, the ASSC heard from many of the non-academic units that in order to implement electronic process, to University’s ability to sign documents electronically needs to be investigated. Moving existing processes to a workflow process in PeopleSoft may be one way to address this as signature approvals could be built in.
- In the proposal phase, the committee recommended that the following processes and paperwork should be investigated and made electronic (i.e., require electronic signatures and electronic processing), if possible. The committee recommends a focus group be established in Fall 2018 to address the potential for making the following processes electronic, to include “owners” of the processes, end users, and iTech (if appropriate).
 - The committee recommends all hiring paperwork (e.g., Permission to Hire, Background Check, HR tax packet, Offer Letters) be made electronic. University Human Resources is in the process of examining if we have the capability in Peoplesoft and SOAR for electronic PAFs. In the event that we do not, Workflow would be the next option to explore. With the move to Cornerstone, offer letters can now be electronic. In phase II of Cornerstone, the committee recommends that electronic processes for background checks and HR tax packets become a part of the onboarding process.

- Payroll paperwork (e.g., Personnel Action Form (PAF), Personnel Data Sheet (PDS), timesheets). Timesheets have been made electronic for hourly employees. The final phase of this project will be implemented soon.
- Graduate Assistantship (GA) paperwork (e.g., PAF, Memorandum of Assistantship Award (MAA), GA Funding Change form, Tuition Waiver form, Scholarship Authorization form). Of note, the Graduate School has been interested in the hiring paperwork for GAs being completely electronic but is in a holding pattern until the workflow process can be worked out. The Registrar's office will need to be included in this as grade changes and add/drops will need to be a step in the process. Involvement from HR will be necessary as the hiring process for GAs runs through HR.
- Student Degree Progress paperwork (e.g., graduation, declaring/changing majors/minors, graduate school forms). Degree progress paperwork could be combined into one live document with a universal "start here" page that populates consistent information provided on all the forms (e.g., name, degree plan, major, etc.). Of note, in the implementation phase the ASSC learned that internal documents could move to electronic documents. Those related to disciplinary communications would still require original signatures. Change of schedule forms can be submitted electronically. In current practice, the College of Health submits these forms to the registrar listserv. If the University as a whole moves to this method of communication, the registrar cautions against hard copies of these documents being submitted as well since it causes duplication of effort and confusion.
- The committee recommends that the University invest in the "workflow" component of Digital Measures to address the need for electronic processes of Faculty Dossiers (e.g., annual performance evaluations, credentialing, CVs, external funding, proposed goals, publications, recommendation letters, service, student evaluations, syllabi) and Faculty Credentialing (e.g., Faculty Qualifications form, transcripts, CVs).
- The committee had made the recommendation that Travel paperwork (e.g., Permission to Travel (PTT) form, Travel Voucher (TV) form, receipts) be made electronic. The committee has now learned that this is not possible due to State travel rules and regulations set by the Department of Finance and Administration Office of Purchasing, Travel and Fleet Management which require ink and original receipts. While paperwork can be submitted electronically, original documents must be in hand prior to the processing of any payments. Further staffing would be required in the Travel Office to handle the electronic component.
- Procurement & Contracts Services paperwork (e.g., Personnel Services Agreement (PSA), Sole Source Justification, Vendor Registration form, W-9, Remittance Voucher, Employee Reimbursement Voucher, Business Related Expense form). Workflow for procurement card processes has been implemented. Other business processes are being evaluated and will be addressed in the future.
- Other paperwork (e.g., Interdepartmental Invoice (II)). A pilot program was underway in the spring of 2018. The program has been suspended. The

ASSC has learned that this program did not improve efficiency and recommends that an alternative method be explored.

