



Robert Holland Faculty Senate

Uncorrected Minutes of October 4, 2024

The Robert Holland Faculty Senate of Mississippi State University held its regular monthly meeting in the Grisham Room of the Library at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, October 4, 2024.

Members absent and excused were Christine Coker, Alexis Gregory, Andrew Jarosz, Fred Musser, and Rosanne Nunnery.

Members on Sabbatical: Peter Messer and Tara Sutton

Faculty Senate President Robert Banik called the meeting to order. President Banik requested corrections for the September 13, 2024 Faculty Senate meeting. Hearing no corrections, President Banik accepted the minutes as presented.

Guests

Dr. Mark Keenum, MSU President

Dr. Keenum discussed his recent trip to Washington D.C. He said he has the honor of serving on a national foundation board for food and agriculture research that was created by Congress in 2014 as part of the 2014 Farm Bill signed into law by President Obama. The focus of the board is to invest money that was appropriated for agriculture research and for every dollar that we allocate in a grant, it has to be matched with at least \$1 of nonfederal funds. When Congress created this foundation, they provided \$200 million. Dr. Keenum said the statute called for the board to have 15 members. Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack appointed him to this board and now he serves as its chairman. Dr. Keenum said Congress gave us another \$185 million last year and a farm bill extension gave us another \$37 million. He said they have allocated nearly \$800 million in agriculture research funds and have 400 grants with 550 partners to make the grants possible.

Dr. Keenum said today we have about a billion people that we share this world with who are severely malnourished and we can't feed everyone on the planet adequately. He said we are going to have several billion more people in the future and how we as a global society are going to be able to feed the world is a challenge that we all face. It is incumbent on us and the work that we're doing here at this leading land grant research university to address the issues of tomorrow and to feed the world. Dr. Keenum said he had just met with Roger Thoreau, a leading author on the issue of global hunger, who was on campus to speak. He was honored to be in Washington representing our university at this level, meeting with members of Congress, and talking about this university and what we're doing, but also what we can all do collectively to address this critical issue.

Dr. Keenum gave a legislative update and spoke about how this past session didn't wrap up until early May of this year. He said we received the last round of funding of \$30 million for infrastructure improvements for the College of Architecture, Art, and Design and the last round of funding of \$40 million for Dorman Hall renovations. We were given \$18 million for the College of Veterinary Medicine for a new, large animal facility. The hope is to bring an expanded equine center and then funding to enhance our small animal hospital as well and have more commitments for expansion.

Dr. Keenum said we received additional operational funds for the campus that allowed us to provide a merit pay raise this year which is always and will continue to be our top priority. The legislature stepped up and provided the funding needed for PERS and that was one of his biggest concerns for this session. Another area that the legislature stepped up in is health insurance premiums, which went up substantially this year.

Dr. Keenum said the state continues to do very well as the September numbers just came out and state revenues were up \$14.3 million over the estimate. Since the 1st of July, revenues are \$46 million over what was estimated through September. He said there are a lot of discussions about our tax system in Mississippi, and in 2022 the legislature passed the largest tax cut bill in the history of our state, the purpose of which was to phase-down of our state income tax to get us down to a flat 4%. But this is still a big political issue for our leaders in the legislature. At the end of last month, there was a tax policy summit that was led by our speaker of the House, Jason White, to talk about how we can eliminate the state income tax.

Dr. Keenum stated there was not a DEI bill that made it out of committee in this session, but he does believe there will be one this year that will make it out of the committee. He said if the bill comes to both floors, it will pass. Our surrounding states and our region, most have passed such bills. Mississippi's an anomaly because we have not, but the pressure for a DEI bill continues to mount.

Dr. Keenum said we have politicians who criticize us for the areas that we work in and in our scholarship or the speakers who come to our campus. He said we are one of the top universities in the nation when it comes to free speech. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, the nationally recognized organization for free speech, has Mississippi State ranked in the top ten in the nation among all colleges and universities when it comes to free speech.

Dr. Keenum said yesterday our state auditor posted a message calling for the creation of a study committee to outline which university programs are needed for our economy and redirect taxpayer funds to those programs instead of wasteful degrees that don't lead to good-paying jobs in our state. Dr. Keenum said the state auditor has made some comments about this in the past and used the term that we need to eliminate "garbage" programs on our university campuses. Dr. Keenum said we have good leaders and good friends who respect what we do and will fight for us to continue doing our great job.

