

SUMMARY OF BUCKEYE BARRIERS SURVEY RESULTS

Faculty Council

June 9, 2025

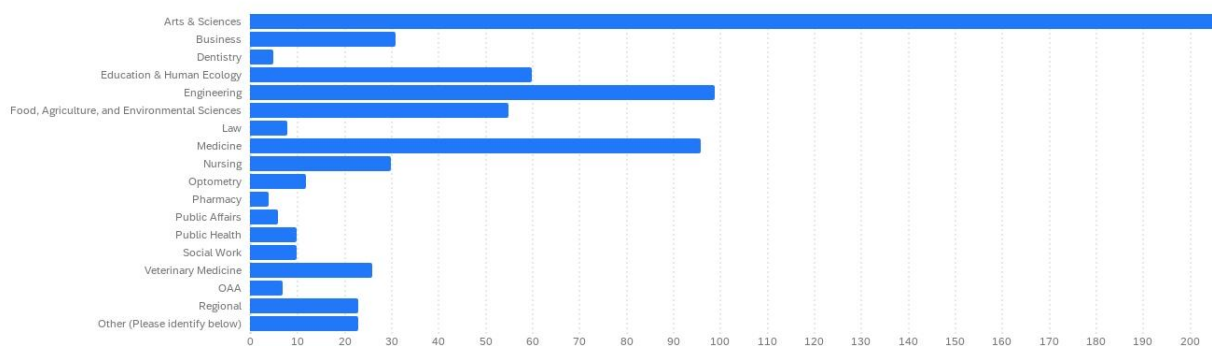
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Introduction

The Buckeye Barriers Survey, circulated in May 2025, had 713 respondents from across all colleges, as shown below. Most respondents took the time to share multiple examples of bureaucratic barriers, providing a rich and extremely detailed source of information not only on the sources of red tape at OSU, but also potential solutions. Below is a short summary of the findings, generated using the confidential version of Co-Pilot.

Survey Respondents by College

Which college are you in? - Selected Choice 713 ⓘ



Survey Respondents by Faculty Category

Faculty Category	Percent	Count
Tenure-track	78%	515
CTP	10%	68
Associated	11%	75

Core Operational Pain Points

This category captures the **core operational frustrations** that cut across departments and roles:

1. Workday System

- Universally described as **non-intuitive, inefficient, and overly complex**.
- Tasks like travel reimbursements, purchasing, hiring, and expense tracking are **burdened with excessive steps and unclear instructions**.
- Faculty often **relearn the system** for infrequent tasks, leading to wasted time and errors.
- Many faculty report **avoiding travel or purchases** altogether to avoid dealing with Workday.

2. Excessive Bureaucracy

- **Multiple layers of approval** for even minor purchases or travel requests.
- **Redundant documentation** requirements (e.g., needing to justify a license renewal every year).
- **Slow response times** from centralized offices (HR, fiscal, legal), often requiring repeated follow-ups.
- Faculty feel like they are **treated with suspicion**, as if trying to “cheat the system,” rather than being trusted professionals.

3. Lack of Transparency and Communication

- Faculty often **don't know who to contact** for help or where their requests stand in the process.
- **Policy changes are poorly communicated**, leading to confusion and inconsistent implementation.

HR and Hiring Challenges

These issues affect both **faculty productivity** and the university's ability to **attract and retain talent**:

1. Slow and Rigid Hiring Processes

- Hiring staff, postdocs, and graduate assistants can take **months**, even when funding is available.
- **Job titles and salary bands** are often mismatched with actual responsibilities, limiting flexibility.
- **Visa and onboarding processes** for international hires are especially slow and opaque.

2. Career Roadmap and Compensation

- The new Career Roadmap system is seen as **confusing and inequitable**.
- It makes it **difficult to compensate staff** appropriate to experience and skill level. The **lack of upward mobility** caused by Career Roadmap makes retention difficult.

Purchasing and Financial Systems

These pain points directly affect **research efficiency and fiscal responsibility**:

1. Vendor Restrictions and Delays

- Faculty are often **forced to buy from “preferred vendors”** at higher prices and in bulk quantities.
- **New vendor approval** can take weeks or months, delaying research.
- **Purchasing specialized or field-specific equipment** is often blocked or delayed due to rigid categorization.