- **Software Systems.** During the implementation phase, the committee developed a university-wide inventory of currently available software systems. The committee recommends a focus group be established in the Fall of 2018 to address the usefulness of the software currently used by the University community and identify software that duplicates effort. This will enable the University to redirect fiscal resources to software licenses that will better increase efficiency across the campuses.
 - Increase awareness of, use of, and training for the following software systems:
 - Peoplesoft
 - ImageNow
 - CashNet
 - Drupal Content Management System
 - Microsoft Office 365
 - Adobe Acrobat (see electronic processes section for related information)
 - Investigate Software as a Service (SaaS) to create internal approval processes (e.g., Office of Research Administration now uses Cayuse 424, which has replaced the use of the Internal Approval Form [IAF])
 - Consider discontinuation of the following software systems:
 - Group Management Application software (used to communicate with students via text message). Many programs are currently available and could be consolidated to one platform.

- **Communication Plan (see also reference Initiative #12 – Communication Plan for Implementation).** Execute a communication plan to avoid confusion during the transition to reorganization. Each academic unit should develop organizational charts to help students identify appropriate faculty and/or staff to contact regarding academic issues and/or questions. Staff spheres of specialization must be communicated to faculty, so they know which staff to contact for specific tasks. Communication must take stakeholders into account to ensure all affected parties are aware of relevant changes and to ensure consistent information sharing. All listservs should be maintained and routinely updated.

In addition, annual university-wide and semiannual college-wide convocations for staff should be implemented. Convocations will encourage ownership, cohesiveness, awareness, and understanding of university and college missions. Colleges should also hold monthly meetings to keep staff informed, increase collaboration, and build teamwork. Non-academic units like the Controller's Office and the Travel Office agree that this would be an ideal opportunity to provide updates to the academic staff on any changes to processes or procedures. A detailed communication plan is provided in initiative #12 "Communication Plan for Implementation." Therefore, this initiative only aims to highlight the critical need for effective communication and will defer to the other proposal for more specific recommendations.

Implementation Strategy

Focus groups will be necessary to ensure successful implementation of the recommendations in this initiative. Focus groups can thoroughly evaluate best practices and make recommendations on process changes. Irrespective of the recommendations in this initiative, focus groups should be developed to continuously review current policies and processes. The consistent use of focus groups to evaluate and monitor processes can provide continuous improvement opportunities in academic support services. Focus groups could increase consistency, foster innovation, and reduce duplication of effort.

We recommend a policy change for the decision-making process. End users must be involved throughout the evaluation period to help prevent unanticipated, negative consequences when new policies are enacted. Involving end users in the decision-making process is an efficient use of resources, as end users are often the most knowledgeable about how a change in process might affect stakeholders. In addition, providing adequate training opportunities for policy or procedure changes is critically important.

Based on the best practices identified in this initiative, we recommend the development of the following three focus groups: Cross-training, Electronic Processes, and Software Systems. All focus groups should have nominations during the early Fall 2018 semester, with full membership identified by midterm. Ideally, focus groups should contain a minimum of 10 members. Members of focus groups should be predominantly the staff that perform the processes under evaluation, but the groups should also include representation from administration, faculty, and students (if applicable). Membership should be diverse and represent all University constituents. Advisory groups, or stakeholders that inform processes and procedures, may also be a useful resource and help ensure success.

The Cross-training focus group should be involved with creation of the “Academic School Staff Operations Manual”. Staff Council has voted to assume responsibility to monitor the “Operations Manual” for accuracy in content and functioning of links once the manual is complete. When the manual is ready for monitoring, Staff Council will have further discussion and vote upon which standing committee will assume these responsibilities. Additionally the committee has identified that many non-academic units are interested in using the monthly college staff meetings as a venue to reach multiple staff members to provide updates on processes and best practices. Of note, the Registrar’s Office would be interested in having members of the academic units join their meetings to provide updates on the challenges faced by schools in executing the processes as a method of improving efficiency. Many non-academic offices that the ASSC reached out to shared that their greatest challenge is ensuring content is available, and being followed by the campus. The committee recommends that the cross-training focus group explore methods of training for both new and current processes. The ASSC was informed by several members of the campus that university personnel that execute their duties the most efficiently are individuals who have held positions in multiple areas of the campus. The nature of their previous employment provided them with broad understanding of the workflow involved with university processes. The committee recommends that the cross-training focus group additionally focus on methods to help all members of the campus understand the steps involved in the processes.

