

Summary of Faculty Senate's Work on Travel Encumbrance and Reimbursement

The Personnel Policies Committee is charged with investigating the practices and processes of encumbrance and reimbursement of funding for faculty travel ([Personnel Policies Report](#) 9-17-2014, Charge #7). The goal is to clarify what the current processes are and to see what can be done to streamline the processes and address perceived problems in order to facilitate the reimbursement for faculty travel.

The Personnel Policies Committee suggests that the Budget Committee might be a more appropriate committee to work on these issues. The Budget Committee defers and it is decided that the Personnel Policies Committee should continue working on the task ([Budget Committee Report](#) 9-17-2014).

At the Faculty Senate meeting of 10-8-14, Senator Poovey (Chair of the Personnel Policies Committee) asks that senators email him with any questions, concerns or suggestions about funding for faculty travel. He receives emails from two senators which include four questions/concerns. These are then forwarded to Senator Fridley who volunteered to pursue these questions/concerns with the Office of Finance. Senator Emge also emailed (10-9-2014) a set of questions that he intended to circulate to his department (Music). He later noted at a Faculty Senate meeting that he had received no responses to the email.

On 10-14-2014, Dr. Melancon, Chair of the Academic Council (AC), sent two requests, recommended by the AC, to President Burrage regarding travel issues: (1) That the required presidential signature and the "thirty-day in advance" requirement be waived for out-of-state faculty travel encumbrance, and (2) That Southeastern adopt the use of a travel card. Faculty Senators Moretti and Fridley learned of this action at an AAUP meeting on 10-20-2014 on which date—at Fridley's request--Dr. Melancon emailed them the Memos.

On 10-19-2014, Senator Fridley emailed an attached letter to Kay Lynn Roberts of the Office of Finance. The letter addressed three topics: (1) Specific questions from Senator Fridley concerning his recent travel funding application. He was using this as a "test case" of sorts to gain more insight into how the process worked. (2) Included the questions/concerns that had been forwarded from senators regarding the travel process, and (3) Questions about how the travel funding process might be improved. (Letter is attached, Document 1)

On 10-20-2014, Senator Fridley followed the letter with a phone conversation with Ms. Roberts. Several questions regarding Fridley's travel request were answered by reference to "state requirements." Fridley asked where he could find the state regulations on travel funding. Roberts informed him that it was the "300 Document,"* which she then emailed to Fridley as an attachment. Fridley then scheduled a meeting with Roberts on 11-3-2014. Fridley shared these developments with the FS on [11-22-2014](#). Two senators requested the "300 Document" and Fridley emailed it to them.

Fridley studied the "300 Document" in preparation for the meeting. His fears that it was a 300-page document were unfounded, but a reading of the relevant 53 pages of the document was informative and answered several of the questions he had about his travel claim.

Fridley and Roberts met on 10-23-2014. The meeting went well and served to clear up several issues. Some of the major points:

- The thirty-days in advance and presidential signature requirements are not State requirements, but are institutional requirements that were instituted under the presidency of Glenn Johnson.
- Approved and encumbered airfare booked through the university's contracted agent All Seasons Travel can be paid for with the Requisition Number on the approved Out of State Travel Encumbrance form and involves no out-of-pocket expense from the faculty member.
- The Office of Finance has published a thorough and detailed [webpage](#) with links, documents, instructions, and answers to frequently asked questions about faculty travel reimbursement.
- Most questions about faculty travel funding can be answered by reference to the webpage, and the Office of Finance is happy to answer any questions. Roberts also encourages faculty to develop a good working relationship with departmental secretaries to facilitate travel funding claims.

The insights and information from this meeting were a topic of conversation at the Executive Committee's (EC) meeting with President Burrage on 10-27-2014 (posting of the EC report is pending for the President's review).

In response to the Academic Council's requests of 10-14-2014, a "travel group" was formed consisting of two members of the AC (Charles Matthews and Theresa Golden), two members of the FS (Kay Daigle and William Fridley), Ross Walkup (VP of Business Affairs), and Kay Lynn Roberts.

The travel group met on 11-19-2014, with the primary purpose being to discuss the logistics and feasibility of using SE's P-Card for conference registration and for lodging. Dr. Matthews requested that SE implement this use of the P-Card. There appeared to be some openness to this possibility on a "trial basis." A question was referred to the Academic Council: namely, is the academic department (specifically the departmental secretary) an acceptable point from which to coordinate the use of the P-Card for these purposes?

On 11-21-2014 the travel group received the following email from VP Walkup:

Update:

President Burrage has approved the following change to the Out-Of-State Travel Request Form that will be effective January 1, 2015:

Current: All overnight travel outside of Oklahoma must be approved by the President 30 days prior to travel.

