Reducing Bureaucratic Burden

Task force final report

July 7, 2023

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Task Force Charge

The Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost issued the following charge to the task force:

- **Identify** process pain points and navigational bottlenecks – help build a catalog of processes, policies and operations for which reform is both possible (i.e., within our control) and would meaningfully reduce complexity, workload and/or inefficiencies.

- **Recommend** improvements and pathways for change – offer suggestions for specific reforms or changes. Suggest ways we can put practices in place that allow us to continually improve our operations so that they place less of a bureaucratic burden on people and/or are easier to navigate.

- **Support** solutions implementation – identify and partner with functional leaders and key stakeholders to advance recommended reform and implement solutions.

This brief report is a summary of our work over the past nine months. It issues a set of **guiding principles** we believe the campus should embrace and adopt, together with a set of concrete recommendations for both navigating existing bureaucratic structures and processes as well as suggesting specific changes across the complicated administrative web that underlies the university we call our professional home.

Guiding principles

The work of the Reducing Bureaucratic Burden task force was guided by four key guiding principles that we encourage functional leaders and other process owners to consider adopting when they develop and refine their own processes. Together we are Berkeley, and these principles can and should guide our work so that we can be effective and efficient every day.

1. **Recognize our time has value:** Faculty, staff and student time has value and hence represents an opportunity cost. The benefit of any activity should outweigh its full cost if implemented; assessment of full/true cost should involve consultation with stakeholders. New initiatives should identify and state the time costs to affected campus members.

2. **Take measured risks:** We are an innovative learning organization. It is important to extend trust to the members of our community in service to our collective mission. Attempting to avoid risk at all cost is inefficient and the impact is not equitably distributed; it is critical to accept a manageable level of risk where possible. Risk should be evaluated comprehensively and include the risk and costs to individuals and departments being hindered in fulfilling their missions.

3. **Engage in continuous improvement:** There is always an opportunity to improve on policies, processes, procedures and programs. We value working toward solutions that are increasingly user friendly and create greater ease and benefit to stakeholders end-to-end. We aim to creatively leverage existing resources without adding additional workload and to transparently allocate the finite resources available towards identified priorities.

4. **Embrace best Berkeley practice:** While we support continuous improvement, we also aim to acknowledge when something is “good enough.” We recognize that “best practice" in a resource-constrained environment means doing less than what could be done in an unconstrained environment. What is best practice at Berkeley might not be industry best practice. We endeavor not to let the quest for perfection or being “best” get in the way of getting things done and done well.

Findings and reflections

We work at an inspiring and prominent institution – the #1 public university in the world. Our goal is to lift up the next generation of Californians and we have the demonstrated ability to do so. This fundamental goal should motivate what we do through excellence in research, teaching and service.

Across the campus, we see evidence of excellence in many areas. People go above and beyond every day in the service of this great institution, often at considerable personal cost. Members of this task force were excited at the possibility of reducing bureaucracy and set out with high hopes to make change – at whatever scale possible. There are some areas where there is evidence of positive change and we are grateful for constructive dialogues with offices across campus. We will document their ongoing efforts and successes on the EVCP website.

At the same time, we also came to recognize just how challenging it is to achieve significant change in our environment. This is not for lack of effort, ideas, proposals, talent or dedication. There is much precedent for this experience and our disappointment; campus has historically convened and currently invests in centralized process improvement efforts, which have had some success in identifying pain points but have been challenged in transforming processes and improving the end-user experience.

We are concerned that a culture of risk aversion limits creative problem solving, inhibits collaboration and interferes with the systemic change needed to reduce bureaucracy. Although our task force failed to make significant progress on the third portion of the charge – effecting and supporting solutions implementation – our work in identifying bottlenecks/pain points and recommending solutions has sparked an important conversation around some critical campus activities. Those conversations will need to be continued and amplified so that productive change and accountability for change can happen.

