



APG Policy Comment Tracker

Travel Expense Policy

Comment Period: March 8 – April 7, 2021

<u>Comment No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Comment</u>
1	3/8/2021	Brian Savilonis	<p>Pretty unclear policy--- Does one have to use a pcard, even if using non-wpi funds (PD for example)?</p> <p>Can one book travel for partners through TMC, paid for privately? If not how does one sync travel?</p>
2	3/8/2021	Amity Manning	<p>I have significant concerns about the proposed travel expense policy and its requirement that all travel be booked through a travel management company. While I would like to believe that a policy like this could result in cheaper ticket prices, in my experience the involvement of a TMC (even one with negotiated pricing) is still more expensive than using one of the many discount ticket websites. I assume that similar motivations for negotiated pricing drove the purchasing system on workday but the ‘WPI negotiated pricing’ still often remains higher than what I can find/negotiate myself and I fear this will do the same for travel. Funding is tight and even modest increases in ticket prices will preclude me from attending or sending students to conferences- meaning this policy will hurt our faculty and labs, not help them.</p>
3	3/8/2021	Gary Collins	<p>The hyperlink to the ‘MyTrips Travel Registry’ (5.4.7 & 5.4.7.1) is not functioning... but here is the hyperlink for the information on the WPI webpage. https://www.wpi.edu/student-experience/resources/off-campus-projects/health-safety-security/my-trips-travel-registry</p>
4	3/8/2021	Joshua Rosenstock	<p>I am concerned that using a travel management company is actually going to complicate travel planning and in fact make it harder to plan economical travel. For example, for many of the places I need to travel to it’s actually cheaper and more convenient to my destination to use Airbnb than a hotel, but I suspect that the travel management company is going to force me to use hotel chains with which they have a financial arrangement.</p> <p>I worry that this will have an effect on things like car rental and airline travel as well - we’ll be forced to use the companies the management company prefers, rather than the one that actually provides the best service for the price.</p> <p>In my experience, any kind of prepaid travel discount often equates to being shunted into a lower class of service by the transit company since you are not seen as a profitable customer.</p>
5	3/9/2021	Natalie Farny	<p>I am writing in opposition to the enforced use of a travel management company (TMC) for booking of all university-related travel.</p>



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			<p>The proposed requirement for booking through a TMC, rather than allowing employees to find suitable arrangements on their own via the internet, suggests that the originators of this policy believe that currently employees are being exorbitant in their spending on travel, or at the very least that they are not being as frugal as possible, and that this will be curtailed by the use of the TMC. Does the university have any evidence that this is true?</p> <p>The use of a TMC also suggests that the university has some evidence that, on average, the discounts that would be provided by the TMC are significantly less than what is currently spent by employees on arrangements like airfare and lodging. Is this the case? Since no TMC is identified in the policy (it says TBD currently), it seems impossible to me that anyone can know whether this will actually save any money.</p> <p>The policy is unclear about how much autonomy travelers will have in making their travel arrangements. For instance, what if I need to book my travel at a certain time of day because of my work schedule or family-related duties. If that flight costs \$100 more than some other flight that leaves at a time that causes me a serious personal or professional inconvenience, will I be permitted to book the more expensive flight? Same with hotels – will I be permitted to make decisions about what accommodations are reasonable, given my personal and work-related needs? The policy language surrounding who decides what is reasonable should be strengthened to protect the traveling employee, and clearly state that the TMC will not decide what is reasonable, but will have a role only in facilitating arrangements the employee believes are reasonable.</p> <p>Finally, it is unclear to me why this policy should apply to grant-funded travel. It doesn't make sense from a cost-savings argument, because the university doesn't get those savings back as the funds are under the control of the PIs. PIs make budgets for travel that are approved by their funding agencies and are subject to the regulations of those agencies. They don't need to be regulated by the university, too. As long as a PI is in compliance with the travel policy of their funding agency, there is no reason for these rules to apply to grant-funded travel. I do appreciate the need for other aspects of the proposal (registration of travel, for example). I also understand that the university has the right to regulate university-sponsored travel in this manner. However I feel an exemption to the use of the TMC should be made for grant-funded travel. If the TMC is the cheaper option, then great. But as a PI, I need to stretch my funds as far as I can, and I need the autonomy to do so by ensuring I am getting the best deal I can for my travel arrangements.</p> <p>My concern is that the use of a TMC will be more time consuming, and result in less convenient or less cost-effective arrangements. This may actually end up costing more out of our grants than allowing us to search the internet for better prices on flights and hotels.</p> <p>As a parent, I also need the flexibility to make travel arrangements that are compatible with the needs of my family. Therefore I oppose the mandatory use of a TMC for all university-related travel.</p>
6	3/9/2021	Angela Rodriguez	<p>I'd like to submit the following comments on the new Travel Expense Policy.</p> <p>First, it appears that this policy necessitates having a p-card. Many members of the WPI community do not have one, nor do they want one. What is the alternative. Will it be possible to book travel using the departmental p-card, which could then be charged to the appropriate account to clear the charge?</p>



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			<p>Second, this policy places substantial burden on faculty who need or elect to travel with dependents. For instance, if a faculty member brings children with them to a conference, how will booking the airfare be handled? It cumbersome to book family members on separate reservations, and this runs the risk of not all people getting on the same flight or being seated together. It's also impossible to book a small child on a reservation without an accompanying adult. Will TMC be able to book all tickets and then charge the faculty member's fares versus the family's fares separately so the faculty member can pay out of pocket for family members? A similar logistical issue arises if a faculty member is traveling with a spouse or partner. Although these fares can be booked separately, then the same issues about getting on the same flight and being seated together arise. It is far more advantageous to have groups traveling together on the same reservation. It seems imperative to have procedure for this established up front to avoid downstream confusion and frustration. Alternatively, WPI could allow faculty traveling with dependents/family to continue to book their own flights and reimburse only their portion of the fare.</p> <p>Thanks for your consideration of these issues.</p>
7	3/9/2021	Colleen Shaver	<p>Hi-</p> <p>I'm curious how this applies to Mass Academy related travel? I am specifically asked because I regularly book travel related to our FIRST robotics team where we travel with Mass Academy students, other high school students, WPI students, alumni, etc. To be clear this paid out of an operational budget with a cost center/activity code not associated with the Mass Academy, but that funding is directed for the Mass Academy robotics team that is managed by me as part of my job as a WPI employee.</p> <p>I have a WPI P-card that is primarily used for expenses associated with this program. We currently use it to book all our annual travel. We always shop around for lower rates that meet our specific travel needs (which often includes arriving by a certain time of day while trying to minimize the amount of school the kids miss) because the more it costs, the less kids we can take with us.</p> <p>Specifically, we often book:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rental vehicles for travel to events, often needing to fit robots or several people (so mini-vans or transit vans). We rarely if ever have needs to book midsize vehicles, only larger. - Buses to travel to overnight events (3-5 days), typically in US but sometimes to Canada. - Hotel for overnight events (3-5 days), 1-2 times per year - Group airline tickets to travel to World Championship (within US, currently Detroit) <p>Questions:</p>



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			<p>The travel policy does not mention bus travel (outside of what seems like individual bus fare). Will the Travel Booking Site/TMC be able to book buses? If not, will we be able to book/pay with P-card as we do now? We have regular bus companies we book with that we hope we could request to be included with any booking site if that is what we need to use.</p> <p>The FIRST Championship event negotiates specific hotel rates/block with hotels nearby the venue. The only way to book a hotel within one hour of the venue is to book through FIRST (if we were an hour+ out it would require rental vehicles, \$30+ per day parking fees, etc, besides adding an extensive commute). Will we be allowed to book our hotels through the FIRST system at their negotiated rates? Most years it's between \$4000-5000 for the hotels (8 rooms for 4-5 nights in downtown Detroit)</p> <p>Will the booking site offer group travel book for airfare? We typically use group booking because it gives a good rate and reserves the seats but allows us enter the names later, since we really don't know the names until later when rates have gone up. Also it's important because we need to ensure everyone gets on the same plane since they are high schoolers. If it won't offer group rates, will we be allowed to book through group booking at the individual airlines to get the group booking benefits?</p>
8	3/9/2021	Scarlet Shell	<p>I write to express my high level of concern about the proposed Travel Expense Policy. Specifically, I am concerned that the requirement to book travel through a TMC will make travel prohibitively expensive for us faculty who pay for travel using grant funds and personal development funds. I did a postdoc at an institution that required plane tickets to be purchased through a TMC, and they were substantially more expensive than market rates. I use grants and personal development account funds to travel to conferences and send my student to conferences. Attending these conferences is critical for us to maintain our profile in the research community, and provides invaluable experiences for students. I work hard to obtain the necessary funds and it is of utmost importance to me that I use them judiciously. I therefore ensure that we do comparison shopping to find the cheapest flights and lodging. Because I need to use my limited funds carefully to maintain a healthy research program, there is build-in accountability and incentivization. I can attest that there is no money wasted when I or my students travel, because every dollar I spend on airfare is a dollar that I don't have available for lab supplies, salaries, tuition, publishing fees, etc. Just as my care with these limited funds means we don't waste money now, it means that I am uncomfortable with an institutional policy that restricts my ability to manage and spend these funds judiciously.</p> <p>If the TMC can offer cheaper airfare and lodging than we can get in the open market, I wonder what the rationale is for requiring us to use it. We would use it voluntarily if it saved us money. I was also wondering if the TMC under consideration can provide guarantees for airfare and lodging rates that are at least as good as what is available through direct purchase on the open market.</p> <p>I raised these concerns with a few colleagues, and some of them thought that the proposed policy would not apply to travel funded by faculty grants. My interpretation was that grant-funded travel would fall under this policy. Can you provide clarification on that, please? If I'm understanding correctly that grant-funded travel is included, then I have an additional level of concern that other faculty may not be raising concerns during the comment period because they don't realize that this policy will apply to them.</p>