Change: All overnight travel outside of Oklahoma of \$1,500 or more or International Travel must be approved by the President prior to travel.

Rational: RUSO policy 1.10.3 Travel Expenses - requires a quarterly report be submitted to the Board for travel \$1,500 or more. Outside funding may be available to reduce international travel below the \$1,500 – President wants to know when faculty/staff travel is out of the country.

VP of Business Affairs has approved the following change to the processing of the Pre-Pay Registration Approval Form that will be effective January 1, 2015:

Current: Completing the process of this request is Dana Bell, Purchasing Office.

Change: Completing the process of this request will be the Department Secretary.

Rational: Full process never leaves the department.

Announcement will be made to faculty/staff of these changes in December. (Highlight added)

On 1-14-2015, Senator Fridley emailed Walkup and the travel group asking if the notification had been sent to faculty in December. VP Walkup replied on 1-15-2015 that the announcement had not gone out, but would be sent within the week and that Kay Lynn Roberts would be sending follow-up instructions.

On 1-16-2015 the following email announcement was sent to all faculty and staff (three documents were also attached—Travel Information Claim, Out of State Overnight Instructions, and Pre-Payment Approval Registration):

Follow-up instructions / forms to Ross Walkup's email on 'Procedure Change on Travel' dated 1.15.2015 8:31 a.m.

TRAVEL UPDATES

Updates to:

1. 'Travel Information Claim Form'
 - a. Mileage reimbursement rate increased to \$0.575 per mile
 - b. Email was sent out with updated form on January 6, 2015
 - c. Updated form attached
2. 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form
 - a. President Burrage has approved the following changes to approval path
 - i. Out-of-state overnight travel outside of Oklahoma \$1,500 or more and ALL international travel must be approved by the President prior to travel
 - ii. Out-of-State overnight travel outside of Oklahoma less than \$1,500 does not require President's approval
1. See routing of form on page 2 of the "Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request" form (see attachment)
 - iii. Updated form attached

Academic Council and Faculty Senate are seeking ways to improve the out of pocket expense burden on an employee in travel status. The main concerns appear to be the big expense categories: airfare, registration, and lodging. Also mentioned was the time it takes to get approval on the 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form.

Implemented Change #1 – effective today, Friday, January 16, 2015 – use appropriate 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Request' form (updated form attached)

President Burrage has approved a change in the approval path in securing approval on the 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form

1. Out-of-state overnight travel outside of Oklahoma \$1,500 or more and ALL international travel must be approved by the President prior to travel
2. Out-of-State overnight travel outside of Oklahoma less than \$1,500 does not require President's approval
- a. See routing of form on page 2 of the "Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request" form

Implemented Change #2 – effective today, Friday, January 16, 2015

Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) is authorized to perform the following tasks on behalf of employee seeking travel arrangements. Employee is encouraged to seek assistance from Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) with travel expenses to be charged on departmental PCard due to the responsibility of the PCard cardholder in securing all required documentation and original receipts for all transactions:

1. Airfare: Provided No Budget Limitations
- b. Once the 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form has been approved and encumbered an email will be sent from Office of Finance staff noting approvals and requisition number assigned to request
- c. At this time the PCard cardholder is authorized to call All Seasons Travel to book the employee's flight arrangements and charge airfare on departmental PCard by:
 - i. Providing the requisition number that was sent via email AND
 - ii. Departmental PCard account number
- b. Employee is encouraged to charge airfare on departmental PCard vs. paying out of pocket
2. 'Pre-Payment Approval – Registration Fee' form – updated form attached
- a. If registration is for an overnight out-of-state or international travels
 - i. Prior to employee submitting the 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form for approvals

1. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will complete the blue highlighted sections on the 'Pre-Payment Approval – Registration Fee' form
2. Then forward the form to the conference official for completion (yellow highlighted section) and signature
 - ii. If requirements are met and conference official has completed and signed the form
1. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will forward a copy to the employee to be attached to the 'Out-of-State Overnight / International Travel Request' form
 - a. At this time do not charge registration on departmental PCard – wait until email has been received from Office of Finance staff noting approvals and requisition number assigned to request
 - iii. Once email has been received from Office of Finance staff noting approvals and requisition number for out-of-state overnight / international travel
 1. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will contact the organization to charge registration on departmental PCard
 2. Ensure proper documentation is faxed to organization if required
 - iv. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will attach a copy of the completed registration form and printed paid receipt to the original "Pre-Payment Approval – Registration Fee" form to be submitted with PCard monthly reconciliation
 - v. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will coordinate with the employee by providing a copy of the completed registration form and printed paid receipt to be submitted with the employee's travel reimbursement claim form (informational only)
 - vi. PCard cardholder is responsible to secure all required documentation and original receipts for all transactions charged on departmental PCard for travel AND attach to PCard reconciliation
 - b. If registration is for same day travel and no overnight or international travel approval required
 - i. Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) will complete the blue highlighted sections on the 'Pre-Payment Approval – Registration Fee' form
 - ii. Then forward the form to the conference official for completion (yellow highlighted section) and signature
 - iii. If requirements are met and conference official has completed and signed the form
 1. Departmental Secretary (PCard Cardholder) is authorized to charge registration on departmental PCard up to six weeks prior to conference date