From our perspective, the problem goes far beyond any particular set of policies or processes; it is fundamentally one of culture. Fear of making mistakes is ubiquitous. This translates into a reluctance to challenge and alter current processes and a general aversion to taking even small amounts of risk in exchange for significant returns to our campus community. Absent changes to this culture, significant reductions in both the bureaucratic burden and adjustment to the perception of UC Berkeley as an unduly bureaucratic institution are unlikely. Engaging in a campuswide conversation about how to reduce the bureaucratic burden is just the start of addressing these organizational shortfalls.

Our campus culture is often dominated by the drive to get an A+ in everything we do. While this is perceived as a positive for people to have a desire to excel, it can produce negative effects. Excellence is not about working harder, but about working smarter. People's time is increasingly limited and burdened by policies, some of which our campus imposes upon itself. We must design and change policies and processes so we put every impacted stakeholder's time and resources to their best use; we need to make carefully considered tradeoffs and allocate effort where it can do the most good.

We need to evolve our culture, which means that our leaders must aggressively promote and adopt a mindset of "reducing bureaucratic burden," which in turn includes internalizing and implementing the guiding principles articulated above. For example, leadership can make these principles a significant component of performance evaluation for senior administrators and publicly document efforts to reduce bureaucracy. The guiding principles we developed should encourage campus leadership to think carefully about how we make decisions about what we should start doing and, equally important, what we should **stop** doing.

Concrete steps forward involve managing towards a culture that rewards process efficiency and simplification, that is willing to take measured risk in exchange for measurable returns, that prioritizes the end-user experience and is accountable for it. Specific suggestions for how to shift the culture in this direction include:

- **Senior leader performance expectations**: Make measurable efficiency improvements a core incentive for staff — especially at the more senior administrator levels. Until "reducing bureaucratic burden" is an expectation for senior personnel, any task force efforts are futile.

- **Leverage expertise on campus**: We have expertise on campus (our forward-thinking innovative staff, for example) that could be deployed to train other offices/units (e.g., as consultants and/or project leads paid via stipends or additional appointments, where appropriate). Once trained, the availability of such people would enable offices to implement and adopt new technology.
    - An illustrative example of such an effort could be a broader use of DocuSign to decrease the effort involved in collecting an arguably excessive number of "wet signatures" in a variety of formats. Setting up this tool for an office/unit can be daunting. Leveraging the expertise of "superusers" or individuals who have successfully rolled this out could be a much quicker and cost-effective way to achieve efficiencies.

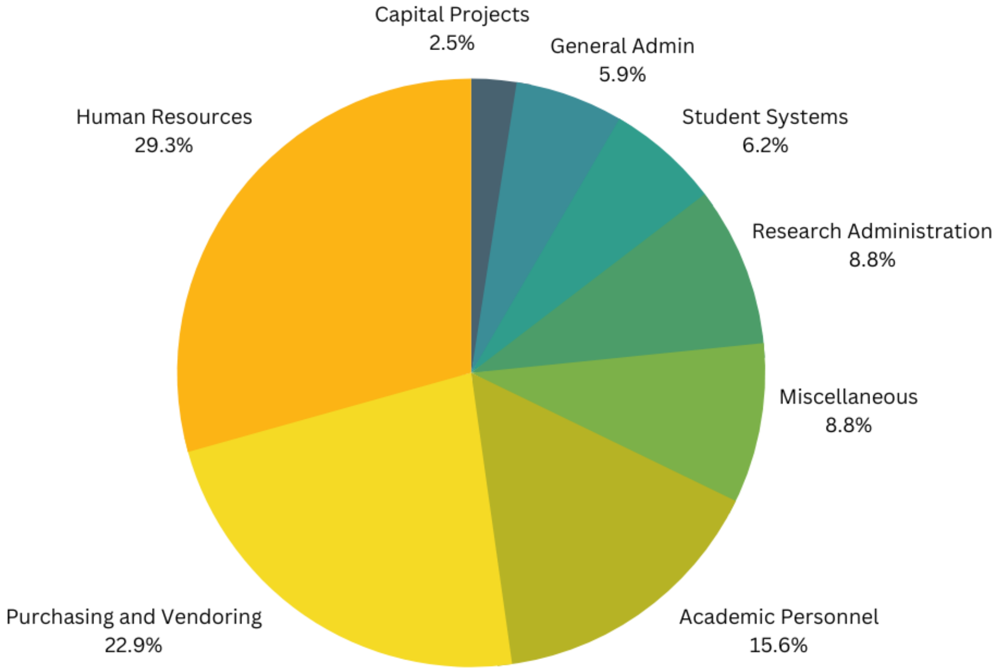
- **Incentivize leaders and staff**: Recognize and reward offices and/or their staff for improving on their existing processes as an incentive for them to continue to implement innovative solutions with campuswide impact. This does not have to be costly and we could leverage existing star and achievement award programs. Staff awards for bureaucracy reduction could serve this purpose well.