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			Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.
9	3/13/2021	Louis Roberts	Dear APG I am not in support of mandating the use of a travel company to act as a middle entity. Exclusivity agreements with “middle people” are far more likely to cost more and be more restrictive.
10	3/17/2021	Nicole Caligiuri	Hi all, I have a few questions regarding the travel policy, namely, how it affects grad students and post docs. What are the changes to procedure that our supported grad students and postdocs will have to utilize to comply as they book travel in the future? Will those without PCards still be able to make travel arrangements on their own, and file for reimbursement like now, or are there extra steps they will have to take?
11	3/18/2021	Kent Rissmiller	I realize that Gary, Erin and Nancy were involved with vetting travel management companies, but they don’t routinely travel for the Global Program. I’m beginning to hear back from center directors and faculty who advise off campus and some, who were forced to work with TMCs in the past, believe that they just make a profit off of us without providing any real benefit. They site many examples when they could find less costly arrangements, especially to out of the way places – think Armenia. So they question the overall value of this approach. Other faculty have expressed that the travel expense policy is just not well informed. It might work for going to Europe or Japan, but we deal in many places where credit cards are not accepted and receipts are not routinely given – eg. Morocco and Ghana. We are assembling this information so that we can express these concerns to the APG in a consistent voice. Probably most of the policy can work for travel to Hawaii. But it may not work in northern India. Lastly, because the policy is reported to be 21 pages long, no one, including me, has had the time to read it.
12	3/18/2021	Aaron Sakulich	Hello, I have reviewed the travel proposal. Since most of my travel is through the international IQP program (I run the Panama and Iceland programs), I offer the comments below primarily from that vantage point and as constructive offerings. I am trying to get this email knocked out before grading and reading final IQP proposals for Armenia, and I very much apologize if this is a bit more "flow of thought" than a coherent, polished email. Please evaluate the ideas and not, so to speak, the grammar! :) I should mention that the APG policy, however, makes things quite difficult. In a faculty meeting if someone raises a concern, it might be something that I had missed, or it might influence something I have to say; not knowing what other people think about the policy constrains me to perhaps the most obvious



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			<p>comments and the ones that are most specific to my experience. Knowing what other people are thinking helps me to round out my own opinions, and so I apologize if these comments are perhaps a bit on the niche side. On the one hand, I understand the need for a policy; on the other hand, it makes me somewhat sad, as though the administration thinks that the faculty are out there racking up fraudulent bills all the time. It would mean a lot to see a detailed analysis of, and justification for, the motivation for this policy, and how much money we are expected to save through its implementation. Is the expense of associating ourselves with a TMC really going to outweigh whatever unreasonable expenses are currently being racked up? Do we have any proof that the existing process is insufficient in some way?</p> <p>My primary concern is that WPI is in danger of being “penny wise and dollar foolish”. As an example, when I last travelled to the Armenia Project Center, it was a 20 hour trip (Boston to Moscow to Yerevan). I could have saved something like \$100 by going having a layover in, I think, Germany, but that would have made it a 36 hour trip. If the focus is solely on the lowest possible cost, I can easily see significant losses of productive time as travelers cool their heels in layovers. Similarly – sometimes money can be saved on a flight by taking a budget airline that has no baggage allowances, and I see that fees for baggage will not generally be reimbursed. When I travel to the NSF, will I be allowed to stay at the Holiday Inn right next to the building, or will I have to save \$10 a night by staying somewhere else miles away? I personally prefer to fly out of providence because although it is 15 minutes further away from me than Logan is, it is INFINTELY easier to park, get through security, etc. Will I still be able to do this? Or must I fly out of only the closest airport? I guess what I am saying is that in my opinion there needs to be some allowance for personal judgment and weighing pros and cons, which is not the impression that I get from reading this document.</p> <p>I will mention that before WorkDay, the reimbursement process was that I gave my receipts to an administrative assistant who submitted the documents. Now, it takes 5x – 10x longer for me to submit a report on my own. Considering the disparity between the salaries of administrative assistants compared to faculty, I think that the university is actually losing a significant amount of money using this process. I have a similar worry about getting preapprovals and using the management company – if it takes significantly longer to arrange travel, this is not in the best interests of the university!</p> <p>I am concerned about the reference that the TMC “can advise” about international travel. I would rather imagine that most WPI travel is international. If all bookings are meant to go through the TMC – are they really going to be able to book a hotel to me when I advise at some of our more far-flung project centers? Can they get me and the students I am advising a lodging in Rural Namibia during a data-gathering trip? Can they help me rent a car in Yerevan Armenia? I find this all but impossible to imagine – and if they can’t do that for the program that is responsible (I assume) for the majority of WPI travel, then what is the point?</p> <p>I may have missed it, but I don’t see anything about reimbursement for parking at airports. Driving my car to Providence Airport and paying the parking fee is actually cheaper than using a shuttle service from Worcester to Logan airport for trips shorter than 5 days in length, if I recall correctly. (To be fair, it’s been a while since I travelled).</p>



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			<p>I see that in one place it mentions that tolls will not be reimbursed, and in another place I see that tolls WILL be reimbursed for bridges and tunnels. In Panama, as example, there is a \$10 toll to enter or leave the airport (it's how the government funds airport maintenance). There are similar tolls in certain parts of Iceland, which again are neither bridge nor tunnel tolls. And of course there are highway tolls between Worcester and Logan airport (and for a short trip, driving my car and parking at Logan is cheaper than a shuttle service, as mentioned above). Will any of these be covered?</p> <p>Regarding meal costs, I am not sure that the guidance is appropriate regarding the various destinations in which we have project centers. For \$10 in Panama, for example, you could buy enough food to fill a dumptruck; in Iceland, a \$10 breakfast would consist of tap water and one half of one slice of untoasted white bread. I would perhaps suggest that the 'guidelines' for meals could reflect the GSA rates by which one is expected to abide when travelling on a grant, rather than the blanket numbers reflected here? If I am limited to \$10 breakfasts in Iceland, I am going to lose a lot of weight if I advise there!</p> <p>My final comment is regarding receipts. First – we have project centers all over the world. Will I need to provide translation services when I return with, for example, a restaurant receipt written in Icelandic? A taxi receipt written in Armenian? A hotel receipt from our Thailand project center? If not, what is the purpose of requiring receipts even if no one at WPI can read them? Second - receipts just aren't a thing in some countries. I lived in Morocco for a year during graduate school aside from some of the European chain hotels I can't begin to imagine how I would get a receipt for anything. On the other hand, in Panama receipts ARE a thing, but I am nowhere near fluent in Spanish and have gotten so frustrated trying to get receipts there in the past that I have given up. Does the new policy really mean that I'd be on the hook for expenses where I just can't get a receipt? I of course only have anecdotal evidence on this point, but I would hope that some language could be added to allow for a level of flexibility depending on circumstances. The policy should have some room for personal judgment based on specific circumstances.</p> <p>Thank you, Aaron</p> <p>PS - For what it is worth regarding the alcohol policy, when using a personal credit card in the past, I simply do not ask to be reimbursed for Alcohol. Blacking out two beers from an itemized receipt and paying for them myself is much easier than getting separate receipts, particularly in countries where I don't speak the language fluently. If a P Card is expected for ALL expenses from now on, it's going to add an extra little time-consuming inconvenience.</p>
13	3/22/2021	Jeanine Skorinko	<p>Thank you for working on a travel expense policy.</p> <p>I have a few comments:</p> <p>How did the limit of \$1000 come to be? It seems rather arbitrary rather than based on actual travel expenses. When I submit for grants, I work in at least \$1500 per conference travel (\$500-\$600 for airfare, \$500-600 for hotel costs, and the remainder for transportation to/from the airport, food, etc.). Most of my travels for conferences (unless they are local) cost over \$1000, so I fear this need to get it approved ahead of time is going to create more work and</p>