2. If there is a need for pre-payment more than six weeks in advance contact Purchasing Office for written approval – forward an email with detailed information to back up the request
3. Registration that crosses fiscal years should not be pre-paid on departmental PCard
 - iv. Ensure proper documentation is faxed to organization if required
 - v. Coordinate with employee the paperwork to verify pre-pay registration has been completed
 - vi. PCard cardholder is responsible to secure all required documentation and original receipts for all transactions charged on departmental PCard for travel AND attach to PCard reconciliation

Dana Bell, Purchasing Office staff, will no longer coordinate with All Seasons Travel employee airfare and pre-payment registrations for SE employees. This task has been assigned to the Departmental Secretary (PCard cardholder) to coordinate with SE employee seeking travel arrangements.

Proposed Change #3 – if implemented change #2 (airfare and registration) proves successful – the next step will be to make the necessary changes to allow SE employee to charge lodging on departmental PCard

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR OVERNIGHT TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF OKLAHOMA AND ALL INTERNATIONAL IS AS FOLLOWS:

- 1 All out of state overnight travel outside of Oklahoma \$1,500 or more and all international travel must be approved by the President prior to travel
- 2 Out of State overnight travel outside of Oklahoma less than \$1,500 does not require President's approval
- 3 Employee will submit Out of State Overnight / International Travel Request to Chair/Department Head
- 4 ^Attach required documentation
- 5 Chair/Department Head confirms availability of funds, signs (approves) and forwards to appropriate Dean
- 6 Dean, if applicable, confirms availability of funds, signs (approves) and forwards to appropriate Vice President
- 7 Vice President signs (approves) and forwards to Office of Finance
- 8 Office of Finance forwards to President for approval if \$1,500 or more or if international travel
- 9 President's Office will forward to Purchasing Office to be encumbered
- 10 If request is less than \$1,500 Office of Finance will forward to Purchasing Office to be encumbered
- 11 Once encumbered the original will be forwarded to Office of Finance
- 12 An email will be sent to all signatures and departmental secretary noting the approval and requisition number

- 13 Employee is encouraged to seek assistance with travel arrangements from the departmental secretary
Departmental secretary / Employee is authorized to call All Seasons Travel to book travel arrangements
by giving the requisition number that was sent via email and the departmental PCard account number
If Pre-Pay Registration meets the requirements identified on pre-payment approval - registration fee form
Departmental Secretary will coordinate with conference official to secure approval
If approved, departmental secretary will contact organization and make payment with departmental PCard
Departmental Secretary will ensure proper documentation is faxed to organization if required
and coordinate with employee by providing a copy of the completed registration form and paid receipt
- Departmental Secretary is responsible to secure all required documentation and original receipts
for all transactions charged on departmental PCard for travel and attach to PCard reconciliation**

^Required documentation for Out of State Overnight Travel Outside of Oklahoma and All International travel:

- a. Justification for out-of-state overnight / international travel
- b. Airfare Quote from All Seasons Travel (get quote prior to travel)
- c. If Pre-Pay Approval - Registration Fee form meets the criteria to be Approved for Pre-Payment
Attach copy of pre-payment approval - registration fee form and a completed registration form
- d. Brochure / Schedule - verify beginning/ending dates and times - verify meals included in registration cost
verify designated lodging rate; verify city, state where conference held
- e. Per Diem Rate Schedule www.gsa.gov/perdiem (print and attach copy)
- f. If opt to drive vs. airfare - print mapquest - city, state to city, state (no zip codes and no physical address)
Mileage reimbursement is limited to Airfare Quote from All Seasons Travel + mileage to and from DFW airport
200 miles allowed Durant to DFW to Durant - or shorter distance if leaving from home
374 miles allowed Idabel to DFW to Idabel - or shorter distance if leaving from home
210 miles allowed Ardmore to DFW to Ardmore - or shorter distance if leaving from home
158 miles allowed Denison to DFW to Denison - or shorter distance if leaving from home
136 miles allowed Sherman to DFW to Sherman - or shorter distance if leaving from home

Lots of information - Please read very carefully – if you have questions or concerns please email kroberts@se.edu or call x2977.