- **Promote a culture of feedback and accountability**: To promote a culture of continuous improvement, unit/self-reflection and organizational accountability, central offices could make it easy for campus constituents to provide ongoing feedback about their unit's policies, practices and processes. This can be achieved via regular targeted check-in meetings, feedback mechanisms prominently displayed on websites and/or surveys by offices with their stakeholders and "clients."
    - The feedback results should be transparent and published to reinforce that campus constituents are being heard and actions are being taken. There should be reporting out by offices on how they are addressing the feedback. Based on our experience on this task force, the survey should be specific and request actionable feedback; central office leadership should be accountable for improvement.

In what follows below, we document some of the specific feedback we received, as well as pain points and proposed solutions for the different subgroups of the taskforce.

Taking the campus pulse

In early fall of 2022, the task force fielded a large survey to staff and faculty across campus asking them to submit the bureaucratic pain points that, despite heroic efforts by many on campus, persist. We received ~800 submissions and read each one (multiple times). We are grateful for the clear and constructive nature of these comments; they are briefly summarized below. This specific feedback informed the recommendations the task force has issued.



Almost half of the comments we received are broadly related to the difficulties in hiring and personnel actions related to faculty, staff and students – i.e., human resources and academic personnel. Nearly a quarter of the suggestions reflected how difficult it is to purchase goods and services. The final category expressed how difficult it is to secure, apply for and administer grants at Berkeley. A smaller set of suggestions pertained to student systems and capital projects.

We organized the work of the task force to align with the four largest categories and issued specific and broad recommendations which, in the interest of minimizing duplication of effort (since our time has value), are summarized and linked to in the next section.

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Task force subgroups and recommendations

Each subgroup convened separately, analyzed pain points and worked on providing actionable short/medium-run solutions. The whole task force discussed and approved the recommendations made below. In the process, members of the task force met with relevant administrators and senate committees to present the findings. After the meetings, relevant units conducted examinations of their policies, processes and programs and followed up accordingly. We summarize the challenges and suggested paths forward below. The full set of documents for each subgroup is linked in the sections below and will be available via the task force's website.

Human resources (staff)

The plurality of comments (44.9%) pertained to human resources and personnel actions; 29.3% were specific to staff HR and 15.6% to academic personnel. The subgroup addressing staff HR reviewed the survey feedback and recommendations and then met with leaders in People & Culture and Berkeley Regional Services to discuss the recommendations regarding staff recruitment and hiring. In the meetings with P&C and BRS, efforts and planned improvements by the Hiring Improvement Process task force were shared. There was some overlap between existing plans and presentations and the "pain points" identified by the survey respondents and summarized by the task force; however, a comprehensive and well-defined process improvement strategy to resolve the issues has not yet been laid out.

The following challenges and recommended paths forward were identified:

Challenges

- Inadequate degree of transparency and lack of accurate timelines on the full end-to-end staff recruitment and hiring process.
- Lack of clarity on the ownership of and accountability for the efficacy and efficiency of the recruitment and hiring processes since multiple units are involved.
- Insufficient opportunities for users to share feedback on human resource processes and procedures, and insufficient action taken by relevant units in response to feedback they receive.

Recommended paths forward

- **P&C and BRS to prioritize improving the process of staff recruitment and hiring**. This could be done either through the Hiring Improvement Process task force, if they were empowered to do so, or via other initiatives led by P&C and BRS focused on specific challenges identified in the process. Either way, we strongly encourage greater involvement of campus unit stakeholders in any streamlining efforts to ensure that key pain points are addressed and the end-user experience is improved.