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			<p>headaches for faculty and those who need to approve. I recommend increasing from \$1000 to \$1500 to reduce the workload for everyone. Or at least look at the average costs expended for conferences. That data should be available. This is also going to be problematic for project centers and project center travel. Those tickets can exceed \$1000 alone depending on location.</p> <p>There was information in there that was a little confusing about conference hotels. Many conferences book hotels way in advance. For instance, several of the conference I attend now forces us to pay EXTRA if we stay at another hotel and there are room still available in the hotel block. This is because hotels are starting to charge for unused rooms in a room block. I would rethink this in light of this fact. I don't know that we will actually get cost savings. The other thing to consider is that for faculty and graduate students and post-docs staying at the conference hotel(s) allows for networking and other important conference experiences by running into people you may want to collaborate with, write a grant with etc. So, the extra few dollars could actually lead to more benefits for the person attending.</p> <p>There is language about using a p-card. Clarification on this is needed. Currently, faculty are not required to have a p-card. It appears that there would need to be a new policy that requires all faculty to have a p-card otherwise, the travel expense policy won't work as it is stated because currently faculty do not need to have a p-card. I then wonder what forcing p-cards on all faculty then does for workload and systems at WPI. I currently do not have a p-card and personally, I don't really want yet one more thing to track in my wallet. (And, I have credit and bank cards that allow me to make transactions abroad without any international transaction fees because I travel so frequently).</p> <p>Thank you again for working on the policy. I hope these comments are helpful as you consider the policy and ramifications of some of the language in it.</p>
14	3/22/2021	Amy Fabiano	<p>Hello,</p> <p>Based on feedback from Cross Insurance, the following language should be removed from the Travel Expense Policy: "WPI's auto insurance policy will cover liability insurance claims provided the Employee was not operating the vehicle in a negligent or reckless manner, driving while intoxicated or under the use of a controlled substance at the time of the accident. In these cases, the Employee may be solely liable for all damages to the vehicle(s) and personal injuries resulting from the accident."</p> <p>Fran McCormack at Cross Insurance explained, "... since insurance coverage depends on the written policy specifics, I always refrain from stating or implying (particularly in a written document) whether or not there will be 'coverage' in certain situations. (I don't believe that the statement regarding negligence/recklessness is accurate... but will confirm with Liz.) It is ok to say 'WPI's auto insurance policy provides liability insurance for claims incurred when an Authorized Driver drives a WPI Vehicle on WPI Business.'"</p> <p>OGC will make a corresponding change in the draft Fleet Safety Policy.</p>



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15	3/28/2021	Anna Gold	<p>Dear colleagues,</p> <p>I hope this finds you all well and enjoying the weekend!</p> <p>It is great that this draft policy continues to encourage economy / coach air travel wherever the health needs of travelers don't require business or first class. This will save WPI money, and it also promises to minimize the carbon emissions associated with WPI air travel. (See https://www.airportwatch.org.uk/2013/06/new-norwich-airport-flights-revealed-for-winter-2010/ , https://www.greencarcongress.com/2019/07/20190701-sivak.html).</p> <p>In order to underscore and support WPI's commitment to sustainability, here are three other ideas to consider that could be adopted, at least in part, through this new Travel Expense Policy. I've shared a version of the first idea earlier this month with Paul Mathisen and Jeff Solomon, so I'll include Paul in the cc's:</p> <p>(1) Establish a small carbon offset fee for all WPI-sponsored air travel, and use these fees support our Green Revolving Fund. https://www.wpi.edu/offices/sustainability/programs/green-revolving-fund. This fee could be \$8-\$15 per trip - see examples at https://secondnature.org/climate-action-guidance/iv-case-studies/</p> <p>2) Add a sentence or two in the new policy that encourages travelers to consider alternatives to travel that are equally effective for professional networking and advancement. Separately from the expense policy, we might provide information on sustainable travel to support travelers in making a To Travel or Not To Travel decision - something like what McGill offers: https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/get-involved/sustainable-travel. But just adding this sentence to the policy might save WPI a lot of money if some travelers stop, consider alternatives, and forgo unnecessary travel.</p> <p>3) In selecting a Travel Management Company, consider their ability to support sustainability considerations in making travel arrangements, as a factor in selection. This is an issue the corporate travel industry is familiar with: https://business.travelcounsellors.com/en/2017/09/01/why-your-business-needs-a-green-travel-policy/</p> <p>The benefits to WPI of considering the costs to our carbon emissions of travel as part of our travel expense policy could be quite significant for our bottom line, as well as our 'carbon budget' bottom line. Other potential benefits include supporting our Green Revolving Fund, and advancing the commitments we've made in our Sustainability Plan to considering sustainability impacts and opportunities throughout our work at WPI (Objective O1):</p> <p>"WPI reduces environmental impacts by reducing the use of energy, water, waste and other resources, and by considering creative ideas to incentivize and promote efficiency and resource reduction."</p>



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			Thank you for taking the time to consider these ideas.
16	3/28/2021	Paul Mathisen	<p>Thanks for the email, Anna. And thank you for these great ideas!</p> <p>I'd also think that getting people to think more about their travel will help to raise awareness about sustainability overall. This can help encourage people to work to improve efficiency and reduce the costs of our operations and activities. I'd be happy to help consider approaches for enhancing sustainability in our travel.</p> <p>Best regards, Paul</p>
17	3/29/2021	Kristin Wobbe	<p>The Center for Project-Based Learning (pre-COVID) traveled to colleges and universities across the country and infrequently outside the country to deliver custom workshops. These trips were paid for by the client institution, sometimes directly – they bought the tickets, sometimes by reimbursing the Center for travel we booked on a P-Card. As such this travel was not paid for by WPI and we would appreciate being able to book our own flights as necessary using a P-card.</p> <p>Kris Wobbe</p>
18	3/29/2021	Lauren Mathews	<p>Hi APG members,</p> <p>I have a number of concerns about the proposed travel expense policy, but they are mainly about the fact that the impacts on those of us who travel a lot, especially for academic reasons, are unknown. I think many of us are concerned that the requirements of the policy may impose significant costs to individual faculty members in terms of time, convenience, and sanity, though possibly some of the benefits may help to offset the costs to travelers.</p> <p>In particular, I am concerned about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having no clear understanding of the extent to which our travel options will be limited by the required use of the TMC (or perhaps they will not be limited at all compared to not using a TMC) 2. Confusion about the pre-authorization process and how significantly this will hinder our travel planning and scheduling (it will hinder planning, there is no doubt about that) 3. What happens if I violate the travel policy, either inadvertently or because of extenuating circumstances while on travel 4. Where I go to get clarification on policies that I am having trouble interpreting for a specific situation <p>5. Because so many of us in the Global Projects Program travel extensively and have spent years developing skills and knowledge in how to make this travel as convenient and low-cost as is reasonably possible, it seems like it would be wise to have a pilot test of the policy before formal adoption. Perhaps it could be pilot-tested either campus-wide or by a subset of the campus in a 1-year trial to understand better where the policy is beneficial and where it may impose</p>



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			costs that outweigh its benefits, and most importantly, how it can be improved. I fear there may be significant disruption if the policy is implemented with no such trial or transition period!
			Thanks for your consideration-
19	3/29/2021	Jagan Srinivasan	<p>Dear members of the APG, I am a tenured faculty in the department of Biology and Biotechnology under the leadership of Prof. Duffy. I have a federally-funded research lab with an R01 funding from the NIH. I have read the recent FAP minutes and saw that the travel expense policy for using a travel management company (TMC) applies to federally-funded projects also.</p> <p>As a concerned faculty, I would like to <u>raise an objection</u> to the said policy. I would like to state the reasons below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This policy does not allow the PI to compare flights for cheaper options. This is especially true for travel to certain conferences, wherein the PI has to send several students to the conference. Given the limited amount of funding, we look for the best possible options and sometimes the options are last-minute deals. We have been very successful using this in previous years. 2. It also does not allow for last-minute changes due to unavoidable circumstances. We believe that we should be given the option of selecting how the travel can be planned for both PI and students. 3. Even within our department, there is a strong objection to this policy amongst various faculty as we feel that limits our options for best using the grant money. <p>Hence, I request the members of APG to hear our concerns and adjust the policy in response to our queries.</p>
20	3/29/2021	Albert Simeoni	<p>Hello,</p> <p>I would like to comment on key points of the travel expense policy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Employment of a travel management company. I understand this need for the trips which are to be taken on WPI's own budget (operating budget) and the rationale is convincing (reimbursement for canceled trips). However, I don't see any benefit for sponsored research or for personal development funds. I am myself getting everything already reimbursed quite efficiently and seamlessly. Going through an agency would be an additional burden. Actually, I was in a company which used an agency and I never got any cheaper flight or hotel room compared to what I could find on the internet in 5 mins. The addition of the agency fee made it more expensive each time and the communication with the agency was a useless burden. And because I was (and still am) a frequent traveler, I had sometimes to change trips, which involved very long exchanges with the agency while I could do it myself in a few minutes. Apply this policy to all trips seems like a bad idea. b. Workday pre-authorization: this is an undue burden, both on the traveler and on the administration.



