# Office of Organizational Excellence Improvement Project Report: Board-Approved Academic Personnel Action Notification Process Office of the Board of Trustees

## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

The Board of Trustees' Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee (AESEC) approves tenure and promotion, hires with tenure, and honorary academic titles. Following full Board approval, the Office of the Board of Trustees prepares and distributes more than 240 official notification letters annually, with as many as 120 letters concentrated in two peak cycles.

Although the process reliably fulfilled its formal responsibilities, it had become labor-intensive, compressed, and prone to rework. Preparation required approximately 10 minutes per letter, resulting in up to 20 concentrated staff hours during peak periods. Distribution accuracy varied due to inconsistent college preferences, and late changes could trigger corrections across as many as six separate systems and documents.

This improvement project redesigned the process to reduce manual effort, eliminate unnecessary variation, and strengthen accuracy — while preserving the integrity, security, and formality required for Board-approved actions.

As a result of the team's improvements:

- Hands-on preparation time will be reduced by 50%
- Up to 10 staff hours will be saved during peak cycles
- Distribution accuracy will increase from 75% to 100%

The redesigned process maintains the authority and ceremonial importance of Board communications while making the work faster, simpler, and more consistent.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee (AESEC) of the Board of Trustees approves key academic personnel actions, including awards of tenure and promotion, new hires with tenure, and honorary academic titles. Following AESEC and full Board approval, the Office of the Board of Trustees issues official notification letters to candidates and designated campus leaders.

These letters serve as the authoritative record of Board action. They are relied upon by colleges and schools, Human Resources, and administrative units to complete downstream processes — and by candidates to mark significant professional milestones.

Over time, however, increasing volume, compressed preparation windows, variability in distribution preferences, and manual formatting steps introduced unnecessary complexity. While the process was trusted and accurate in substance, it required concentrated effort during peak cycles and was vulnerable to distribution errors and rework.

This project was initiated to strengthen the process while preserving its essential integrity.

## Scope

This project examined the portion of the process that begins when the Office of the Provost prepares candidate materials for presidential review and ends when the Office of the Board of Trustees distributes final notification letters for approved candidates.

## Goals

1. Reduce time spent preparing and distributing notification letters
2. Increase accuracy of BOT-produced documents and reduce rework
3. Eliminate unnecessary duplication of notifications to university leadership

## Improvement Approach

The project followed a structured improvement methodology consisting of three phases: Discovery, Possibility, and Planning. The project team used process mapping, data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and facilitated working sessions to identify root causes, explore improvement options, and develop a focused implementation plan.

## Project Team

**Sponsor**:     Stacey Bradley, Interim Secretary of the Board of Trustees, University Organizational Excellence Officer

**Team Lead**:     Cary Graham, Assistant Secretary to the Board for Business Operations

**Members**:     Jean Brklich, Office of the Provost
Stacey Bryant, Office of the Board of Trustees
Markie Gaddis, Office of the President/Communications and Public Affairs
Lisa Hammond, Office of the Provost

**Facilitator**:     Maegan Gudridge, Office of Organizational Excellence

**PHASE 1: DISCOVERY**

The Discovery phase focused on understanding the current-state process, identifying strengths, and determining the conditions that created inefficiencies, errors, and duplication.

**Current-State Overview**

**Volume and Timing**

- Approximately 240 notification letters issued annually
- Peak times in June and December, with up to 120 letters per cycle
- Candidate materials received 3–10 days before Board meetings
- Notification letters distributed within 7 days of Board approval
- Average end-to-end turnaround of approximately 17 calendar days

**Hands-On Effort**

- 10 minutes of hands-on work per letter
- Up to 20 concentrated staff hours during peak times

**Accuracy and Rework**

- 90% of candidate materials complete and correct when submitted to Board Office
- 75% of notification emails reach preferred recipients on the first attempt
- Late changes require updates across up to six systems or documents; post-distribution corrections may require resubmission to a later Board meeting

**What Worked Well**

The team identified several strengths that required preservation:

- Strong subject-matter expertise and attention to detail across offices
- High trust in Provost and Board Office documentation at senior leadership levels
- Established routines among colleges and campuses for handling letters once received
- Acceptance of security requirements, including password protection
- Clear understanding of the importance and sensitivity of Board communications

**Causes of Inefficiency**

Through process mapping, stakeholder interviews, and error analysis, the team identified several recurring conditions that created problems.