- P&C and BRS are currently addressing some of the recommendations:
  - Update the P&C recruitment website, including clarifying process ownership and realistic timelines for which P&C is accountable to increase transparency around the hiring process;
  - Develop additional resource documents to offer more support to supervisors with onboarding new employees;
  - Publish transparent visa timelines for our campus; and
  - Partner with UCPath to share current efforts and pilots to transfer UCPath entry to locations.

A separate subgroup worked specifically on the recommendations regarding the Achieve Together program. P&C has led various focus groups and shared communications with campus networks to continue their improvements to the Achieve Together program. It is anticipated that P&C will share improvements to the form and process before the August 2023 Achieve Together cycle commences.

Academic personnel

The subgroup for academic personnel, which included both faculty and staff, engaged in a robust set of discussions of the issues identified in the survey data. This data, coupled with their own experiences, outreach and informal interviews with colleagues who have engaged with academic personnel actions in recent years, informed their recommendations for the faculty merit and promotion case process.

Simultaneous to the work of the taskforce, the Office of the Vice Provost for the Faculty and the Academic Personnel Office were engaging in their own process improvement efforts — many of which aligned with what the task force lifted up. Especially illuminating was the deep dive that the Office for Faculty Equity and Welfare did through analysis of timelines within AP recruitments to highlight where bottlenecks were and how to address those needs. The ongoing efforts in academic personnel streamlining led by those in the Office of the VPF, APO and OFEW can be found here: https://vpf.berkeley.edu/policies-programs/streamlining.

Challenges

Recurring themes in feedback included long timelines for regular merit cases and confusion about what should be submitted for favorable review. Decisions delayed beyond the effective date of actions resulting in months to a year of retroactive pay adjustments are not uncommon. Many faculty feel the need to "overachieve" in preparing their merit cases. This leads to duplication of documentation and redundancy of effort on the part of both faculty and staff.

The faculty review process is extremely personnel-as-a-resource intensive, including the faculty member, department staff, department leadership, college staff, college leadership and campus reviewers. This comes at a significant cost that must be weighed against the benefit, particularly for non-threshold merit reviews. Specifically, the following challenges related to the faculty merit and promotion case process were identified:

- Regular merit reviews take too long and communication of outcomes are delayed without explanation;
- The various memos and documents that make up faculty cases are frequently redundant (e.g., information included on the CV and in other documentation is entered into APBears and vice versa); and
- Guidance and messaging are frequently inconsistent and expectations and terminology seemingly shift regularly, sometimes in the middle of a review cycle.

Recommended paths forward

The task force commends the Office of the VPF and APO staff who are engaging in streamlining work in support of bureaucracy reduction and better processes. We look forward to the outcomes of their ongoing efforts and encourage regular engagement with key academic department stakeholders (e.g., department chairs, faculty, AP analysts, etc.) to ensure optimal results. In terms of areas to focus on for ongoing improvement, we recommend efforts that:

- **Reduce the volume and eliminate duplication of materials** submitted by the faculty, the department and the college;
- **Reduce the time that cases spend in APO after the Budget Committee processes them:** publish service level agreements and/or adopt transparency regarding timelines;
- **Provide clear expectations for faculty self-assessments,** with respect to both content and length;
- **Streamline AP Bears to eliminate duplication**; require only CV upload, publication list and confirmation of teaching and graduate mentorship records;
- **Eliminate long letters** for non-threshold cases by creating a two-page checksheet (modeled on the Assistant Professor first merit checklist) and by establishing the expectation that the Budget Committee will request additional information from departments when required in their evaluation of the case; and
- **Adopt the use of DocuSign for APO forms and signatures.**

Purchasing and vendoring

The subgroup addressing purchasing and vendoring engaged in conversations with UCLA and UCSC, both of whom take a very different approach to risk management and insurance requirements. The recommendations of the subgroup were also aided significantly by conversations with the Streamlining Research Pilot work team spearheaded by the Goldman School of Public Policy, the vice chancellor for research, the campus risk manager and the chief ethics, risk and compliance officer.

