Faculty Experiences with the New University Travel Policy: Summary of Survey Findings and Recommendations for University Leadership

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Executive Overview

This report summarizes open-ended responses to an anonymized Qualtrics survey on the University's new travel policy, the SAP Concur travel and expense system, the new University card program (Travel Card, OneCard, and ProCard), and the related Edge Learning training. Respondents were asked how their travel since summer 2026 had been affected, what they experienced during travel authorization, how students and staff were affected, how they experienced the Edge Learning training, what effects they foresee on research, and for any other comments .

The survey received 610 responses between September 29 and October 9th, 2026. The survey was not scientifically designed, used open ended questions, and reflects user bias of faculty with recent and abruptly imposed experiences of the new system. Only five respondents reported a positive experience, with up to 30 respondents reporting some benefits along with the reports of negative experiences. Responses came from across the University, including the Colleges of Science, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences (including Cooperative Extension), Medicine (Tucson and Phoenix), Engineering, Eller, Optical Sciences, Nursing, Public Health, Pharmacy, Humanities, Fine Arts, Education, CAPLA, Information Science, the Libraries, and the Office of Research and Partnerships.

The dominant message is that the new system has moved substantial administrative work from trained business staff to faculty, students, and program staff. Respondents report that this has increased workload, delayed reimbursements, and in many cases discouraged research and conference travel. A much smaller group reported neutral or positive experiences, and their perspectives are also included below.

The report presents seven major findings followed by seven recommendations and an appendix with representative verbatim quotes from the respondents..

Part One: Seven Major Findings

Finding 1: Administrative work has shifted from business professionals to faculty, students, and program staff, at a real cost to research and teaching

The most common theme across responses is that tasks once handled efficiently by departmental business staff are now the traveler's responsibility. Respondents described themselves as having become their own "travel agent and accounts payable" clerk .

Respondents framed this shift mainly as a loss of productive time:

- One respondent estimated an added hour per week of workload.
- Another reported three added hours per week.
- Another reported spending "about a quarter" of research time on forms.
- Several described spending three to ten hours on reimbursement for a single trip].

Many argued that the shift is economically inefficient. In their view, it moves work from staff who process travel routinely to more highly compensated faculty who do it rarely and must relearn the process each time. As one respondent put it: "How does it save money to have specialized employees (faculty) being paid $100K+ doing staff work rather than their research and mentoring?" . Another described the arrangement as "making life easier for the back office while completely ignoring the cost in lost labor for everyone else".

Several principal investigators raised a related point about indirect costs. They questioned why they continue to pay indirect costs on grants when the administrative support those costs are meant to fund is no longer available for travel processing .

Respondents also reported that staff workload has not actually gone down. Instead, staff now spend time troubleshooting, correcting faculty errors, attending office hours, and repeating the same guidance to many individuals. One respondent noted that "it now takes multiple people to tackle work that it used to take just one person" .

Faculty in colleges that do not permit delegates expressed particular frustration. They noted that the Edge Learning training describes delegation as a way to "streamline the workflow," but delegation is not allowed in their units.

Finding 2: The Concur system is widely experienced as unintuitive and poorly configured for academic travel

Respondents repeatedly described Concur as "cumbersome," "opaque," "clunky," and "not intuitive". They identified a number of specific configuration problems.

No-cost and externally funded travel.

- Travelers must list an expense or a UA account to submit an authorization, even when no UA funds will be used.
- This forces respondents to enter "fake" or nominal expenses, sometimes as little as $1.
- The system then sends repeated automated reminders to file an expense report that will never be submitted.
- In one case, a traveler was warned that the amount would be treated as taxable income.

Errors and alerts.
- Cryptic error messages and unresolvable alerts block submission.
- Some alerts cannot even be scrolled to.
- When AI-based receipt reading fails, travelers may be unable to proceed at all.
- One respondent reported that a $3.65 discrepancy took two administrators and the faculty member half a day to resolve.