*The “300 Document” has now been replaced with a new version ([Statewide Accounting Manual](#)—Travel pages 181-260) that is available on the [webpage](#) of the Office of Finance.

Document 1

Sunday, October 19, 2014

RE: Travel Encumbrance and Reimbursement

Dear Sherrie and Kay Lynn,

Thank you for the very detailed email of September 9, 2014 regarding President Burrage’s approval of my Out of State Travel Request (requisition number R46295). This is the first time I have applied for individual travel funding in over six years, and I appreciate the improvements that have been made in the funding process and its communication.

I do have some questions regarding my travel request and I would also like to request an opportunity to meet with either or both of you—if possible, sometime this week. I am making this request on behalf of the Faculty Senate. The Personnel Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate has been charged with the task of seeing what can be done to streamline and improve the travel funding process and to facilitate better communication (especially on the part of faculty!). On Monday, October 27, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate will be holding its first bi-semester meeting with President Burrage, and the top item on the agenda is *travel encumbrance and reimbursement*. To prepare for the meeting (which I anticipate will serve as an introduction to this important issue), I thought it best to get some basic information from those on the front lines: you! ☺

On the email I received, I appreciated the offer to take phone calls with questions. I will call on Monday, October 20 at around 10:00. I thought this letter might be a helpful “heads-up” before I called. Let me again commend you on the thorough and informative email your office sent, which included: carbon copies sent to the relevant administrators, all the information about my claim, a link to the recommended ‘Travel Log’, a list of Required Documentation on file and needed, airfare information, Travel Information Claim Form and list of reimbursements requiring documentation, a link to the Office of Finance Forms, and it was sent with High Importance—well done!

First, the questions on my travel request:

1. The conference registration does include a personal membership, but the *membership* cost is not identified or delineated, nor is there an option to opt out. Additionally, I paid my registration on the day of the conference (I forgot to send it in earlier) and incurred the “at-the-door” charge of \$100. Will the receipt for the conference registration suffice for full reimbursement?

2. I did not fly, nor did I drive my personal vehicle to the conference in San Antonio. Rather, I drove with a colleague (in his car) who was also attending the conference and is not seeking travel reimbursement. I paid for the two tanks of gas we used on my credit card (total of \$99.12). Will the receipts and a written explanation/ justification suffice to receive reimbursement?
3. I also paid for the parking which is included and itemized on my hotel receipt. Will the hotel receipt suffice to get reimbursed for the parking charges?

As to the more general questions about the *travel encumbrance reimbursement process*, here are some concerns and questions from faculty.

- Why can't approval of a mini-grant result in automatic encumbrance of funds? This would cut down on one set of (what feels like) duplicate paperwork.
- I hope that there can be a discussion and clarification of which rules came from where. For example, the 30-day-rule. This can be especially difficult when one is trying to interview job candidates who may be receiving other interviews or offers.
- We had a faculty member not get All the Per Diem because of the hotel had free meal each day. The meal started at 6:00am but the faculty member had to be gone by 5:30 am. Can we establish a means of filing a complaint with someone other than the person that has denied a charge?
- The reason that has been given to me is that the auditors don't like something. Let the auditors talk to me then to explain my travel. I'm the one that is signing the statement, "here do under penalty of perjury, declare that the information contained in this document and any attachments are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief."
- Are there rules on travel reimbursement that are institution specific (i.e. over and above state regulations)? If so, are these a "hangover" from financial improprieties that happened over twenty years ago, and can these be changed?
- Is there a possible way to arrange for the purchase of airline tickets for guest speakers who are brought to campus and for which funding has been approved/encumbered? That is, buy their ticket rather than have them pay for it and get reimbursed after the fact.
- As noted, the improvements made in the process are noted and appreciated. Other than "read the directions" (which faculty can admittedly do a better job at), do you have additional suggestions for those faculty seeking travel reimbursement?
- Are there any changes you would like to see made in the *travel encumbrance reimbursement process*?

This should be enough to get us started. Based on the Faculty Senate's meetings with President Burrage, I am confident that he will be supportive of these efforts; especially if we are able to work in a cooperative and collegial manner.

I ask for only a half-hour of your time. I will be available to meet at the following times this week:

- Between 8:00 and 10:30, and between 12:30 and 2:30 on Wednesday, October 22
- Between 1:00 and 5:00 on Thursday, October 23
- All day on Friday, October 24

I thank you in advance for your cooperation on this important matter.

Sincerely,

William Fridley, Ph.D. On behalf of the Faculty Senate