1. Distribution Complexity and Variability

   o Variation in recipient preferences by college
   o Unclear CC practices leading to confusion and duplication

2. Upstream Content Errors

- Misspellings and incorrect titles originating at intake from colleges/schools
- Manual copy-and-paste steps increasing risk of error
- Late changes cascading across agendas, portals, mail-merge files, and letters

3. Duplication of Effort

- Variability in how Board letters reached Human Resources, resulting in duplicate receipt of some letters and gaps in receipt of others
- Redundant storage of documents without clear value

4. Compressed and Variable Timelines

- Tight preparation windows before Board meetings
- Peak cycles coinciding with other high-demand activities

Collectively, these conditions create unnecessary effort, elevated risk of errors, and avoidable frustration — particularly during peak cycles.

## PHASE 2: POSSIBILITY

During the Possibility phase, the team shifted from diagnosing inefficiencies to exploring actions that would improve the process and achieve the project's goals.

The team evaluated potential improvement actions against three shared principles:

- Standardize where possible
- Prevent errors rather than correct them later
- Preserve formality and security

The team deliberately avoided shifting work between offices without reducing overall effort. Each proposed change was assessed for impact on time, accuracy, or duplication.

## PHASE 3: PLANNING

By generating, refining, and prioritizing ideas, the team built a foundation for focused action. The next phase translated these possibilities into a practical set of recommendations. The following improvement actions increase accuracy, reduce rework, and standardize processes across all personnel action types.

### Confirm Content Requirements

**Lead**: Cary Graham and Lisa Hammond
**Status**: Complete

- Determine required content and attachments for Board review

- Eliminate unnecessary content and materials

## Standardize Document and File Formats

**Lead**: Cary Graham and Lisa Hammond
**Status**: In progress
**Timeline**: Spring 2026

- Determine whether cover sheet is necessary; eliminate if unnecessary
- Standardize the Columbia cover sheet format across all personnel action types
- Align system cover sheet with the Columbia standard
- Align system mail-merge file with Columbia standard
- Align honorary academic title mail-merge file with Columbia standard
- Standardize the agenda list for honorary academic title actions in Word format
- Streamline honorary academic title letter language to reduce risk of error

System-related updates will be implemented in coordination with new divisional leadership and onboarding of assigned staff.

## Streamline and Standardize Notification Audiences

**Lead**: Cary Graham
**Status**: In progress
**Timeline**: Spring 2026

- Document letter CCs, email recipients, and uses of Board notification
- Replace individual Board notification emails with a single notification email directing recipients to the centralized file location
- Standardize audience expectations across offices, colleges, and campuses
- Reduce Board letter CCs to essential recipients, aligned with shared-folder access

## Develop a Centralized Shared-Folder Model

**Lead**: Cary Graham and Stacey Bryant
**Status**: In progress
**Timeline**: Spring 2026

- Design, document, and create a shared-folder structure that will support accurate distribution
- Distribute Board notifications to colleges and schools through shared folders (one folder per college/school)
- Provide Division of HR, Office of the President, and Office of the Provost access to Board notifications through shared folders
- Establish a long-term storage and access management plan

## Strengthen Intake and Review of Honorary Academic Title Information

**Lead**: Jean Brklich and Lisa Hammond
**Status**: In progress
**Timeline**: Summer 2026

- Review current intake form and submission methods to improve accuracy and completeness
- Update the honorary academic title intake form
- Use form-generated spreadsheet data to create downstream documents
- Engage HR contacts to clarify requirements and align data elements
- Explore mechanisms to surface errors before information is shared with the Board Office

Implementation will begin in summer 2026 following completion of an existing university priority assignment.


## EXPECTED IMPACT

The combined improvements are expected to produce measurable benefits:

| Measure | Current | Projected | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Hands-On Preparation Time** | 10 minutes per letter | 5 minutes per letter | -50% |
| | up to 20 concentrated hours at peak times | up to 10 concentrated hours at peak times | -50% |
| **Distribution Accuracy** | 75% of notifications distributed to the preferred recipients | 100% of notifications distributed to the designated recipients | +25 |
| **Intake Accuracy (Completeness at Submission)** | 90% of candidate materials are complete & correct when submitted to the Board Office | 90% (baseline maintained; to be evaluated after intake improvements) | |

In addition to measurable outcomes, the redesigned process:

- Reduces cascading corrections across multiple systems
- Clarifies roles and expectations
- Eliminates unnecessary duplication of notifications
- Maintains password protection and security standards
- Preserves the ceremonial and institutional significance of Board-approved communications


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