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			<p>c. Required use of a college P-card for air and hotel purchases: this may save some money on WPI's budget (operating budget) but it may have an opposite effect for my research. Using my own card allowed me to use perks for my team, such as free breakfast for all people traveling with me or free meals at the airport, making substantial savings on my research budget.</p> <p>d. Requirement of receipts for out of pocket transaction payments above \$25 (down from the current threshold of \$75): this is an undue burden, both on the traveler and on the administration. I think it has been removed and I am glad for that.</p> <p>e. No longer permitting travel fare upgrades out of professional development funds: I do not understand this intrusion on personal development funds (for this policy and earlier policies). I may have done it once or twice in the past and it was to cover the most difficult part of successive trips while suffering from severe neck pain. I am quite responsible with my funds (and I will assume that most of my colleagues are) and if I did not do it, I would have needed to cancel at least one of the trips.</p> <p>I see in this policy and in earlier policies a trend which is seriously concerning me. We are adding unnecessary burdens particularly to the people who are research-active. I am convinced that it will result in de-incentivizing research and maybe even service to the university. A discussion with my colleagues at other universities also show that we are becoming even more burdensome than most of public colleges, which is concerning if we want to remain attractive to the best researchers. I am convinced that to be successful, a researcher has to operate like an entrepreneur and adding all this burden and stiffness to the process may stifle enthusiasm and creativity. If people do not manage well their grants and their personal development funds, they will be the first to suffer. And even if they do so, it will not result in savings for the university as these funds are restricted. I do not think that removing flexibility and perks to the people who are working hard to bring more to WPI is the way to go and will be beneficial to the university over the long term.</p>
21	3/29/2021	Suzanne LePage	<p>After reviewing the proposed Travel Expense Policy, I felt that the policy related to family travel was left unclear. Section 5.4.10 indicates that any expenses incurred by family members are not reimbursable. This is reasonable – and is not a change from the existing policy. However, if all bookings are required to go through a (to be named) online booking tool or designated TBC, how will it be possible to coordinate tickets and seating if purchasing separately? Currently, if my spouse or child were to travel with me, I would simply purchase the tickets, make the hotel accommodations, etc. using my own personal finances – and then later, submit expense reports for my portion of the travel expenses. This would ensure that my children and I would be on the same flight – and sit in proximity to each other. It would also allow me to book two adjacent rooms in a hotel as needed, expensing only my stay to WPI. How will employees and project advisors be able to coordinate family travel under the new booking policy?</p>
22	3/29/2021	Greg Fischer	<p>Hello,</p> <p>I wanted to comment on the proposed travel policy. I see the motivation for some cases, and it has many reasonable aspects, but it seems to overlook the fact that a lot of travel (especially faculty and grad student conference travel) is not readily planned this way, nor do those types of travel affect the university budget.</p>



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			<p>The policy seems to overlook the fact that there are at least two very distinct types of travel – “administrative/business travel” which is paid out of operating budgets, and “academic/research” travel which is paid out of research grants and/or PD funds. The latter of which is primarily faculty and graduate students traveling to conferences and other such meeting funded primarily out of federal research grants.</p> <p>First, it is very unclear why academic/research/education related travel funded out of research grants and or individual faculty professional development funds is under the purview of the administrative policy group. According to APG’s charter, the scope does not apply to: “The process for “initiating, considering, and making recommendations on questions of educational policy and problems arising therefrom. <u>A question is one of educational policy to the extent that it bears upon conditions facilitating instruction, study, research, publication, and other scholarly or cultural activities of faculty members and students</u>” as set forth in the Faculty Handbook at p. 1-5.”</p> <p>In fact by this definition, research-related travel of faculty and students very clearly does not belong in the scope of APG.</p> <p>Second, the stated purpose of this policy, based on the just-transmitted FAP Meeting #23 minutes, is “this draft policy was another outgrowth of the WPI Forward work which had been <u>aimed at containing travel costs to realize some savings for the college</u>”.</p> <p>Travel funded out of research grants and/or individual faculty professional development funds (not operating costs) has absolutely no effect on the university budget and constraining it provides no savings to the university.</p> <p>Those two points alone should make it clear that this should not apply to travel supported by research grants and/or individual faculty professional development funds.</p> <p>However, if for some reason a restrictive & burdensome travel policy is still being considered for faculty and student travel supported by research grants and/or individual faculty professional development funds, then I have the following specific comments/reservations about the policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Requiring a travel agency seems crazy: “Employees are required to use WPI’s Online Booking Tool [TBD] or designated TMC, to book air, hotel, car or other Travel arrangements”. First off, I have no idea how that could actually be economical since now there is a middleperson who has to take a cut. Next, this limits making quick decisions on purchases based on sales on airfare, etc so it does not necessarily reduce costs. Further this prevent placing travel orders direct from hotel or airline websites which usually have the best rates and allow for changes most readily (I have had MANY problems when I need to make changes when using rewards travel or a travel agency – this is just asking for trouble!). Suggesting this as a preferred option sounds fine, but requiring it seems very problematic. c. What happens when the travel agency (or associated online booning service) is not able to make the required reservations (or to do so in a timely enough manner)? There are many such scenarios, such as when changes need to be made last minute or when needing to make interconnecting legs of travel by air, rail, or car that are not planned in advance. It is VERY common to make previously unplanned side trips when at conference, etc to



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			<p>visit with other research labs & universities to help build collaborations. Again, recommending using such a service when practical makes sense, but requiring it is not feasible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Along those lines I just want to make sure there is a clear appeals/exception policy to ensure we are reimbursed/approved for required expenses regardless of whether they are able to be made according to the very restrictive rules or not. e. This seems very burdensome with an enormous amount of additional time and hassle. Why are we trying to further overloading already overloaded faculty? So easy to just book a flight (sometimes with <24hrs of planning) on a p-card or personal card and file expense report – this adds A LOT of extra work. f. Are we giving PCards to all of our graduate students? This seems to imply PCards are the preferred way to make travel arrangement and expenses while traveling. Pretty much every PhD and MS thesis student goes on conference travel, so please keep this in mind. g. Why would you include approvals from Deans or Department heads with regard to funds where the faculty member is PI and responsible for those funds. “Exceptions may be granted for additional leg room or if not available, business class, for health related extenuating circumstances with pre-approval from a Dean or Division Head”. So we need to ask the Dean to get extended leg room seats paid on one’s PD funds? Which, by the way, allow folks to be comfortable enough to nap and do a day trip and save on hotels which cost way more. h. That being said, it is nice to know that at least we can now get private or chartered flights J i. I have no idea what the Online Booking Tool is, but again I am not convinced that it is capable of making the hotel, etc reservations required. I am primarily referring to international travel hotels nearby the conference site (usually not the conference hotel which is typically way overpriced). Maybe if more information is provided then I would feel better about it. But I foresee major problems with this. Again, softening the language to recommend such a service makes sense. For example, at a recent international conference I got there and the hotel I had booked was unable to provide my reservation and I scrambled to find another reservation that I booked at the front desk of another hotel. j. Similarly, it is common to make other travel arrangements such as trains on the fly when traveling so it is impractical (if even possible) to use such a tool/agency to book. k. For rental cars, again this TBD service may or may not be appropriate depending on the location. It is common to get rental cars while on conference trips to visit other labs/universities. Will the needed car rental companies be in there? <p>In summary, I strongly urge appropriately setting the scope of the policy to not encompass research/education related travel funded on grants or PD funds that have absolutely no effect on operating budget. And, I strongly suggest softening language to make “suggestions” rather than “requirements” because in many cases (some we can foresee, and many none of us foresee) they will not be possible to accommodate. Further, it is hard to truly evaluate the implications of this without knowing more about this mythical travel booking system that can book & revise booking on every airline, every hotel, every train, and every car rental agency with the best prices and immediate service.</p> <p>Bottom line is – why make things harder that will not save any money and make it a much bigger hassle??</p>



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			Thank you for your consideration. Happy to discuss further.
23	3/30/2021	Nancy Burnham	<p>APG,</p> <p>My personal experience with travel management companies (TMCs) has been varied. If I'm heading to DC to serve on an NSF panel, the process works quite well. The trip is simple - there and back. The tickets I get allow changes, so the trip is convenient.</p> <p>However, my experience with TMCs for complicated trips (e.g. multiple stops, partial personal travel, companion travel, in-country trips from a global project center, specific needs or housing requirements for students, etc.) is poor. I doubt that a TMC could do better for a global project center than someone who knows the country well.</p> <p>If a TMC could save us money, I'd like to know how. (Show me the data!) If the impetus for this policy is that some departments overspent, then please just give them a budget limit and leave the rest of us to continue as we successfully have.</p> <p>My guess is that the proposed policy was developed with national conference and recruiting travel in mind. In contrast, I doubt that a TMC knows how to save money better than I do for my own project center.</p> <p>I hope you'll reconsider the travel policy, at least as it applies to the Global Projects Program (GPP).</p> <p>Cordially yours, Nancy</p> <p>P.S. The authorization limit of \$1000 would put Kent in the position of having to pre-authorize a significant fraction of the trips that the project center directors make. That's not a good use of his time. The limit should be higher for the GPP.</p>
24	3/30/2021	Mark Claypool	<p>Comment on the proposed Travel Expense Policy.</p> <p>It seems to me that the biggest change in this policy (and the biggest potential impact) is the use of the Travel Management Company (TMC). So, that leaves me with a lot of questions:</p> <p>It would seem cost savings in this new policy will come primarily from using the TMC. I can see this playing out in a few ways:</p> <p>Making travel arrangements and reimbursement onerous, so: 1) WPI employees just don't travel as much. That would save money, but would make us worse at our jobs. Or 2) WPI employees shoulder more of the cost themselves since getting WPI to pay for it is a pain or not allowed. That would also save WPI money but is insidious – basically equivalent to a salary reduction.</p>