Inaccurate estimates.
- System-generated cost estimates vary widely. One respondent reported a range of about $1,800 around a $3,000 mean for the same international trip after simply refreshing.
- Some units instruct travelers not to use the built-in estimator at all and instead require Excel forms, which must be uploaded as screenshots because Concur does not accept Excel files].

Trip structures the system cannot handle.
- International date-line arrivals produce day-mismatch errors.
- Multi-city and field-site itineraries are difficult to enter, and mileage to actual remote sites cannot be calculated.
- Two trips cannot be recorded on the same day.
- Participant lists cannot be edited for field trips.
- Groups sharing a motor pool vehicle must each file separate authorizations.
- Student employees must file separately from student groups.

Account and routing problems.
- Required account codes sometimes do not appear in drop-down menus.
- Approval requests are routed to the wrong supervisor or to faculty with no connection to the traveler.
- Some respondents receive duplicate approval requests].

Duplicate data entry.
- Business purposes must be entered for nearly every line item, including per diem.
- The same justification is requested again at the authorization stage, the reimbursement stage, and by central finance].

Finding 3: Reimbursement delays are causing financial hardship, especially for students and lower-paid staff

Respondents consistently reported long and unpredictable reimbursement times. Reported waits included more than 30 days, close to a month, two months, three months, and "3–4 months." One respondent was told that central review takes 31 business days after college approval .

The financial consequences reported include:

- A faculty member carrying nearly $8,000 across three conferences, partly drawn from personal savings.
- Travelers paying credit card interest because reimbursement arrived after their billing cycle.
- A Field Studies fellow still owed $1,376 for approved travel completed in July.
- Program directors giving students money out of their own pockets to ease food insecurity.
- Students and research staff earning under $20 an hour, or around $30,000 a year, being expected to front thousands of dollars.

Respondents also described a lack of communication about the status of submissions:

- Reports marked "submitted" were actually rejected or stalled, and travelers learned this only by chance weeks later.
- Central finance sometimes denies reports without explaining what is missing.
- One respondent noted that the "system is perfect for taking so long that you forget entirely that the school owed you money"].

Some travelers simply accepted partial reimbursement rather than pursue the balance. One example was a lodging rate capped at the Los Angeles limit for a conference held in a higher-cost area.

Finding 4: The University card program has created new risks, restrictions, and confusion

Many respondents objected to being required to hold a University-issued card they did not request. Their concerns fell into several groups.

Liability and security.
- Respondents asked who is responsible for lost or compromised cards, for unreimbursed fees, and for expenses that exceed departmental travel allocations.
- Some asked whether late repayment could affect personal credit.
- Several questioned the institutional risk of putting many more cards into circulation.
- A few raised concerns about AI access to card or bank data.

Limits and merchant restrictions.
- A default $1,000 single-transaction limit has caused declines for conference registrations and multi-night hotel stays.
- Cards have been declined for fuel, vehicle costs, field supplies, computers, and vendors classified as "industrial supply".

Fragmented purposes.
- Rules that assign one card to one purpose prevent PIs from managing grant expenditures directly.

- Some PIs now have staff holding the card for their own grant.
- A faculty member with a travel card may be unable to hold a ProCard for lab purchases.
- One respondent described having to manage three payment mechanisms for a single trip: a personal Travel Card, a departmental card held by staff, and post-trip reimbursement.

Gaps for students and infrequent travelers.
- Graduate students are not eligible for cards, including those who travel alone for weeks or months of fieldwork.
- Faculty report that they cannot easily book student or postdoc travel.
- Requiring every occasional traveler to complete training and hold a card for one or two trips a year was described as inefficient.

Loss of personal card benefits.
- Respondents reported losing airline status, free checked bags, seat selection, miles, and travel insurance.
- Some had used miles to reduce costs to grants or to help students attend conferences .

Delays in obtaining cards.
- Applications sat for weeks, were rejected because of the wrong training, or were held up because accounts were "scrambled."
- Small units learned only after signing up that fiscal officers should not be cardholders, which created routing problems that remained unresolved months later.