Senator Vivier asked about the university administration's lack of support publicly or privately for faculty members and academic freedom as distinct from free speech regarding the state auditor's recent comments. He asked if the faculty should assume that if their research becomes unpopular for whatever reason, they are then on their own to some degree.

Dr. Keenum said the state auditor did criticize a faculty member about a book she had written but the university posted the announcement about it being published and the award she received.

Dr. Keenum stated he was not going to engage in the social media back and forth but will take the high ground and promote the scholarly work of our faculty. He added when faculty do their work, we are going to post it and make people aware of it.

Dr. Keenum stated there are some issues on certain topics in our society that not everyone agrees with and that the legislature has the power to go in and say the universities shall not do scholarly work or teaching in these fields or these programs or these disciplines. He said how we communicate and when we choose to communicate helps us to continue to have the programs and be as broad and diverse as we are. He agreed there are things we could advocate for that could be extremely detrimental to the programs we're advocating for from a funding standpoint. He said he knows that we have people who want us to be strong advocates for certain areas but we have to choose our time. Dr. Keenum said freedom of speech on campuses is a conservative initiative and conservatives across the country want to see universities have free speech and expression. He finished by stating he may not or the university may not make statements the way you would like for them to make but they are being made.

Senator Zuckerman stated she remembered a recent meeting in which the question was asked why there isn't a DEI bill in this state and why doesn't there seem to be momentum towards it and Dr. Keenum replied that of course there was momentum towards that.

Senator Zuckerman said she is concerned about the university's ability to provide high-quality education that, for example, state auditor Shad White got for himself as an economics major, a Rhodes Scholar, and as a Mississippian and who is now hard at work to deprive other low-income, first-generation, working-class kids of that ability to have that education at our finest public university. She stated she was concerned the auditor would accomplish his goal because the faculty worry their employer does not have their back and would leave the university making it impossible to be able to give the poor and working-class kids of Mississippi a fine education in the social sciences, liberal arts, and humanities.

Dr. Keenum said Dr. Zuckerman was correct. He said he hosted a group of senators recently and spent most of the time talking about our operating budget and funding. He asked Rasheda Forbes to come and share with them what we do in our Access, Opportunity, and Success division. She went through all of the programs that we do for all of our students, and every senator was blown away.

Dr. Keenum said if we are going to be ranked in the top ten universities we could not go down the pathway of what our state auditor is asking us to do as far as free speech and that we couldn't even be ranked in the top thousand if that was the case.

Dr. Keenum said what we are doing across our arts, sciences, and humanities, and all the things that we do, is vital for a well-rounded, educated student, regardless of whether they are an engineer, architect, or whatever. They have got to have the finer arts of education and humanities. We are a higher-knowledge institute, not a vocational or a trade school. But I will say that because of who we are, the work that you all do, and the impact that you have on our state that people can readily see and experience, we get the benefit of the doubt.

Report of the Faculty Senate President

Wow! We are already at our third meeting of the semester. Time is flying by very fast this semester. Be sure to go out and take a stroll around campus with the nicer temperatures lately. Hopefully, we have left behind the 90+ temperatures of summer as we move into a more fall-like season.

I met with Emily Shaw, Emily Owen, Tommy Parker, James Herzog, Chelsea Cockburn, Cheryl Bowen, and Andi Burck to discuss book adoptions on September 17th. I asked that Barnes & Noble not send emails out to faculty until at least October 1st to request book adoptions. Originally, Barnes & Noble representatives wanted to have access to the SIS report from the Registrar's office as early as September 1st. Since the spring semester course offerings were not due to the Registrar's office until September 25th, we all agreed on October 1st as the date to request adoptions from faculty.

Reports from Committees on which I Serve:

Athletic Council – This committee met on September 11th. Athletic Director Zac Selmon spoke and gave athletic updates and a “state of the state” update. He talked about having tools for student success and that means more than the scoreboard. Student athletes need transformational experiences to win at life. He also gave an update on the NIL backpay case and additional funding for student athletes. He stated MSU had 9 students and 1 coach in the Olympics this past summer. A few updating projects were mentioned, such as lighting and sound at Davis Wade Stadium and the updates to Humphrey Coliseum.

There will be a guest coach program for faculty based on student input and nominations of past instructors. The faculty must be from the previous semester or earlier, not the current semester. Seven faculty were chosen for this year for football. These faculty, plus one guest, will get to participate in Friday/Saturday meals, the Dawg Walk and receive sideline passes and tickets. This is a different program than the faculty recognition and invite held in the spring.