Challenges

- Comments and interviews reflect an extreme degree of perceived and adopted risk aversion with regards to purchasing and vendoring on our campus that is different from some of our sister campuses (e.g., UCLA, UCSC).

- Compliance with the systemwide BFB-BUS-63 Policy requires a certificate of insurance from *all* suppliers and vendors that work with UC. Currently at Berkeley, the interpretation of this policy does not allow for any flexibility or standard exceptions. This creates an administrative bottleneck for hundreds of staff members involved in the day-to-day purchasing at Berkeley, with about $2 million in staff time spent just tracking insurance certificates. Interpretation and enforcement of BUS-63 lie within the Risk Office at Berkeley.

- Hiring abroad is extremely challenging and convoluted (e.g., enumerators and translators). Individuals in remote regions who may or may not speak English cannot navigate our systems. This hinders the research mission of our university.

- Reimbursing international visitors/service providers is exceptionally complicated and time-consuming. The bureaucratic burden in these transactions is significant and falls on a small, resource-limited staff.

Recommended paths forward

- **Insurance certificate collection:** At this time, insurance certificates are collected for each transaction. Instead, shift insurance certificate collection to vendoring where it is collected once (instead of each time the same person/company is hired);

- **Insurance certificate database**: Currently, insurance certificates are frequently collected in hardcopy and must be processed. Instead, create an uploadable database so vendors can upload certificates without a further touchpoint by Berkeley staff. Make the database searchable by anyone on campus;

- **Waive insurance certificate requirement for low risk transaction**: Establish a list of types of transactions that are low risk for which we will no longer require certificates of insurance. Berkeley Risk Services has proposed a preliminary list including some very limited titles as a starting point;
    - UCLA does this via a general $10,000 exemption threshold for lower value/lower risk services; UCSC has established a $100,000 threshold for goods purchases.
    - Categorically exempt large private and public organizations (e.g. Fortune 500, state and federal agencies) who carry insurance already.
    - Update list monthly based on exception requests to risk services and make the list public and searchable. BRS agrees to review exception requests with no more than a 7-day turnaround.
- **Insurance certificate duration**: Work with insurance vendors to provide monthly, quarterly and annual options for insurance. Make purchasing more straightforward to address communication challenges with less-technical vendors who might struggle with "insurance speak." Our complex forms negatively affect smaller and minority-owned businesses disproportionately. Possibly design an auto-upload of insurance certificate mechanism through insurance vendor; and
- **Establish a team to study international and community-engaged vendoring/procurement.** Proactively work on a technological solution to replace petty cash (which is no longer permitted).

Research administration

The research administration subgroup, composed of faculty and staff, benefited greatly from interactions with the RA staff in BRS, the Committee on Research of the Academic Senate and the Streamlining Research Pilot work team (as mentioned above in the purchasing and vendoring section). The subgroup reflected upon their conversations and reviewed the survey comments in order to develop these recommendations to improve RA.

Challenges

The survey comments related to RA expressed displeasure with the following three areas: navigation, grant awards and the institutional review board (IRB). Specifically, the comments highlighted the following challenges:

- The current RA structure makes it challenging to navigate the various research support and contracting offices, necessitates numerous handoffs, contributes to inconsistent services and creates confusion around roles and responsibilities.

- The process of accepting, finalizing and establishing grant awards and subcontracts places a substantial administrative burden upon faculty and staff. Additionally, the time associated with establishing a grant award can sometimes have drastically negative impacts on the faculty member and their research.

- The federal regulations, inconsistent review comments and length of time associated with IRB create a significant administrative burden for faculty and staff.

Recommended paths forward
There are some quick wins largely related to managing expectations and better information as to "where to go for something," but real progress in this landscape is going to require substantive change, possibly in structure and definitely in the funding model.