Finding 5: Booking and lodging rules often raise costs and conflict with how academic travel works

Many respondents reported that the required booking channels and policy rules increase rather than reduce costs.

Airfare.
- Respondents reported that fares through Concur and Anthony Travel are often higher than fares booked directly with airlines or found through Google Flights, particularly for international trips.
- Some flights do not appear in the system at all.
- A $3 booking fee per transaction was also noted].

Policy-compliant fares.
- Concur often treats only the cheapest fare as compliant, which may mean a red-eye or basic economy with no checked bag.
- One respondent described a flight arriving at noon that was flagged as noncompliant because it cost $105 more than a red-eye arriving at 7:00 a.m. That option would have left the traveler waiting about eight hours with luggage before hotel check-in.
- Respondents also noted that the training says economy with checked luggage is allowed, while the system flags it.

Rebooking and support.
- When flights were cancelled or delayed, the travel agency was described as hard to reach.

- In one case, the agency could not help because the traveler had already checked in and the flight was operated by a non-U.S. carrier.
- In another, a ticket spanning three airlines left no one willing to take responsibility for a delay .

Lodging.
- Conference hotel blocks and discounted conference rates could not be booked through the system.
- Lodging caps (one respondent cited roughly $269 per night) are well below actual rates in common conference cities such as Washington, D.C., Boston, New York, and parts of the Los Angeles area.
- The rule reimbursing only a single bedroom penalizes multi-room Airbnb or shared units even when they cost less than a conference hotel.
- One respondent who stays in hostels at about $50 per night must now write memos justifying the choice .

Approval delays that raise prices.
- Waiting for authorization caused missed early-bird registration rates, sold-out hotel blocks, and higher airfares .

Personal time.
- Restrictions on adding personal days, and on using the card when doing so, burden faculty who extend trips at no cost to the University.
- These rules also burden faculty who lead summer study-abroad programs and need to travel with family.

Finding 6: Training and support did not prepare users for the system they actually use

Respondents described the Edge Learning training as long, compliance-focused, and disconnected from the practical steps of using Concur.

Length and timing.
- Respondents reported spending one, two, four, and six hours on the training.
- Many completed it during the summer while off contract or traveling, under deadlines as short as a few days.
- Others were required to complete it at the busy start of the fall semester.

Content gaps.
- Most frequently mentioned was the absence of guidance on post-travel expense reports, reconciliation, and allocating expenses across cards. Respondents described these as the most complex and consequential steps.
- Some material was outdated, including links that no longer exist.
- Some material contradicted the system or local college practice, such as delegate rules and the pre-travel versus post-travel expense report process .

Format.
- Video-based instruction is not searchable.

- Some found it inaccessible for users with visual impairments, partly because of questions hidden below the fold.
- Several described it as AI-generated and poorly executed.
- Respondents repeatedly requested a short written PDF, cheat sheet, or one-page summary .

Redundancy.
- Supervisors took duplicate trainings.
- Others took a training only to be told it was the wrong one.

Support after training.
- Help channels were described as circular: ambassadors referred users to FNAB teams, who referred them back to ambassadors.
- Some contacts had left the University.
- Automated replies promised responses within 48 hours.
- Users received conflicting answers at office hours.
- Guidance changed after colleagues had already completed training .

Some respondents were unaware that the training existed at all .

Finding 7: The policy is discouraging research travel and harming morale, retention, and trust in shared governance

Many respondents reported concrete changes in behavior.

Cancelled or reduced travel. Respondents reported:
- Cancelling European travel and keynote invitations.
- Cancelling conferences, including one in Brazil.
- Paying for conference travel entirely out of pocket rather than using the system.
- Planning to cut travel budgets in future grant proposals.
- Deciding to "travel less" generally .

Effects on students.
- Several faculty have stopped sponsoring student travel or organizing field trips.
- A Director of Graduate Studies described an improvised "rabbit hole" for funding graduate student conference travel.
- Faculty reported presenting their lab's work themselves because trainees cannot afford to front costs.
- A summer field studies program that has run for ten years may have lost student trust because of months-long payment delays .