Dean's Council – This committee has not met since our last meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for October 14th.

Design Review Committee – This committee has not met since our last meeting and the October 3rd meeting is cancelled. The next meeting is scheduled for November 7th.

Executive Council – This committee has not met since our last meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for October 28th.

Game Day and Special Events – This committee has not met since our last meeting.

Inclusive Excellence Leadership Council – This committee has not met since our last meeting. This committee is scheduled to meet on October 2nd.

Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee – This committee has not met since our last meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for October 10th.

Parking and Traffic Regulations Committee – This committee met with Walker Consultants to do a campus wide Parking and Transit Demand Study on September 19th. Consultants came to campus to do their initial survey work and met with this committee as we represented key groups on campus. Walker Consultants will be taking the next several months to create a parking master plan for changes and updates throughout campus.

Sustainability Committee – This committee met on September 26th. Nicole Thomas shared that she has initiated some of the ideas brought up at Faculty Senate in September. She has reached out to the Meridian Campus to see what steps could be taken for recycling at that campus. She also has put one of the interns in charge of starting a composting of pizza boxes and what steps should be taken to have this set up.

Beyond these updates, it was mentioned that over the next two years, the outdoor space around campus will be enhanced to provide more outdoor enjoyment. Also, to cut the grass from around and under the new solar farm, DAFVM has moved sheep to the area to “mow” the grass. The final week of testing for the new C.A.B. autonomous buses was last week. The hours for the buses will be from 12pm – 8pm this week. The Glass Recycling drive will be October 22nd from 1pm – 5pm at the Sanderson Center/Chadwick Lake boat ramp. MSU Green Week will be October 16th – 20th. The next meeting is scheduled for December 5th.

United Faculty Senate Association of Mississippi (UFSAM) – This committee met on September 17th. The termination hearing for JSU Faculty Senate President Dawn McLin on September 20th was not held. The chair of that hearing had a family emergency, so that will be rescheduled. Beginning in October, at least one member of the UFSAM will attend the monthly IHL board meeting in Jackson, MS. I was nominated to attend the October 17th meeting.

Report of the Faculty Senate Vice President

Committee on Campus Access

This committee has not met since the last Vice President’s report.

Calendar Committee

As I mentioned last month, we are preparing the 2025-2026 Academic Calendar. I was able to ensure that grades are never due less than 48 hours after final exams, and they will not be due on a weekend day.

Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee

This committee has not met since the last Vice President’s report.

Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery Committee

There were several relevant topics in this month’s meeting:

- Reminder to check out the URCD website - comprehensive resource <https://urcd.msstate.edu> (Subscribe to the Research Connections e-mail there.)
- Sandra Orozco-Altman will be teaching a Research Discovery course in Spring 2025 to help students explore research opportunities in the early years of their college careers (Freshmen/Sophomores)
- Introducing Endeavors Undergraduate Research Journal to create an opportunity for MSU undergrads to publish (1) original student research, (2) review articles, and (3) undergraduate theses. Shooting for Spring 2025. This is a student-led initiative.
- Spring Undergraduate Research Symposium will be April 9-10, 2025. Look for the call.

Reports from Faculty Senate Designates on University Committees

Business Sent to Committee

Business to be Sent to Committee

Standing Committee Reports

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

1. AOP 12.04 Final Examination (Academic Affairs)

Senator Perkins, on behalf of the Academic Affairs Committee, provided the committee report on AOP 12.04 Final Examination.

The motion to accept AOP 12.04 Final Examination, as presented, passed by majority hand vote.

ANCILLARY AFFAIRS – No Report

CHARTER & BYLAWS – No Report

FACULTY AFFAIRS– No Report

STUDENT AFFAIRS – No Report

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES – No Report

Old Business

New Business

1. Academic Freedom Resolution

President Banik presented the Academic Freedom Resolution as sent to the Robert Holland Faculty Senate by Senator Walters.

Senator Tschume made a motion to accept the resolution. Senator Vivier gave the second.

The motion passed by unanimous hand vote.

Senator Breazeale made a motion to adjourn. Secretary Haynes seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 3:13 pm.

Submitted for correction and approval.

Stacy Haynes, Secretary

Dinah Jenkins, Administrative Assistant