The Electronic Processes focus group must include constituents from the office where the paperwork originated. For example, Human Resources must play a dominant role in developing processes related to hiring and payroll paperwork. In addition, the inclusion of an undergraduate and graduate student representative would be important for the processes focused on student paperwork. Because of the breadth of suggestions provided in this proposal, this focus group may need to be divided into several subgroups. Priority should be given to processes that are the most frequently used (e.g. hiring, payroll, GA, and travel paperwork). Prior to the development of the Electronic Processes focus group, there must be support from University administration to develop electronic paperwork processes and workflow. Once new processes are established, this focus group should coordinate with the cross-training focus group to keep the “Academic School Staff Operations Manual” up-to-date.

The Software Systems focus group should be charged with increasing awareness and use of beneficial software systems. The committee recommends that *iTech*, in cooperation with the Procurement Office, can help ensure software systems are not duplicated across the University and are appropriate for the intended use. The focus group should ensure routine training options are made available. Additional representatives from *iTech* administration should be included as members of this committee to provide vital technical expertise. They can also help ensure software systems are not duplicated across the University and are appropriate for the intended use. In 2016-2017, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution supporting an inventory and license management program across campus, particularly so that faculty and staff can see all the software available on campus and what needs exist (see full resolution in Appendix A).

Financial impacts are expected to be minimal in the short- and long-term. Cross-training is expected to bear no expense other than the investment of staff time. Electronic processes could have financial impacts. However, the long-term software investment is expected to be offset by increased staff productivity and reduction of costs associated with hard-copy paperwork. Initially there will be limited minimal financial impact while existing software is being reviewed. Long-term impacts are likely to be cost savings, as unused or duplicated software systems are removed and alternative options are considered.

Evaluation Strategy

Focus groups must be established to develop solutions and make recommendations for implementation. Once implementation is in effect, the focus groups should become standing committees to continually evaluate progress. Group members should rotate every fiscal year, with staggered two-year terms. Membership should continue to be diverse and represent all university constituents. Standing committees should review processes annually or semiannually and continue to develop and make recommendations to increase efficiency.

To evaluate the recommendations of this proposal, staff surveys should be conducted during the fall and spring semesters. Surveys can be used to evaluate current academic processes and implemented changes. Surveys should encourage suggestions to further refine and improve processes. The surveys can be developed, distributed, and evaluated by each focus group/standing committee. Continuous evaluation of academic processes could foster innovation, promote engagement, and continually improve the efficiency of the university.

Depending on the survey focus, it may be useful to also survey faculty, administration, and students. Broad feedback can be gained by including all user groups affected by changes in processes. Constructive criticism should be encouraged to promote innovation of processes and fully capture the perspective of all members of the university.

Appendix A

FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTION #3, 2016 -2017

Authored by: David Holt, President

Co-authored by: University Communications and Academics Committees

Introduced by: **Faculty Senate Committee: Communication**

A FACULTY SENATE resolution in support of creating a research software inventory and license maintenance program.

WHEREAS, the university constantly strives for cost effective operations; and,

WHEREAS, faculty are often in need of software for research that is both costly to license and cumbersome to maintain the licenses; and,

WHEREAS, faculty often must fund these software licenses through funds from department, college, or grants; and,

WHEREAS, faculty currently have little means to know if certain software already exists on campus and if there is license capacity among current licenses; and,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, FACULTY SENATE requests a joint effort between the Vice President of Research and Chief Information Officer to petition the university to create an inventory for both current research software licenses with points of contact and faculty research software needs; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, FACULTY SENATE requests that a low/no cost easily accessible system be established to maintain and coordinate licenses as needed for the university as a whole to organize cost sharing measures to fund needed licenses in the future; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED THAT, copies of this resolution shall be sent to the Faculty Senate, Vice President of Research, Chief Information Officer, Provost, and the President.