Mission-specific harm.
- Cooperative Extension faculty, who travel statewide and sometimes daily, described the 35-mile authorization rule and card restrictions as fundamentally at odds with the land-grant mission.
- Nursing faculty conducting clinical site visits often learn student schedules less than a week ahead. They reported that pre-authorization rules are causing them to take on fewer students .

The attendance limit.
- The provision that attendance by more than two people from a unit at an out-of-state meeting should be held to a minimum and justified in writing drew sharp criticism from many disciplines.
- Respondents noted that entire departments routinely attend their field's central meeting.
- They also noted that at least one author must present each accepted conference paper, and that student presentations are central to professional development and to the University's visibility .

Retention.
- Some respondents said they are considering leaving the University, retiring early, moving grants to collaborators at other institutions, or taking grants as personal consultants.
- Early-career faculty without staff support described the burden as falling entirely on them.

Governance and trust.
- Many respondents objected that the changes were implemented over the summer without faculty consultation.
- Some described a pilot that began only about a month before the campus-wide launch].
- Several respondents raised questions about the contracts with Bank of America and Anthony Travel, and about what financial incentives exist.
- Several said the training and rules conveyed distrust, as if faculty were presumed "bad actors".

Positive and neutral experiences.
A small minority of respondents reported favorable experiences, and these offer useful guidance on what is working:

- Some found Concur straightforward, especially those who had used it at previous employers.
- Some reported reimbursements arriving faster than before, in a few cases within days.
- Some appreciated holding all receipts in one system and not having to front money.
- Some valued the clarification of "least expensive airfare" and the default approval of conference hotels.
- One respondent described decentralization away from slow central review as "a massive process improvement, even if the rollout was terrible".
- Where delegates were permitted and business staff remained actively involved, faculty reported little added burden.
- A few respondents felt that the issues reflect a normal learning curve .

Part Two: Seven Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Restore professional business-office support and allow delegation campus-wide

Respondents' most frequent request was to return routine travel processing to experienced business staff. The University should:

- Permit faculty in all colleges to designate staff delegates who can view and complete every step of authorization and expense reporting.
- Allow business offices to prepare and submit reports on behalf of travelers, particularly for students and infrequent travelers.
- Designate trained "super users" or travel champions within units as named points of contact .

This recommendation directly addresses the opportunity-cost concerns in Finding 1 and draws on the positive experiences of units where delegation already works.

Recommendation 2: Reconfigure Concur to fit academic travel

Respondents identified specific, fixable configuration problems. Priority changes include:

- Allow $0 authorizations and a clear "externally funded" or "self-funded" option that does not trigger reimbursement reminders or taxable-income warnings.
- Support sub-accounts, multi-select accounts, and editable participant lists.
- Allow group authorizations for shared trips.
- Handle date-line crossings, same-day trips, multi-city itineraries, and actual field-site destinations for mileage.
- Replace cryptic errors with plain-language explanations of how to fix them, and allow users to proceed with an explanation when AI receipt reading fails.
- Provide a single business-purpose entry per trip, plus a standard checkbox for routine academic conference presentation instead of a custom justification.
- Align the system's "in-policy" flags with the written policy, for example on checked baggage, hotel rates, and fares.
- Correct approval routing and provide a simple way to reassign incorrect approvers.

Recommendation 3: Establish reimbursement service standards and transparency

To address the hardship described in Finding 3, the University should:

- Publish and meet a target reimbursement turnaround time.
- Give travelers clear status visibility in Concur.
- Route reports to departmental fiscal officers before central finance, so errors are caught and explained rather than silently denied.
- Require that any returned report state specifically what is missing, and stop requesting the same documentation multiple times.
- Prioritize reimbursements for students, postdocs, and lower-paid staff, and expand travel advances or direct payment options for them.
- Address the existing backlog of summer 2026 reimbursements, including those for student fellowship programs.