2. Reimbursement and Expense Reporting

- Faculty must **pay out of pocket** and wait weeks for reimbursement.
- **Documentation requirements** are excessive and inconsistent.

- **Travel policies** are designed for conferences, not fieldwork or research travel, leading to mismatches and denials.

Travel Systems and Bureaucracy

1. Mandatory Use of Approved Travel Vendors (e.g., CTP)

Faculty are required to use **OSU's designated travel agency**, which is widely seen as **inefficient and expensive**.

- One faculty member reported that CTP quotes were “twice as expensive” as flights found on Kayak.
- Another said they had to cancel a field research trip because CTP couldn't provide a suitable vehicle, leading to lost data and student opportunities.
- Study abroad instructors noted that vendor delays and inflated costs have made programs unaffordable — e.g., switching from \$900 apartments to \$2,000 hotel rooms.

2. Cumbersome Pre-Travel and Post-Travel Processes

The spend authorization and reimbursement process is described as overly complex and redundant.

- **Faculty must justify travel twice** — once before the trip and again after, even for routine expenses like baggage fees.
- One respondent said they had to submit **three separate expense reports for a single trip** due to the 60-day rule.
- Another noted that receipts and documentation requirements are **unclear and inconsistent**, especially for international travel.

3. Delays and Lack of Transparency

Faculty often don't know when or if their travel has been approved, and approvals can take weeks.

- One faculty member estimated they had spent over \$10,000 out of pocket in unreimbursed travel expenses over three years due to delays and confusion.
- Graduate students and postdocs are especially affected, as they often can't afford to front travel costs.

4. Inflexibility and Safety Concerns

Travel policies are seen as **inflexible** and **disconnected from real-world research needs**.

- A researcher had to split their team into two vehicles due to policy restrictions, which led to a field safety incident involving an attack on students.
- Another noted that **travel policies prioritize rules over safety**, such as not allowing vehicle modifications or group travel in a single van.

5. Nitpicking and Micromanagement

Faculty feel **micromanaged over minor expenses**, undermining trust and wasting time.

- One person had to defend a \$10 per diem deduction because a conference agenda listed a “reception” (which turned out to be just soft drinks and crackers).
- Another was asked to justify two baggage fees — one for the outbound flight and one for the return.

Research and Grant Management

These pain points directly impact OSU's **research productivity and competitiveness**:

1. Post-Award Grant Management

- Faculty report **inability to track spending, delays in reimbursements, and confusing budget reports**.
- **Workday and PI Portal often show conflicting data**, making it hard to manage grants.
- **Hiring delays** for grant-funded positions (e.g., postdocs, technicians) can **jeopardize deliverables**.

2. OSP and Legal Delays

- The **Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP)** is frequently cited for **slow processing, poor communication, and lack of flexibility**.
- **Legal reviews** for contracts and vendor agreements can take **months**, even for routine purchases.
- Faculty often feel like they are **doing the work of OSP staff** just to move things forward.

3. Barriers to Field and Clinical Research

- **Travel policies** and **vehicle restrictions** make it difficult to conduct fieldwork.
 - **Access to clinical sites** (e.g., OSUWMC, Nationwide Children's) is inconsistent and often favors certain colleges.
 - **Safety concerns** in the field are not adequately addressed by current policies.
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Technology and Infrastructure

This theme highlights how **digital tools and physical spaces** are failing to support faculty work:

1. IT Restrictions and Fragmentation

- Faculty are **locked out of installing software** or using tools like Google Docs, Padlet, or AI platforms.
- **Multiple Microsoft Teams accounts** (e.g., for OSU and Wexner) create confusion and inefficiency.
- **IT support is slow**, and centralized systems are **not responsive to college-specific needs**.

2. Inadequate Teaching Tools

- **CarmenCanvas, Mediasite**, and other platforms are described as **clunky and hard to integrate**.