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			<p>Having a TMC that finds bargains or has negotiated discounts so that the exact same travel done before without the TPC is now less expensive.</p> <p>I really hope the intent of the policy is for reason "B" (cost savings through bargain hunting) and not reason "A" (attrition). If reason "A" is the plan, that's messed up.</p> <p>Regarding cost savings the TPC might find, to what lengths will it do so? Travel by Spirit Air whenever possible? Save \$25 on airfare even if it takes an extra 4 hours, 3 hops and 2 plane changes? Rent a car from an off-terminal company that requires a shuttle (and an extra hour of time to get the car) to save \$5/day? In most of the above cases TIME IS MONEY. I would easily reduce time spent getting a car or changing planes for some extra cost. WPI should too. WPI should shoulder this cost since more time spent getting to a destination is less time I spend doing my job (research, teaching, advising). Put it another way, WPI should actively avoid paying faculty and staff to spend time walking and waiting in airports and such and should instead get them to where they need to go as fast as possible so they can do the job they are getting paid for.</p> <p>How much discretion does a WPI employee have in making bookings? Does the TPC say "here is your trip" and it's take it or leave it? Or can someone say "I'll take the non-stop option" without having to get prior approval for the extra cost (over, say, the 2-hop option) or without having to pay the difference out of pocket.</p> <p>I assume there is data and analysis someplace showing the savings a TPC might have on WPI's travel budget (hopefully, data from a third party and not data provided by a TPC hoping WPI will use it). I assume this data was used in helping shape this policy. Can this be shared? It would be great if such data included not just \$\$ cost savings but some indication of time costs (e.g., did average travel times to destination increase).</p> <p>Lastly, is there a trial period for this? It would be nice if it was "built-in" with a plan to revisit this for convenience (e.g., a survey) and cost savings before baking this new policy in for the long-term.</p>
25	3/30/2021	Arne Gericke	<p>Dear APG group</p> <p>I am concerned that the use of a travel management company adds work, lacks convenience and at the end won't save much of our money. In my experience, working with TMCs required phone calls, multiple emails and often I did not get a connection that was the best combination of price and travel effort. My travel is mostly funded through grants (either direct or through indirect cost return) and I have a keen interest to control the cost. For example, for flights (in particular European flights) I monitor several months in advance the cost for the flight to find the best time point to buy (using in part the Kayak price predictor). Is the TMC doing this for me and informs me when it is the right time to buy? If not, why using the TMC in the first place? For me, TMCs are a relict of pre-internet traveling (through they "dress" up as internet savvy companies) and the cost savings can be realized by instituting smarter policies than this across the board mandate.</p>



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			<p>Why is grant and PDA funded travel included in this mandate? How about making the use of a TMC in this case optional? The university will not save money by instituting the mandate for this kind of travel. I am interested in protecting the funds I have available and I should be allowed to decide how to do this.</p> <p>When I am in Europe, I mostly travel by train. I am well aware of the discounts available and I typically book on short notice so that I can maintain flexibility - a TMC won't help in this regard. In fact TMCs are often offering inferior service when traveling in foreign countries.</p> <p>Conference organizers typically make Hotels available for booking by conference attendees. Large conferences also partner with airlines and provide a discount. TMCs don't have access to these booking offerings. Again - why go through a TMC when the conference organizer provides me with 10 or so hotel choices I can book depending on my budget? Going through the conference organizer's website is fast and convenient and i typically have more generous cancel and change policies than booking outside the conference organizers webpage.</p> <p>My students typically book AirBnBs when traveling as a group to conferences - how will this being handled? Students are incredibly savvy in stretching the available funds and I doubt that the TMC will do a better job.</p> <p>How will split financing being handled where the funds for the student conference travel come in part from the conference organizer, the university and my grant (or a subset thereof?).</p> <p>I am surprised that travel authorization will be primarily a financial one. At my previous institution travel of faculty needed to be authorized to ensure that classes are not negatively impacted by the travel (questions like "which classes are impacted by your travel", "who will be teaching your classes in your absence"). DHs were required to sign off on travel which I thought was a good practice. While the majority of faculty will take care of their classes (or avoid traveling when teaching) others will not and put a replacement teacher in the class that is not appropriate.</p> <p>Thank you for considering my concerns</p>
26	3/30/2021	Dominic Golding	<p>Dear APG Members,</p> <p>As a faculty member in DIGS (formerly IGSD) and the Global Projects Program (GPP) I take relatively few trips but usually for extended periods. I am typically away from campus for 4-5 months/year advising somewhere in the world. The proposal Travel Expense Policy seems more geared towards the standard faculty and staff travel to conferences and meetings. Like my colleagues who participate in the GPP, I am concerned what new policies may mean for my future travel plans. I recall that Workday was meant to streamline the expense filing process, but it now takes me much longer to file expenses than it used to when I return from an advising stint. Will the new Travel Expense Policy create other new headaches for us that we are not even aware of yet? I appreciate the drive to reduce costs, but I am concerned how much having a TMC will actually save and what will be the hidden costs associated with the</p>



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			<p>new policies. I invariably make my travel arrangements to minimize costs by traveling mid-week and using public transport whenever possible, although I know some faculty and administrators are not so frugal.</p> <p>I know that several of my GPP colleagues have already submitted comments, so my concerns may be duplicative. Many of my colleagues have far more complicated travel itineraries than I. They encounter all sorts of situations that the typical TMC will likely not know how to handle, I am sure. While my travel may be somewhat less complicated than some GPP faculty, I have several particular concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am concerned that we might be ‘forced’ to take substantially longer or more inconvenient flights based on minimal cost savings. • The policy indicates that ALL travel should be booked through TMC but it is unclear what if any local, in-country local travel (such as booked group excursions with students) might also be included. • The policy indicates all overnight accommodations should be booked through TMC or online booking system, but many GPP faculty use AirBnB and other local vendors that are unlikely in the systems. I assume that we will continue to use the housing providers we have used previously for faculty and student accommodations at project centers, but this should be clarified. • The policy indicates single bed/room only but GPP policy allows for travel with spouse and dependent children. • Receipts are not always available many places, and often not in English <p>As always, changes in policies create uncertainties and concerns. I hope that the new Travel Expense Policy can be further clarified to address some of these concerns and that the roll out will have few if any snafus.</p>
27	3/31/2021	Kent Rissmiller	<p>Dear APG</p> <p>On Monday, March 29, I hosted a meeting with those most engaged in the Global Project Program – Project Center Directors and Advisers – to discuss the travel booking and expense policy that is currently open for comment.</p> <p>I encouraged those in attendance to submit comments directly to the Administrative Policy Group, but also offered to assemble their questions and comments and forward them directly to the APG.</p> <p>In the following, I document and summarize the concerns raised by our center directors and advisers.</p> <p>This policy (and use of a TMC) should not apply to student or faculty housing at project centers abroad. Student housing varies from center to center and is usually very consistent, year to year, with providers that we trust. Faculty are also using the same housing providers year after year or are booking through Air B&B. Faculty needs vary each year as sometimes spouses and children accompany them.</p>



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			<p>Many members of this group have had bad experiences in the past booking with TMCs and at a minimum; we would want a mechanism for providing feedback on the TMC selected and its services.</p> <p>Travel needs vary. When time is not an issue, people are willing to take a longer trip at lower cost. But when there are time constraints – like needing to be back for classes – the lowest cost option will not be satisfactory.</p> <p>Travel preferences vary. One director wishes to pay more for an aisle seat on a trip to China, or book economy plus when it often is the same price as economy on a different airline</p> <p>There are concerns about booking complicated trips and there is less confidence in a TMC in these situations. In addition, directors do not have confidence that a TMC is familiar with our travel needs – eg. Flights inside India as our center is not on a direct flight from outside of India.</p> <p>Many advisers/directors are concerned that the TMC will limit our options in favor of low cost. All wonder if they will experience significant inconvenience to save money. EG. A 40 hour flight from Armenia costs less than a 20 hour flight. Will we be pushed to take the low cost, longer flight? Another director is not close to an airport. Will she be pushed to take flights that will force her to arrive home at 3 a.m.? At some point, travelers should have the ability to select flights that fit their needs and not only the lowest cost flight.</p> <p>A most important concern is how and whether a TMC will make decisions for us regarding travel. How will a TMC limit our options to save WPI travel dollars? We assume that if the TMC is not limiting our options, then there is no savings. A fundamental concern is that the TMC will push us into low cost options that will make people really unhappy. We want to know how much control we will have over the timing and duration of trips.</p> <p>We are wondering if there is an option for a pilot test for a year – with options for feedback. People also asked if the Global Program could be exempt from the TMC or opt-in for some kinds of travel (like conferences) and opt-out for 8 week travel to project centers.</p> <p>As a group, we do not understand how the TMC saves money for WPI. We might be more understanding if there are significant savings, but travel in the GPP is already frugal. Everyone flies economy. There is no evidence that anyone has abused the travel budget. We already book travel with online low cost services. We know that other divisions have paid for travel perks at business class. Maybe these divisions should limit travel costs, without imposing restrictions on the Global Program.</p> <p>We are concerned that family travel will be difficult. The Global Program supports family travel, with spouses and children. How can a faculty member book travel with the TMC and then book travel on the same flight with same seating for a spouse or child? Faculty often use reward points to pay for family travel, but it seems that there are blackout dates and times that would prevent off-campus advisers from using rewards points to pay for their family travel.</p>