- Enhance the navigability of the research support offices and structures:
    - **Identify ways to reduce the number of contacts needed to activate and manage research.** Limit the number of touchpoints for the faculty across the various research support offices.
    - **Assess the current organizational structure** of the various research administration support offices and perform a SWOT analysis.
    - **Initiate a navigator service pilot program** to increase support throughout and identify pain points to better understand how to support faculty through the process.
- Provide transparency and guidance to improve the grant awards process from the faculty perspective:
    - **Create a standing group that monitors and improves grant awards**. Monitoring and improving upon the grants awards process should be a continuous process with an executive sponsor.
    - If funding was available, the **number one priority would be adding FTEs** to reduce the number of awards per research administrator and contracts and grants officer.
- Improve the Institutional Review Board process, within the constraints and requirements IRB faces, to improve timelines and the complexity of interface.

Other identified pain points

The task force became aware of a number of “micro” problems that span across multiple central offices and campus units. These generally include, but are not limited to, lack of transparency, insufficient communication, poor online resources and navigation tools, areas with multiple hand-offs or unnecessary touchpoints and protracted timelines. The cumulative impact of a large number of small pain points is significant, demoralizing and de-energizing staff and faculty across campus. It creates a culture of inaction, as survival requires acceptance of things "as they are." There are a large number of such challenges, and we worked with a variety of campus stakeholders to try and address some of them. While the following additional pain points were mentioned, it should be noted that the list is not comprehensive:

- **Student hiring** — The process of hiring students is cumbersome and time consuming, especially considering the limited nature of these positions and high turn over from semester to semester. As an initial step, Berkeley Regional Services (BEARS region) in collaboration with VC Student Affairs has established a working group focused on student hiring to map the process and address pain points.

- **Small construction projects** — The cost and time required to implement small construction projects is considered by many campus clients to be excessive and prohibitive; we recommend a deep-dive analysis of process and costs.

- **Capital projects** — The process for capital projects is long and sequential.We recommend exploring pooling processes to shorten the required bid processes, reviewing whole buildings to avoid duplication of studies (to see which processes could be done in parallel) and offering incentives for delivering projects on time and under budget.

- **Facilities Services** — Despite Facilities Services posting information on its website, there is a perceived lack of transparency into service levels (particularly services that occur outside of the regular services) and the volume and priority of facilities requests across campus. Routine maintenance is difficult to schedule and track in the system and can lead to emergencies and crises that are more expensive to address and cause interruptions in research.

- **Employee and labor relations** — There is insufficient transparency, responsiveness and coordination related to managing labor issues. This past year has been especially difficult with multiple negotiations, a strike and staff turnover, which exacerbated the ongoing inconsistencies in tracking, settling and escalating labor issues and resulted in additional work with compressed timelines across departments, regions and ELR. These tangible and intangible costs to our campus should be captured and documented from impacted stakeholders so that when future labor negotiations and implementations are underway, ELR can proactively plan, engage and address the challenges encountered by our campus this last round. Additionally, we recommend clarifying and publishing roles and responsibilities across units that support employee and labor relations (e.g., ELR, APO, Graduate Division, etc.) and documenting end-to-end processes.

- **Parking** — The campus parking permit experience is not very user-friendly, particularly the daily permit option. There is a lack of clarity as to how to navigate the daily parking permit process for faculty and staff. The "Pay-by-phone" app has a more user-friendly customer interface and should be more widely advertised.

- **Multi-location agreements** — A number of pain points emerged, including: no clear approval timeline for APO, other campuses and other approvers; department and BRS staff responsible for MLAs struggle to gain cooperation from other campuses; length of time from start to finish is excessive; and participants are unable to track progress.

- **Course approval process** — The course review and approval process through the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) is cumbersome and time consuming.

- **DocuSign adoption** — We do not have a consistent adoption of online forms and signatures. Some central units use Adobe forms or fillable pdfs; some still rely on hard copy forms that you have to print, complete and scan. This is confusing, time consuming and requires individuals to learn multiple platforms and have access to scanners. The task force recommends we work to transition the campus to DocuSign in a more comprehensive way. Executive sponsorship of this effort could help diminish the use of multiple tools.

The task force understands that making the suggested changes above may be difficult and/or take time, and will need to be balanced with the other priorities of the units. The co-chairs are happy to engage with any team going forward to understand the issues and strategize on how to address them.

For further details on the task force and an up-to-date list of successes and projects that are being led across campus to reduce the bureaucratic burden and streamline processes, please consult the EVCP website.