- **Classroom tech support** is inconsistent, and **response times are slow**.
- Faculty are **confused about which platforms to use** (Zoom vs. Teams vs. Carmen) and **receive little training**.

3. Aging and Inaccessible Facilities

- Faculty report **unsafe or outdated buildings, lack of office space, and inaccessible classrooms**.
- **Parking is a major issue**, especially for those with disabilities or guest lecturers.
- **Lack of investment in infrastructure** is seen as a sign that faculty are not valued.

Teaching-Related Barriers

1. Barriers to Using Innovative Teaching Tools

- Faculty are **blocked from using modern educational tools** like Kahoot!, Padlet, or AI-based platforms due to IT restrictions or slow approval processes.
- One respondent said, “We have disallowed Kahoot!, we don’t have a good student-instructor messaging system, and non-traditional grading is nearly impossible in CarmenCanvas.”
- Another noted that **OSU’s procurement process stifles innovation**, even for tools widely used at peer institutions.

2. Inadequate Classroom Assignments and Facilities

- Faculty teaching collaborative or tech-heavy courses are often **assigned to rooms that don’t support their pedagogy**.
- One instructor teaching data analysis said they were placed in a room without tables or displays, while high-tech rooms were used for lecture-based courses like Philosophy.
- Others reported **unsafe or poorly maintained classrooms**, including “windows falling out” in historic buildings.

3. Overloaded Courses and Grading Burden

- Faculty are being asked to **teach larger classes without additional support**, making it difficult to assign meaningful assessments.
 - One respondent said they **avoid assigning essays or projects** because they don't have time to grade them for 100+ students.
 - There's a sense that **teaching quality is being sacrificed** for enrollment numbers.
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Curricular Approval Rigidities

1. Excessive Delays in Course and Program Approval

Faculty across multiple colleges report that the process to approve new courses or revise existing ones is **slow, bureaucratic, and demoralizing**.

- One faculty member said it took **2–3 years** to get a new GE course approved.
- Another described a **40-page proposal** just to get a course approved for high-impact designation.
- A faculty member in Arts & Sciences noted that **GE course approval is “out of control”**, requiring multiple drafts and resubmissions.

2. Overly Detailed and Rigid Requirements

The approval process often demands **fully developed syllabi**, including readings and assignments, even for courses that won't be taught for several semesters.

- In CFAES, faculty must submit **complete syllabi with readings and assignments** before a course can be approved — a challenge for courses on current issues where materials evolve.
- One respondent noted that **syllabi are expected to be 15–20 pages long**, with much of the content being boilerplate that could be placed in a student handbook instead.

3. Redundant and Multi-Layered Review Structures

Courses must pass through **multiple levels of review**, often with overlapping or unclear responsibilities.

- A course in one unit had to be approved by the **sub-area, area, Graduate Studies Committee, full school, and then the college**, with the college review alone taking 3–6 months.
- Faculty in Arts & Sciences suggested that **college curriculum committees often overstep**, offering opinions on course content (e.g., readings and assignments) rather than focusing on learning outcomes and credit hours.

4. Lack of Trust in Faculty Expertise

There's a strong sense that the system **does not trust departments or instructors** to make sound curricular decisions.

- Faculty expressed frustration that **minor changes to majors or minors** (e.g., substituting one course for another) require **lengthy justifications and paperwork**, even though such changes are rarely rejected.
- One suggestion was to **streamline approvals for minor changes** and allow departments more autonomy.

5. Concurrence and Turf Wars

The **concurrence process** — where other departments must approve overlapping content — is seen as increasingly territorial and obstructive.

- Faculty described “**turfism**” as a growing problem, with departments blocking or delaying courses that might compete with their own offerings.
- This stifles innovation and makes it harder to offer interdisciplinary or applied courses.

6. Impact on Innovation and Morale

The cumulative effect of these issues is that faculty are **discouraged from proposing new courses** or updating existing ones.

- One faculty member said they are now **reluctant to propose Gen Ed courses** because the process is so burdensome.
- Another noted that **faculty are not updating courses** even when needed, because the approval process is “terrible, nit-picky, and not worth the effort.”