Recommendation 4: Make the card program flexible and clarify liability

Respondents asked for choice and clarity rather than mandates. The University should:

- Make the Travel Card optional, and continue to permit personal cards with reimbursement for travelers who prefer them.
- Raise default transaction limits so that standard conference registrations and multi-night hotel stays are not declined.
- Correct merchant category restrictions that block legitimate field, Extension, and lab expenses.
- Allow PIs to hold cards covering both travel and research purchases on their own grants.
- Restore departmental or lab cards that can pay for student, postdoc, and infrequent-traveler expenses.
- Issue a clear written statement of cardholder liability, covering lost or compromised cards, unreimbursed fees, and expenses above departmental allocations, along with the data and privacy protections in place.

Recommendation 5: Revise booking and lodging rules to reflect real costs

To reduce the cost increases described in Finding 5, the University should:

- Permit direct booking with airlines when the fare is comparable to or lower than the agency fare.
- Define a reasonable fare to include checked baggage and to allow avoiding red-eye flights when the price difference is modest.
- Ensure 24/7 rebooking support for disruptions, including for non-U.S. carriers.
- Allow conference hotel blocks and conference rates to be booked and treated as compliant.
- Adopt location-specific lodging limits for high-cost conference cities.
- Reimburse whole-unit lodging, such as an Airbnb, when the traveler documents that it costs less than comparable hotels.
- Allow personal days before or after business travel when there is no added cost to the University, without restricting card use.
- Allow travelers to secure early registration and fares before final approval when the travel is clearly allowable.

Recommendation 6: Remove the attendance limit and tailor rules for Extension, clinical, and in-state travel

Respondents across many fields asked for these changes:

- Remove the provision on more than two attendees from one unit, or exempt academic and scientific conferences from it.
- Exempt no-cost, same-day in-state travel from the authorization requirement.
- Provide simple, long-duration blanket authorizations for Cooperative Extension, clinical site visits, and community-engaged research.
- Shorten or waive the advance-notice requirement for short-notice research needs.
- Consider allowing PIs to self-approve travel charged to their own external grants up to a reasonable threshold.

Recommendation 7: Improve training, communication, and shared governance for future changes

Respondents asked for practical guidance and meaningful consultation . The University should:

- Replace lengthy video modules with short, searchable written guides and one-page summaries, and add specific instruction on expense reports and reconciliation.
- Show estimated completion times for trainings, avoid duplicate supervisor trainings, and schedule required trainings during contract periods.
- Ensure that training, website guidance, and college practice agree, and communicate policy changes before rather than after people complete training.
- Staff a responsive help desk with real-time human support in place of circular referrals.
- Pilot future systems with a diverse set of units, including Extension, health sciences, field-research, and small units, with enough time to correct problems before campus-wide launch.
- Consult the Faculty Senate and affected faculty, staff, and students before implementing policies that significantly change workflows.
- Share with the University community a clear statement of the problem the policy was meant to solve, and a total-cost assessment that includes faculty, student, and staff time. Respondents repeatedly asked for both..

Conclusion

Respondents broadly accept the need for accountability in travel spending. Some see real benefits in a unified electronic system and faster processing when it works. However, most respondents describe the current implementation as shifting significant administrative cost onto faculty, students, and program staff. They report delayed reimbursements that impose financial hardship, higher travel costs, and discouraged activities central to the University's research, teaching, and land-grant missions.

The recommendations above draw directly on respondents' own suggestions. Taken together, they would preserve oversight while restoring professional support, flexibility, and trust.

Appendix: Select Quotes on Each Finding

These quotes come directly from the survey responses and are grouped under the seven findings. Each is verbatim except for occasional bracketed corrections of typos.

Finding 1: Administrative work has shifted to faculty, students, and program staff

"How does it save money to have specialized employees (faculty) being paid $100K+ doing staff work rather than their research and mentoring?"