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			<p>In some locations, it raises costs to use credit cards. EG. In Ecuador every credit card transaction comes with at 10% surcharge, so the frugal approach is to avoid using credit cards and pay with cash. The policy should incentivize advisers to reduce costs, not to promote the use of credit cards/p-cards.</p> <p>We often work with local travel companies to arrange excursions at project centers. Would this policy limit our ability to book with a local travel company for an excursion - desert trip in Namibia or Morocco or weekend trip in Paraguay or Ghana?</p> <p>Will the TMC dedicate staff to our needs? WE think we have a distinctive program with unique needs.</p> <p>All are concerned that the TMC rules will constrain our travel options. After all, if the TMC does not constrain our travel options, how will the TMC reduce costs to WPI? Everyone is concerned about some unknown limit on our travel options – and who is limiting our options and what decision rules are used to limit our options?</p> <p>Can we apply this policy to business and conference travel without applying it to the Global Program? We think our travel requirements are different (7-8 weeks at a time). Or maybe we could book routine travel this way and book complicated travel on our own. We are not confident that a TMC will provide a better price from Albania to Boston than we can find on Expedia or Orbiz or Kayak. Related to this point, people would like to opt-in or opt-out of the TMC based on the nature of the trip.</p> <p>Travel for global project center is fundamentally different from travel to a conference in California. We need much more flexibility in arranging travel.</p> <p>In some places, credit cards simply cannot be used, and in others, where they might technically be accepted, there are practical problems with actually using them, and validation problems can occur because of time differences and less sophisticated technology.</p> <p>Often we choose travel arrangements based on departure and arrival times, not on the lowest cost. Booking for the lowest cost could add many hours to a trip. Travel to New Zealand or Australia can take 23 hours and we would not want to be forced to take 30 hours to save \$50 (or some trivial amount).</p> <p>The pre-booking spend authorization seems burdensome when the Global Program has already assigned people to travel and when nearly all international flights will exceed \$1000. We probably have at least 100 of these in a normal year. It would make sense to raise this dollar amount somewhat – maybe to \$1400 – to reduce the need to be constantly processing these.</p> <p>The policy does not refer to the COBLA process that we have used for years to minimize the need for expense reports for small and recurring items, like local transportation.</p>



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			<p>We ask a lot of our faculty to leave home for 7-8 weeks. We don't want to add to that burden. We want to make it easy for faculty to travel to project centers. Difficult schedules, baggage fees, limited hotel options, restrictions on local arrangements, like excursion providers will add unwelcome extra burdens on our faculty.</p> <p>We recommend that any travel policy be proposed as a pilot policy so that concerns can be raised and adjustments made as we gain experience with the policy.</p> <p>Thanks for reading and addressing these concerns.</p>
28	3/31/2021	Michael Elmes	<p>Dear APG -</p> <p>I oppose many of the proposed changes to the travel policy, especially the use of a TMC to manage our travel at WPI. I direct the Wellington New Zealand Project Center. While it may save WPI a few dollars here and there, I anticipate that it will make our travel much longer and more burdensome and inconvenient. When normally I am on an airplane and in airports for 23 hours to get to Wellington, adding another 5-10 hours because it saves WPI a couple hundred dollars is not tenable for me and reflects poorly on WPI. In addition, I will lose flexibility in how and when I schedule my flights and manage my travel.</p> <p>While I am happy to work to reduce travel costs, supporting overseas project centers around the globe costs money if it is to be done well. Why is there a need for this? I have always flown coach. Always been careful with my meal expenses. None of us are extravagant spenders.</p> <p>In short, I think that changing our travel policy in such a fundamental way would be penny wise and pound foolish - especially now, when our Global Project program has become our signature program at WPI, and we are trying to launch a world-class Global School.</p>
29	4/1/2021	Ingrid Shockey	<p>Dear committee</p> <p>I can't imagine a policy less helpful for those of us in DIGS that travel as a significant portion of our job. My sites in NZ and India would require pre-approval each time I travel according to the cost limit proposed here. Because I fly to complex locations AND have long flight times (17 hours to the first stop in India; 24 hours for NZ BEFORE in-country flights) – it matters a great deal the airline carrier, the arrival and departure times, the airports, the baggage permissions, and so forth, associated with each flight choice. I am frustrated by the implication that we do not consider the most cost effective choice as part of our decision making. DIGS faculty travel the most and under</p>



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			<p>the least comfortable circumstances (in economy class 100% of the time), and for many of us this proposed system appears by its description to make everything much harder, with additional bookkeeping steps as well.</p> <p>I suggest that you make this an opt-in scenario for those interested. Honestly, for WPI faculty who are NOT project directors/advisors who are booking a yearly conference ticket to Europe or something like that, it would probably be a welcomed service. Otherwise these new policies are just demoralizing for us.</p>
30	4/1/2021	Christine Sharry	<p>Good afternoon Jeff –</p> <p>I hope all is well! I wanted to share that Athletics and Student Activities have been working to review the Travel Expense Policy so that we can share our feedback.</p> <p>We understand that this policy impacts any travel using department/operational money, but were unsure if it pertains to travel paid for by the Social Fee or if students are traveling with costs being shared by Social Fee and Departmental funding. As you may know our students travel off campus frequently and as such this policy ties not into our travel policies, but how we deploy staff resources to support travel as well.</p> <p>Knowing this will help us in crafting the most appropriate and focused feedback. We appreciate the opportunity to weigh-in.</p> <p>If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to let us know.</p>
31	4/1/2021	J.S. Jiusto	<p>Dear APG,</p> <p>In addition to echoing the concerns that Kent summarized, I'd like to add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm not opposed to what I understand is the basic idea behind the travel policy, mainly to save some money by employing a TMC and enacting some additional safeguards against irresponsible travel-related spending. The issue for those of us in the Global Projects Program (GPP) is that the application of rules and procedures that might be sensible for most WPI travel could inadvertently and unnecessarily add costs and inconveniences and unintended consequences for GPP center directors, advisors, and even students. Why? Because GPP travel is significantly more complicated, variable, site-specific, and even family-specific than most conference and business travel. It's nothing but "exceptions to the rule." My understanding and experience is that we have pretty good systems in place to manage this complexity, and as we understand from Kent, no one has suggested there are major problems with how we are doing business that warrants urgent change. So... Could we consider exempting Global Projects Program (GPP) travel from the requirements of the travel policy for the first year or two, during which time GPP faculty and staff would be encouraged to use the TMC for GPP travel and Kent and others could gather information, share experiences, and develop a proposal for how the travel policy can be extended appropriately thereafter to cover the GPP? That approach would allow the university and the TMC to work through the inevitable "new systems learning curve and bumps" mostly with "normal" kinds of travel, not the hardest stuff, and meanwhile we could plan more thoughtfully for what kind of policy really makes most sense for our unique circumstances, grounded in some real experience rather than



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			<p>guesswork (sort of an IQP-like approach!). GPP faculty and staff should of course be required to abide by the same rules as everybody else for non-GPP related travel (conferences, etc.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond the TMC questions, we could also use that time to also carefully plan the kind of travel and expense approval processes appropriate for the GPP, recognizing that there too the considerations are myriad and far more variable than “normal” travel. • In short, unless there’s some as yet articulated urgency in all diving into the pool at the same time, maybe we can phase things so as to maximize the chances for success?
32	4/1/2021	Laureen Elgert	<p>To Whom it Concerns,</p> <p>I strongly support the idea of a pilot period of 1-2 years for the proposed travel expense and TMC policy. During this time faculty could opt-in to a booking procedure involving the TMC in order to build a greater understanding of the (in)conveniences and (in)efficiencies of such a system and calibrate the proposed policy to best meet the needs of faculty and balance these needs with budget considerations. Given the heterogeneity of travel destinations and locations, and also of faculty circumstance, preference, and requirements, a blanket approach seems to invite frustration and ultimately, the future need to revisit and revamp the policy (or create an exhaustive list of exceptions and caveats) after all.</p>
33	4/1/2021	Kent Rismiller	<p>In my reading of the policy, it seems a bit more flexible and forgiving/accepting of local circumstances. We’ll need to work through some logistical problems that differ in different locations. But that’s ok. I just took notes and want to put the directors’ concerns together for everyone.</p>
34	4/3/2021	Dominic Golding	<p>Dear APG members,</p> <p>I forgot to put this in my previous comments and it was not part of our discussion in our GPP meeting, but WPI needs to seriously think about how to address its carbon footprint in relation to travel. The Travel Policy should probably recommend how WPI staff and faculty might or should offset their carbon emissions for air travel in particular. This might be on an individualized per trip basis, or a centralized approach based on net year calculations of emissions.</p>
35	3/5/2021	Kent Rissmiller	<p>Hi APG,</p> <p>For the record, I agree that our travel policy should provide information and incentives to add carbon off-sets to our travel. We could also add incentive to attend virtual (vs. in-person) conferences.</p> <p>We need to be forward thinking on this.</p> <p>Kent</p>
36	4/7/2021	Karen Oates	<p>APG members</p> <p>When I worked at NSF we had a managed travel agency for all NSF travel. This agency changed frequently because program officers and staff were very upset with their lack of attention to our needs and lack of understand of our often combined work for NSF, and our research as well as being providing unsatisfactory routes. Each change cost time, energy and aggravation. The travel policy using a managed system was the number one mentioned item program officers were dissatisfied with. Rarely did they save us money - often costing more than we would have paid. In addition, Talking with them took longer than just making our own flights.</p>



