



BUFFALO STATE
The State University of New York

Process Improvement Taskforce Final Report May 2025

Overview

The Process Improvement Taskforce was one of five teams formed by the provost to support the successful combination of the School of Education and the School of Professions. Our taskforce was charged on February 10 with identifying processes and workflows that can be updated, streamlined, or eliminated as part of the transition to a new two-unit structure. Much of our work went beyond the merger of the two schools and we identified process improvements that will have an impact on all areas of Academic Affairs and, in some cases, the entire campus.

The taskforce met bi-weekly, invited key constituents to meetings to provide input, created an inventory of processes, and surveyed the campus for feedback. We gathered valuable input from faculty and staff to inform process enhancements and organizational alignment. The feedback reflected a strong commitment to institutional improvement and a shared desire for greater clarity, efficiency, and inclusiveness in governance and communication.

Our primary deliverables are:

- **Inventory of Processes:** spreadsheet listing the processes we identified for review.
- **Survey Results:** 10-question survey created using Qualtrics and was open to all faculty and staff from April 15 to April 23. We received 114 total responses.
- **Key Findings and Recommendations:** see below, these are based on survey results, feedback from key constituents, and input from taskforce members themselves.

Key Findings

1. Lack of Clarity in Governance and Organizational Structure
 - a. Many respondents expressed confusion over roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority in the new two-unit structure.
 - b. There is a strong desire for more precise documentation and communication regarding how decisions are made and by whom.
2. Inconsistent and Limited Communication
 - a. Respondents noted inconsistent leadership messaging, particularly during structural change periods.
 - b. They requested more timely updates, explicit justifications behind decisions, and specified timelines for changes.
3. Technology Frustration and Underutilization
 - a. Inconsistent Tool Adoption: Tools like Microsoft Teams, Navigate, and Outlook calendars are not uniformly adopted across campus, creating inefficiencies in collaboration and scheduling.

- b. Outdated or Inaccessible Systems: Systems such as the version of Banner we use (8) and SharePoint are viewed as confusing, under-supported, or fragmented. Multiple users report using outdated versions or being unaware of available features.
 - c. Training Gaps: There is widespread frustration with insufficient training — particularly hands-on, version-specific training led by qualified personnel — and a call for practical job-relevant workshops.
- 4. Outdated or Unclear Policies and Procedures
 - a. Faculty and staff noted that many policies, particularly those in the Faculty Handbook and bylaws, are outdated, hard to access, or applied inconsistently.
 - b. Provide widespread support for a formal, inclusive process to update these materials.
- 5. Faculty and Staff Voice in Decision-Making
 - a. Concerns were expressed regarding the limited consultation in key decisions that impact governance and operations.
 - b. Many respondents urged more significant opportunities to engage in institutional planning and reforms.
- 6. Process Complexity and Workload Strain
 - a. Feedback emphasized frustration with redundant processes, vague procedures, and heightened administrative burden.
 - b. Calls were made to simplify reporting, clarify forms and procedures, and reduce unnecessary complexity.
- 7. Process and System Fragmentation
 - a. Siloed Systems: Faculty and staff struggle with redundant data entry and disjointed academic record systems that don't communicate effectively with each other (e.g., Banner, Degree Works, Navigate).
 - b. Missing or Incomplete Forms: Many processes require users to submit documents without clear guidance or knowledge of required fields, signatories, or destinations.
 - c. Loss of Institutional Memory: Frequent system replacements and department reorganization contribute to confusion about how or why procedures work the way they do.
- 8. Committee Functioning and Leadership Development
 - a. Issues addressed included overlapping committee responsibilities, unclear committee mandates, and a lack of training for committee leaders.
 - b. Respondents suggested establishing formal onboarding, defining clearer scopes, and providing ongoing support for committee members and chairs.
- 9. Recognition, Morale, and Culture
 - a. Several faculty members and staff expressed concerns about declining morale and emphasized the need for greater recognition of their contributions.
 - b. Suggestions included more inclusive practices, visible appreciation, and initiatives to foster trust and collegiality.
- 10. Equity, Inclusion, and Representation
 - a. Many emphasized the importance of integrating DEI principles into governance and policy review.
 - b. There is a call for intentional inclusion of underrepresented voices in leadership and decision-making roles. At the same time, there is tension caused by the same people being continually asked to serve on committees.
- 11. Adjunct and Professional Staff Support Deficiencies
 - a. Access Barriers: Adjuncts often lose email/network access between semesters, requiring unnecessary ticketing or delays each term.

- b. **Professional Staff Policy Gaps:** There is no clearly defined or accessible handbook for professional or administrative staff (CSEA), leading to inconsistent practices and accountability.
 - c. **Workload Inequities:** Non-tenured and professional staff reported feeling overburdened while tenured faculty may not always share equal responsibilities, especially in administrative or support tasks.
- 12. **Desire for Institutional Coherence and Identity**
 - a. **Fragmented Academic Array:** Respondents noted the need for a clearer, unified vision of academic programs, expressing that current offerings feel incoherent or misaligned with Buffalo State's evolving mission.
 - b. **Branding & Visibility Challenges:** Department-based web structures often misrepresent or obscure programs, especially in merged or interdisciplinary departments.
- 13. **Missed Opportunities for Innovation**
 - a. **Reactive vs. Proactive Culture:** There's a perception that innovation is stifled by bureaucracy and lack of funding or support for new ideas.
 - b. **Incubation Spaces Needed:** Several respondents proposed dedicated funding and space for collaborative faculty research, curricular innovation, and cross-SUNY partnerships — especially as workloads increase without added resources.

Recommendations: Short-Term Priorities

1. **Host Listening Sessions:** Facilitate summer and fall consultations to hear directly from campus stakeholders about barriers and opportunities.
2. **Provide Regular Merger Updates:** Distribute a monthly email update to faculty and staff on structural transitions and process changes.
3. **Revise and Redistribute Handbooks:** Begin revisions of the Faculty and Library Handbooks. Create and circulate a new handbook for professional staff and administrative employees.
4. **Identify Department Liaisons:** Appoint point persons in each non-department to coordinate cross-department communication and collaboration. Keep organizational charts up to date as changes occur. When personnel changes occur, communicate who is taking over responsibility for duties (or identify contact person for questions).
5. **Launch Targeted Training & Guides:** Encourage administration to establish a handbook designated for professional staff and other employees. Develop and deliver in-person or hybrid sessions for major systems (Bengal Buy, Navigate, OneDrive, HR protocols), alongside quick-reference materials.

Recommendations: Mid-Term and Longer-Term Priorities

1. **Modernize Policy Infrastructure:** Convert DOPS and other key policy libraries into a searchable, digital format with standardized templates, authorship dates, and governance documentation.
2. **Promote Program-Centric Structures:** Shift websites, marketing, and academic support materials from department-centered to program-centered to better align with institutional goals and student needs.
3. **Support Faculty Innovation:** Establish structured, funded incubation opportunities for faculty-led program development and research collaboration.
4. **Standardize Administrative Practices Across Schools:** Align forms, procedures, and expectations across both schools to ensure consistency and reduce redundancy.

5. **Advance Collaborative Culture:** Foster interdepartmental communication through team building, shared governance transparency, and institution-wide planning efforts.
6. **Evaluate and Streamline Workflows:** Conduct a full review of administrative processes to identify unnecessary complexity, automate where feasible, and clarify roles across all divisions.