Legal Barriers: Restrictive Terms and Conditions (T&C)

1. Delays Due to Legal Review

Faculty frequently cited that even **routine purchases are delayed for weeks or months** due to T&C reviews by OSU Legal and Business & Finance.

- One faculty member described a **routine equipment purchase** initiated in June that was still unresolved in November due to T&C disputes — they eventually gave up on the purchase.
- Another noted that **a simple hotel contract for a one-day event** took three weeks of back-and-forth between their center, ASC fiscal, and OSU Legal.

2. Inflexibility with Small Vendors

OSU's insistence on modifying or rejecting vendor T&Cs often **prevents purchases from small or specialized vendors**.

- A faculty member tried to purchase **\$500 specialty software** from a small vendor. OSU added a 10-page legal addendum, and the vendor refused to engage. The purchase was canceled.
- Another example involved **free software** offered to a research center. OSU Legal blocked the agreement due to standard T&C clauses, even though the software was cutting-edge and would benefit students.

3. State Law Constraints

OSU Legal often cites **State of Ohio restrictions** as the reason for rejecting standard T&C clauses:

- OSU cannot agree to:
 - **Indemnification clauses** (e.g., “OSU will not indemnify third parties”).
 - **Governing law outside Ohio** (e.g., contracts must be governed by Ohio law).
 - **Binding dispute resolution** (e.g., arbitration clauses are not allowed).

- These legal positions are **non-negotiable**, even when the risk is minimal or the vendor is offering free or low-cost services.

4. Impact on Research and Innovation

These T&C issues are **directly harming research productivity**:

- Faculty are **unable to purchase essential software or equipment** needed for grant-funded research.
- Industrial partners are **reluctant to collaborate** due to OSU's rigid IP and contract terms.
- One faculty member said these issues give the impression that "OSU is a very difficult place to teach and do research."

P&T/Dossier Technology

1. User Interface and Usability Issues

- Faculty describe Interfolio as "**not user-friendly**" and **difficult to navigate**.
- One faculty member said they were **misled by the wording of entries**, which caused submission errors and delays in their promotion documentation.
- Another noted that the **layout is "terrible and unreadable,"** forcing them to export their dossier to Word, edit it manually, and re-upload it — defeating the purpose of the platform.

2. Redundant and Manual Data Entry

- Faculty are frustrated that **Interfolio does not integrate with other university systems**, such as the Graduate School, OSP, or technology licensing databases.
- This forces faculty to **manually re-enter information** that already exists elsewhere, especially for grants, publications, and teaching records.
- The more active a faculty member is, the more time-consuming this becomes.

3. Frequent Platform Changes

- Interfolio is described as **just the latest in a string of dossier systems** (following RIV and VITA), each requiring faculty to **relearn and re-enter their data**.
- One faculty member noted that in 14 years, they've had to use **4 or 5 different systems**, each with its own quirks and limitations.

4. Lack of Support and Training

- Regional campus faculty, in particular, report **having no administrative support** to help with Interfolio, unlike their Columbus counterparts.
- They are expected to **complete all entries themselves**, often during off-duty periods like summer, which adds to workload and stress.
- One faculty member said they spend more time **asking colleagues how to use the system** than actually entering their data.

5. Inflexibility and Workflow Frustrations

- There is **no “approve all” button** for recommendations, requiring faculty to click through each one individually.
- Faculty feel that Interfolio is **designed more for compliance than usability**, and that it **adds little value** compared to a well-formatted Word document.