"Transferring administrative work from trained business personnel to faculty does not make that work disappear; it simply shifts it to people who are less experienced at performing it and whose time should primarily be devoted to the University's research and educational missions."

"Overall, this is a classic example of making life easier for the back office while completely ignoring the cost in lost labor for everyone else."

"Where is our IDC money going if we are now expected to do all the administrative work ourselves?"

Finding 2: Concur is unintuitive and poorly configured for academic travel

"I recently went to Phoenix to speak at an event and I incurred no expenses but I keep receiving emails that a reimbursement request needs to be submitted, and that the amount will be considered taxable income."

"An example is an error in the amount of $3.65 that took my 2 admins and myself a half day to resolve!!!"

"I allowed the system to estimate my flight and hotel expenses. Then I refreshed and had it do it again. For an international trip the costs varied by $1,800 around a mean of about $3k."

Finding 3: Reimbursement delays are causing financial hardship

"I am putting nearly $8,000 on my personal card to attend 3 conferences from August-October. I have yet to be reimbursed for the first $4,000, which I had to pull out of my personal savings account."

"One Field Studies fellow has still not been reimbursed $1376 from his approved travel that was approved and completed in July. My co-director of the program and I have given students money from our own pockets to help [alleviate] the food insecurity they faced."

"It was honestly by chance that I even found out the report had not gone through, since it said submitted on my end."

Finding 4: The card program has created new risks, restrictions, and confusion

"What happens if my conference expenses exceed the $1,500 provided by my department? Am I personally responsible for paying the difference on the credit card or will it be deducted from my salary?"

"The travel cards were defaulted to a single transaction limit of $1,000 which led to cards being denied at conference hotels because staying over 3 nights is over the limit."

"We now have to receive our expense payments through THREE DIFFERENT MECHANISMS -- the BoA card that I received for myself, a departmental card that I have to speak with a staff member to use, and post-trip reimbursement."

"It's a problem for me that graduate students cannot have travel cards because my students often travel for field work for extended periods of time (1-3 months)."

Finding 5: Booking and lodging rules often raise costs

"It considered a red-eye flight arriving at the destination at 7:00 a.m. to be within policy, while a flight arriving at 12:00 p.m. was deemed noncompliant because it was $105 more expensive—only $5 above the allowable threshold."

"The current maximum of approximately $269 per night is often significantly below the actual cost of lodging in major conference destinations such as Washington, DC, and the Boston area."

"Delays in getting this information ironically means I am paying more in travel costs because I missed a few 'early bird' registration dates and encountered sold-out conference hotel blocks while awaiting guidance."

Finding 6: Training and support did not prepare users for the actual system

"I took the training and now know something about cards I don't have, but still don't know how to track expenses for the card that I do have. Could we get a one page PDF that summarizes these expectations?"

"Why did you not have a training on the post-travel and post-expense process? That is far more complicated and has larger implications for our projects and spending than the initial travel request process."

"They provide the same answer every time--reach out to the FNAB teams or reach out to your ambassador with questions. It is so circular."

Finding 7: Research travel, morale, retention, and trust are being affected

"I have imposed a blanket rule that I will not sponsor student travel due to the difficulty with booking and entering charges."

"I need to present the majority of my lab's work myself due to reluctance of students/postdocs to travel and wait for reimbursement of up front costs."

"We (Cooperative Extension) are not central campus occupants that travel once a year to national meetings. We travel sometimes each and every day."

"Just last week, every single member of my department attended THE central conference in our field, and presented their research, as they should, at an R1 institution."

"Major changes of this kind should be developed with meaningful input from the Faculty Senate and from the faculty, students, and staff who actually use these systems before they are implemented campus-wide."

Balancing Perspectives

"The decentralization inherent in the adoption of the SAP Concur system is light years better than the old system... This is a massive process improvement, even if the rollout was terrible and faculty governance was not consulted."

"It is much easier with my travel card. I no longer am required to wait for reimbursement. I also can still have my office staff help me with submission of receipts as my delegate."