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			Please reconsider why we are doing this and the additional work on faculty! I really foresee very unhappy faculty!
37	4/7/2021	Robert Kinicki	<p>The big problem with your new policy is that I go overseas to project center with my wife. The key piece is we have to pay for her and book her plane ticket separate from WPI and we often use frequent flyer miles to do this for her ticket.</p> <p>Your new policy makes it VERY likely that my wife and I will not be able to sit next to each other as we cross the oceans on a plane. It also makes it likely that we may even have to take different flights to get to an overseas site. If this happens even once, I will NEVER advise an overseas project again. I do not want to work for an organization that cares so little about their employees.</p>
38	4/7/2021	Brigitte Servatius	<p>This policy is earning strong and loud objections.</p> <p>If WPI makes TMC mandatory, then this TMC should provide direct service. WPI should pay directly for all supported work related travel. There should not be need for re-imbursement. There should not be need for going through Workday (yet another third party). Don't take individual freedom away and on top of it burden the individual with added layers of bureaucracy.</p>
39	4/7/2021	VJ Manzo	<p>I am writing to express my concern and disapproval of the Travel Expense proposed policy. The faculty have not received enough information to know why this approach is being taken.</p> <p>Additionally, I am somewhat embarrassed by the APG's lack of transparency regarding the facilitation of faculty discussion of such a critical issue to the WPI community. Like so many other decisions that affect us, I would appreciate the opportunity to hear from my colleagues about this policy in an open forum; we have, likely, all used travel agencies before and, while they may save money, they don't necessarily lead to a better travel experience or relieve the administrative burden than often accompanies travel. Being able to hear from my colleagues in an open forum is a central aspect of faculty governance, and having to articulate my voice privately in this email is an irregular departure from that valuable tradition.</p>
40	4/7/2021	Stephan Sturm	<p>Dear all,</p> <p>I share the concerns about travels for the Global Projects Program as formulated e.g., in Dean Rissmiller's email. I want to make here however mainly the point that this policy could actually have the opposite effect of the intended one, and hurt frugal travelers. This will be in particular the case for people controlling their own travel budget, e.g., via grants and personal development funds; here the incentives are stacked very differently as when travelling is funded, e.g., by the department.</p> <p>To make a case in point: I fund my conference travels mainly from my professional development account, filled by the faculty part sponsor fees from projects (such as industrially sponsored MQPs). Of course, I try to make this money work for as many conferences as possible, using methods such as</p>



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using miles I earned by getting reimbursed from other universities, giving there colloquium and seminar talks (i.e., I charge WPI only the booking fees of \$ 30 or so) • combining conferences with invitations (e.g., trying to schedule invitations in nearby European cities around a conference in Europe. In this way I ask WPI to pay only maybe \$ 200 for inner European flights and two nights, instead of \$1000 for a transatlantic flight) • using for shorter trips discount flights with only cabin luggage (or Amtrak or Greyhound) • using private rooms at AirBnB (co-living with the owners instead of an entire place) • using platforms as Hotwire, where you book not a specific Hotel, but a Hotel in a given neighborhood at a given comfort level for steep discounts <p>In this way I am able to squeeze out of my money maybe 3 conferences per year instead of 2 with what might be a standardized TMC approach with regular not to expensive hotels etc. My understanding is that by using standard TMC procedures, many of this penny-pinching strategies will no longer work.</p> <p>Note also that the effect of this would not be visible from an administrative point of view - the costs do not change, only the amount of travelling I can squeeze out of the money. Thus an evaluation period to see "how much money can be saved" would not help at all for this point.</p> <p>A solution to this problem could be that faculty members are required to get a quote from the TMC, but are allowed to book their own arrangement if they can do this cheaper than the TMC.</p> <p>Let me mention in closing another point that I do not see addressed in the policy. What about conferences that are booked jointly with the hotel, or where the conference organizers have special rates for conference members?</p> <p>To close, I wonder if the APG has considered a benchmarking procedure, before making this proposal (as this is done with so many other things). Did the originators check with other universities where such a procedure has been rolled out at informed themselves about a) the financial effects and b) the feedback from faculty? I could not find any information about this, though it would be for me the first logical step to consider before going into a large uncontrolled trial with potential large downside (on faculty morale, mainly).</p>
41	4/7/2021	John McNeill	<p>Is the savings from this policy really worth the huge cost in goodwill? Faculty are already being nickel and dimed to death. Especially the idea that longer travel time to save a few bucks is worth it – is disrespectful of the value of faculty time.</p> <p>Also the implicit assumption that faculty are trying to defraud WPI and need to be policed by some third party is disrespectful too. This policy is not worth the cost in goodwill.</p>
42	4/7/2021	Danielle Cote	<p>Dear APG members,</p> <p>I'm an assistant Professor in Materials Science and Engineering, with several large research research grants, each involving extensive travel. I have a few concerns about the Travel Expense Policy. In general, while I find the idea of having the option to make use of a travel booking service intriguing, I have several concerns with making it mandatory.</p>



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			<p>Prior to COVID I traveled more than once per month (~15 trips/year), exclusively for grant-funded travel (review meetings, conferences, collaborator visits, etc.), with about two international trips per year. I had the research, organization, and bookings of my travels down to a science (or at least a very systematic approach)! These are factors that I would consider, with my corresponding potential concerns:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First, since all of my travel to date has been grant-funded, I am very conscious of travel costs, as I have to adhere to my pre-determined budgets. 2. Cost is carefully balanced with convenience. I have two young children; flexibility in booking is paramount. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. It costs me \$25/hr for childcare (during working hours); taking cheaper flights that depart/arrive at off hours can cost me hundreds of dollars per trip in childcare. b. Sometimes that means traveling with the family (~2 times per year: bringing the children and a caregiver, obviously paid for myself). c. If I didn't have the option to bring the children, or to travel at convenient times, I certainly wouldn't travel as much as I do, which would decrease my effectiveness as a researcher; travel and networking are crucial for my funded research. How would this work if booked through a travel service? 3. When determining a hotel, I nearly have an optimization algorithm, including functions for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proximity to event (site, convention, base, etc. as I'm typically scheduled for 12+ hours/day) b. Safety of neighborhood (as a woman often traveling alone) c. Accessibility (and cost of commuting) to airport d. Brand name. I have elite status at SPG and Hilton hotel chains and tend to stay there first, when cost effective. Benefits for this include early checking/late checkout (major convenience), better room availability when typically sold out, free breakfasts/meals, and elite member-only rate deals. All cost saving. e. Conference headquarter hotels. Some conferences have "headquarter" hotels where conference attendees receive a discounted rate for staying at an official conference-endorsed hotel. Staying at these hotels is not only convenient, but has proven instrumental in networking. Personally, attending technical conferences is mostly about networking. Informal run-ins (admittedly occasionally intentional on my part!) at the hotel gym or breakfast with my professional network has proven invaluable for me – these networks have actually lead to technical collaborations and collaborating funding opportunities. Additionally, building the professional network provides greater exposure to professional society members often involved in award decisions. Typically more senior and established scientists stay at these headquarter hotels (among others) – as an early-career faculty, meeting them is important. It's really hard to quantify this, and even feels silly writing, but these are real reasons why staying at a (potentially) more expensive hotel is important. f. How could I convey this complex algorithm to a travel service? 4. When flying, agility is important. Many of my trips are visiting collaborators and funding agencies (e.g. DOD bases) and require me to stay longer than anticipated or end early. The ability to change my flight quickly is important.