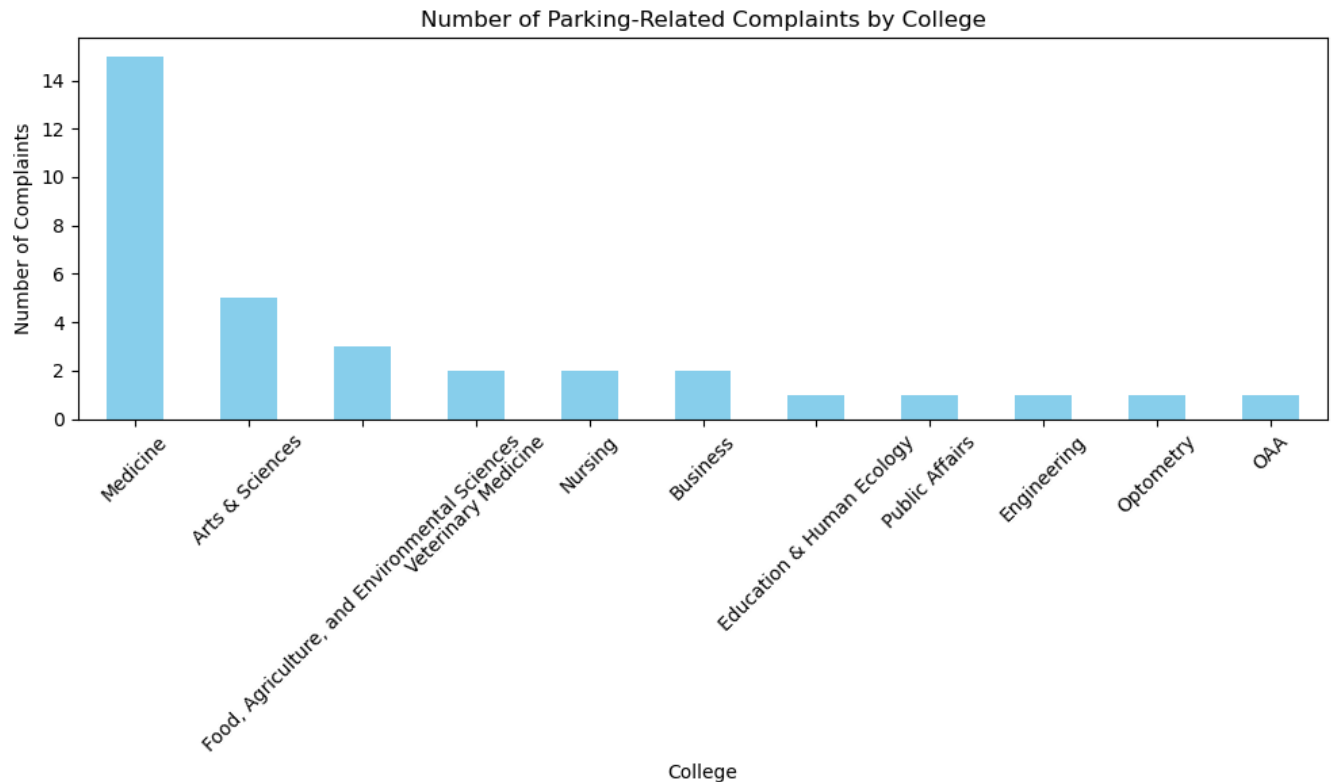
Parking

1. Insufficient Parking Availability

- Faculty report that **there is not enough parking near their buildings**, especially in areas shared with the medical campus.
- One respondent noted that **expansion of class sizes and staff** is worsening the problem, with **no corresponding increase in parking capacity**.
- **Guest lecturers** have declined invitations due to the difficulty of finding parking.

2. Accessibility and Disability Concerns

- A faculty member with a disability shared that they **cannot walk far enough** from available parking to their building or a bus stop.
- **Disability-designated spots are often full**, forcing them to work from home more frequently.
- Another faculty member reported that a **student in a wheelchair was repeatedly delayed** because vans were parked in front of accessible entrances.



Appendix

Breakdown of respondents by College

College	Percent	Count
Arts & Sciences	29%	208
Business	4%	31
Dentistry	1%	5
Education & Human Ecology	8%	60

Engineering	14%	99
FAES	8%	55
Law	1%	8
Medicine	13%	96
Nursing	4%	30
Optometry	2%	12
Pharmacy	1%	4
Public Affairs	1%	6
Public Health	1%	10
Social Work	1%	10
Veterinary Medicine	4%	26
OAA	1%	7
Regional	3%	23
Other (Please identify below)*	3%	23

*Many include faculty from Libraries, as we inadvertently omitted that as a category from the initial survey.