

From: Paganelli, Mark A
Sent: Thursday, January 27, 2011 11:08 AM
To: Cervone, Thomas A; Russell, Margaret H (Margie)
Cc: Hendricks, Linda Bailey; Peccolo, Charles M (Butch); Dipietro, Joseph A; Cimino, Chris; Stockdale, Cindy
Subject: Travel

Mr. Cervone and Ms. Russell:

It is my understanding that concerns were voiced at the exempt staff council meeting yesterday regarding the length of time that it is taking to process travel. I wanted to address these concerns and inform everyone of what has happened and the plans for the future. The short answer is these concerns were valid and they have been resolved. We are currently processing travel that was received on Monday and travelers should be reimbursed within in 3 to 5 five days from the date we receive their request. This is the goal that the office strives to maintain and this has been our turnaround time until recently.

Unfortunately, this was not the case before the Christmas break. This is due to two reasons – a reduction in staff and an increased in volume. Because of budget reductions we planned on eliminating a position in accounts payable that does travel and this position has been vacant for over a year. This has left us with 2.5 people to process over 21,000 claims totaling \$_____ a year. We were doing OK with this and a recent audit of the operation identified an error rate of .3%. The office processes travel for the Knoxville campus, University Wide Administration, the Institute for Public Service, the Knoxville Graduate School of Medicine, the Knoxville Family Practice and the Memorial Research Center at the UT Hospital. Our most experienced travel auditor had a death in the family and another serious medical issue that resulted in an extended leave of absence. This reduced the staff responsible for travel by 40%. The volume of travel, especially international travel has increased to all time highs during the last year. We suspect that this is due to the stimulus money and increased research funding. These two items have resulted in delays in processing travel that are unacceptable.

To resolve this in the short-term, the staff worked overtime and we delayed processing invoices to vendors and other duties until travel was caught-up. To prevent this from recurring, we have permission to fill this vacant position, we have several policies revisions that are being proposed to reduce the number of exceptions and we have started to implement a paperless travel process. This process will significantly reduce the turnaround time. We are currently testing this with the UWA units and should have everyone paperless by June 30. We apologize that this has become an issue with your council and it has been demoralizing for the staff, since they work very hard to process travel in timely manner. I think that when you review the data for this operation, you will conclude that they are efficient and work hard. Unfortunately, the budget has left us so lean that if one person leaves the work piles up quickly and we don't want to be in that position with travel. I will be happy to provide further information if needed and please distribute to others with the council or provide me the names so that I may do so. I am also going to prepare something for the Tennessee Today to inform the Knoxville area travelers. Let me know if you have any questions.

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