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			<p>a. I have elite frequent flyer status with American Airlines which allow for free flight changes, airport lounge access, and free baggage – all of which save money.</p> <p>b. In addition to free flight changes, there is a private phone number to call for rebooking, which I have used more times than I like, but I have been re-routed and rebooked quickly and efficiently. I can recall at least four times this happened in the last year (2019!) where I was able to rebook and save myself hours (often overnights), again saving hotel stays and childcare.</p> <p>c. Just a note – I fly American Airlines whenever economically feasible, which, since Boston is a hub, is most of the time. If other airlines have lower cost fares (by more than ~15%), I do take those.</p> <p>5. On multiple occasions over recent years I have traveled with program managers from my funding agencies for program review meetings and site visits and third party sites. This requires me to travel on their schedule, typically on their flights and at their hotels. Would this still be possible?</p> <p>6. I have a personal credit card with a high annual fee that comes with access to deeply discounted travel services, including airline lounges and hotel rates, when booked with my credit card. This has saved me significant money in recent travel; I would lose this option when booking through a travel service?</p> <p>In summary, traveling for me is a balancing act.</p> <p>My overall concern is a potential decrease in flexibility – in still being able to book the flights and hotels that make the most sense based on the specifics and purposes of each individual trip. Would all flights and hotels be available to book through the travel service or will we limited to those approved by or that are able to be booked through the travel service? When booking through the travel service, will we still be able to savvily take advantage of any current special rates that may be available to us outside of the travel service?</p> <p>Everyone’s situation is unique, perhaps the travel policy should reflect this, too. My current ability to travel so frequently is a result of the flexibility of our current policy. Less flexibility would certainly lead to less travel, which I’m afraid would reduce my overall networking and research opportunities.</p> <p>I’m so happy to discuss any of these points further. I love traveling, even for work, and since we’re grounded now, discussing this is as close as I’ll get to the real thing for a while!</p>
43	4/7/2021	Carrick Eggleston	<p>Because I have been through this before, and because the language in the Travel Expense policy looks very familiar, I reviewed the travel expense policy in its entirety.</p> <p>While most of this is fairly standard stuff, and is similar to or identical to travel expense policies being adopted at many Other institutions, there are aspects of such policy that will inevitably create greater, not less, expense and greater bureaucratic</p>



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			<p>Hassle - to the extent that it may dampen motivation to do one of the things WPI does best, which is send students and faculty To overseas project centers.</p> <p>The policy is clearly standardized for standard domestic travel in the United States. While it has a section on international travel, It is unrealistic about the realities of international travel in the kinds of situations encountered in academic institutions both for Education (e.g., IQP) and research purposes.</p> <p>Consider the following scenarios (these are not hypothetical - they are real situations I have encountered in a foregoing > 25 year career):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Overseas societies often not only dislike, but often will not take, credit cards. This is true in several European countries - I have Personally run across institutions that would only take a credit card if one pays an extra fee. This right away increases expense. 2) Many places - take parking garages in Scotland - are automated and one can only obtain receipts from a machine ... that do not Contain all the information “required” of receipts under the policy. 3) The only available mode of transportation for people and/or equipment is a farmer with a donkey (or yak or ox ...). The transaction Will only be in cash. There will be no receipt. 4) Colleague doing research requires the use of the only available aircraft in the country that can do the job - a private turbo-charged DC-3 equipped to land on ice with cargo. Or, more generally: because of weather or aircraft maintenance issues in remote locations, plans must be changed on a dime from fixed-wing aircraft to helicopter or vice versa. Again, payment issues. No time or opportunity for getting Trustee approval. Not all research is in a lab. 5) The cheapest way to travel to a remote location on a glacier for research with equipment is to pilot yourself in your own private aircraft To the location. I note that under section 5.4.1.4: Private or Chartered Aircraft, it only says “charter accommodations require the prior approval Of the board of Trustees”. It actually says nothing at all about private aircraft. Is there a policy about private aircraft? 6) Project centers in both urban and remote locations around the world are established and run on many personal relationships in Environmental sometimes with very limited options or options constrained by the personal relationships needed to keep the project Center running for students on-site and in-country. The least expensive and most efficient option may not be a standard airline, aircraft, Franchise hotel, or rental car company.



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			<p>7) Travel management companies are great at standard airfare, hotel, and rental car. They completely lose it with non-franchise developing-world realities that some WPI faculty and students must contend with. They cannot arrange services they cannot contact.</p> <p>8) Example: Student traveling to do university-supported research in a remote rainforest location in Ecuador reached by driving on a road for 3 hours with a load of fuel and other materials that is in part needed for transportation but also as gifts to the tribesmen who meet the student at a particular bridge over a particular small river, where the student starts a 5-hour motor-canoe trip up the river to a remote village. Lacking cell phone or in fact any communication possibility except possibly satellite radio. There are no credit cards or receipts involved in this trip or in the lodging, which is in tribal shelters. The university (a different university from WPI) approves the research the student is undertaking. The university asks for an address at which the research is taking place. Reality is so far removed from what anyone at the university imagined that the fact that there is no address other than "village 5 hours up river from the so-and-so bridge on the so-and-so road" does not compute. University attempts to pull the plug on the project, claiming that it is not safe because there is no possibility of airlift out of the location if there is an emergency ... even though a previous student who went to this location was in fact airlifted out because of an emergency.</p> <p>9) Student puts passport through laundry machine during residence in India. The passport is fine because it is designed to survive this kind of thing. However, the Indian Visa that is needed to prove that the student is in the country legally has been obliterated. Now there are expenses with cash and without receipts to get from remote location to an office to try to get some kind of visa substitute that will allow the student to leave the country without being stopped at the airport. Does the travel policy deal with this realistically?</p> <p>I just ask that we carefully consider how travel actually works in real situations, especially when we are overseas and in developing countries without the standard airline/franchise hotel/rental car mode. Personally, I think that the travel policy is just standard boilerplate that WPI will use, along with many other institutions, just to prove that it has a policy that meets federal requirements. But it will make travel for WPI's unique programs more difficult, pretty much inevitably, and probably more expensive. My personal opinion, but one based on decades of experience. The policy is symbolic, to me, or the institution conforming to policies and standards that do not fit.</p>
44	4/7/2021	Berk Sunar	<p>Dear APG,</p> <p>I have reviewed the APG Travel Expense policy draft. Unfortunately, the policy draft is seriously flawed: Basically, it introduces unnecessary bureaucracy, delays and takes away any control a faculty has on their travel booking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before any travel arrangements we would have to file a Spend Authorization Form in Workday (unnecessary delay & bureaucracy) - To book the travel we are required to file a booking request with a Travel Management Company (TMC) that WPI makes an exclusive arrangement with. Introduces a middle man that would supposedly give a price reduction. <p>This is an idea that belongs to the past (travel agencies are gone). No TMC can match the efficiency of Expedia, Kayak, Orbitz etc. Also again another delay element is introduced. Most of the time good travel deals are available for a short window and are readily accessible via existing booking sites.</p>



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45	4/7/2021	Carolina Ruiz	<p>Please do NOT approve this policy. I have my own grant money to travel to conferences and my funding agencies are not requiring me to use a certain travel agency or airline and I don't see any good reason why WPI would obligate me to do so. I like to search online for my own tickets optimizing both the cost and the trajectory. Please don't tie my hands and make me waste time having to deal with a travel agency that likely will do a sub-optimal job both in terms of cost and trajectory.</p> <p>Similarly when I have traveled to advise projects at project centers, I have worked hard to find tickets that would save WPI's money and at the same time that would adapt to my needs and schedule. I'm sure a travel agency, no matter how good it is, won't put the time and effort I put into my own travel arrangements.</p> <p>Please don't create unnecessary bureaucracy. That's not the WPI way.</p>
46	4/7/2021	William Martin	<p>I write to strongly discourage WPI from embarking on this new system of bureaucracy.</p> <p>Several examples (such as NSF travel) show that TMGs often cost MORE, not less, than market competition. Yes, there may be promised discounts at the start. But once you eliminate the free market, you become a sucker waiting to be manipulated. Practically every time I travel on NSF business, I am forced to pay far higher than the best price for hotels and airfare.</p> <p>In recent years, I have traveled about 10 times per year. I have been to 30 countries and have been invited to lecture on my area of expertise in 15. This unnecessary bureaucratic system will simply cause me to decline travel to avoid WPI's imposed headaches, or to travel on my own dollar (and remove WPI from my lecture slides.) I already pay for about half of my research travel out of my own pocket because of bureaucratic hurdles. This will just add on to the many expenses I bear to simply do my work at WPI.</p> <p>As I read the APG Travel Expense Policy, I get the image of an ivory tower more interested in accommodating the needs of lawyers than furthering the mission of a research institution. I wonder how many times the author of the document tried to get a receipt for a lunch in Hangzhou or a receipt for a taxi cab in Italy. The document seems wildly out of touch with the duties of a researcher.</p> <p>I close by asking you to consider having people who actually do the research travel be involved in a policy which is simple and minimally invasive.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p>
48	4/8/2021	Elizabeth Ryder	<p>Dear APG --</p> <p>I do not do a lot of travel for WPI, but I think it extremely important that the concerns of Kent Rissmiller and faculty who travel a lot for IQPs are taken into consideration. This is one of WPI's flagship programs, and we don't want to make it harder for faculty to participate.</p>



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			As an aside, I am skeptical that doing anything using WorkDay is going to streamline things, especially since I would do this infrequently and have to re-learn it each time. But my main concern is for faculty traveling for IQPs.
49	4/8/2021	Fatemeh Ganji	Dear Colleagues, I am reaching out to express my opinion on the Travel Expense Policy. In my previous institutes (in Germany and in the USA), there were similar policies. Based on my experience and observation, such policies result in more confusion, unnecessary bureaucracy, and delay. Even if there were a (slight) price reduction, the negative impact of this policy on the faculty members would not be compensated. Therefore, with all due respect, I am not in favor of this motion.
50	4/8/2021	Chris Brown	Hi, Please note I am strongly opposed to letting someone else schedule my travel. It is essential that I continue working while I travel and to arrive at an appropriate time to prepare for the meeting. No one else can do this for me.