



Robert Holland Faculty Senate

Uncorrected Minutes of February 14, 2025

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, February 14, 2025.

Members absent and excused were James Chamberlain, Robin Fontenot, Santanu Kundu, Alison Lee, Andy Perkins, Neeraj Rai, and Tara Sutton.

Members on Sabbatical: Kimberly Kelly and Peter Messer

Faculty Senate President Robert Banik called the meeting to order and asked for corrections to the minutes of the January 17, 2025 Faculty Senate meeting. Senator Lemus made a correction to state he was absent, and it was not listed as such. President Banik requested a motion and second to accept the minutes as corrected. Senator Lemley made a motion to accept the minutes, and Senator Taebi gave the second. President Banik accepted the minutes as presented.

Guests

Mr. Zac Selmon, Director of Athletics

Mr. Selmon greeted the Senate and gave updates on athletics. He said opening day of baseball was moved to today due to the weather. Mr. Selmon thanked the senators for what they do for the institution and for the athletics department. He said when you mix higher education and sports, the number one priority is for the student athletes to graduate. Last semester our student athletes had a 3.34 GPA with 15 of 16 sport programs above a 3.0.

Mr. Selmon said the transfer portal nationally is something to be worked on and stated there were over 50 new student athletes in January. That is a big challenge to come in mid-semester, not only academically, but socially, and then mixing with the team.

Mr. Selmon stated one of the biggest challenges not just at MSU, but industrywide, is a case called *House v. NCAA*. He said if the case is formally approved in April, each institute would provide up to \$20.5 million dollars in revenue sharing with the student athletes. He said when NIL went through legislation there were not a lot of guardrails, and it left everyone scrambling. He said we are now at the hands of the court.

Mr. Selmon stated they are looking into ways to control the expenses to meet the requirements. One of those ways was to adjust ticket pricing for faculty and staff. He said they should know more about the legal challenges very shortly.

Senator Lemus asked if they know how it will be distributed among the teams. Mr. Selmon said they are working that out because there is not a model where they would become employees.

Senator Lemus stated it was not adding up for him to have the student athletes share up to \$20.5 million dollars but not our regular students. Mr. Selmon stated the \$20.5 million goes directly to student athletes but not to other students. He said we are in a completely different day and age, and it is an economic reality specifically of big-time college football and basketball, and the landscape of athletics has drastically changed the past few years.

Mr. John Rush, Vice President for Development and Alumni

Mr. Rush greeted the Senate and thanked the senators for what they do in investing in students. He stated donors do not give because of him but because they had professors who invested in them. As they become successful and can give themselves, they want to invest in current students by providing better facilities and opportunities. He said MSU fundraises with our ears. They find out what the person's passions and interests are, then look for those needs and opportunities within the university. This allows the donor to see what their gift has done and how important it is.

Mr. Rush said over the last five years, \$120 million has been raised for MSU. Mr. Rush stated of the funds raised one half of 1% is unrestricted. The remainder of the funds are all donor designated. He said we now have 105 endowed faculty positions across campus with a \$97.5 million endowment collectively. Mr. Rush stated they have raised money for Promise Kids and a mentoring program for them. He said nearly 700 faculty members have contributed over \$8.7 million to MSU. Mr. Rush said they have been able to grow endowments for research to \$22 million and another \$2.2 million for an endowed lecture series.

Mr. Rush stated if you have a relationship in industry or a partner, then reach out to your dean to go to that person. He said they also have staff that does corporate foundation work and will come alongside you. Mr. Rush said in corporate philanthropy they want access to you or something that you're doing. He said we must ride that line between what is sponsored and what is philanthropic. If a corporation is interested in building an endowed faculty position to make sure we have faculty of a certain expertise, we can do that philanthropically. He said they can also help if they want to build a laboratory for our space to make sure we have certain equipment that all our students can use for an educational benefit. When they want you to do a specific project or test a certain thing, then it would be transferred over to sponsored programs to make it work.

Dr. David Shaw, Provost & Executive Vice President

Dr. Shaw greeted the Senate and stated he had met with Human Resources about the Dual-Career resolution passed at the January Senate meeting. He stated a website had been created at <https://www.hrm.msstate.edu/benefits/dual-career-program>. He asked that the senators visit the

site and give feedback about the information. He stated he would be sending the link out campus wide.

Dr. Shaw stated he investigated the Work-Life Balance Committee and found it had not been active for the past 3 years, but they are re-constituting the committee to move that forward again.

Senator Gregory stated she was using and navigating digital measures. She wondered about an opportunity for small groups or a partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning to educate faculty about its uses and so the OIRE office would not have to answer the same questions for others. Dr. Shaw stated he would visit with Dr. Baham about providing more information and tutorials regarding digital measures.

Senator Gregory asked Dr. Shaw for insight concerning the Visual Art Center Galleries that are to be demolished on University Drive, which affects the art department because they are losing space. Dr. Shaw stated although he had not been given a specific briefing, he would investigate and have better information next time. He said we are going through a lot of pain related to space across the entire campus due to building and building renovations and they are working on how to accommodate on a temporary basis the needs of the departments. He said they had good conversations with the library for some spaces and good conversations about additional spaces that may be opening within the next 12 month.

Senator Gregory stated her specific concern is the public access to the building and the library restricts public viewing along with faculty and students. Dr. Shaw said he would have information at the next meeting.

Senator Taibi asked if there are going to be any discussions within the administration on how cuts to indirect costs would affect each part of the university. Dr. Shaw stated they are talking about it and a meeting has been set to discuss it for Monday morning. He said it was very fluid and literally changing as he spoke, but as of now the indirect cost rate for NIH grants has been set to 15%. He also stated that the fortunate part for us is that we do not have a lot of NIH funding, and they are already looking at what that means budgetarily for the university. He said there are rumors the same indirect cost rate would be applied across the board, but there has been no announcement of that. He said they are in close contact with the congressional delegation and their staff on almost an hourly basis trying to be sure we have weighed in so we can be in the best position to be advocating for our programs and for our faculty, staff and students.

Senator Taibi asked about DEI at the university. Dr. Shaw stated that with DEI we are dealing with a federal situation and a state situation that are moving in the same direction, but at different speeds and in different ways. He said they have been working with the legislative leadership in the state, in particular, to try to be sure that anything that does come out is well reasoned and not a surprise to either us or the legislators.

Senator Zuckerman asked for Dr. Shaw's thoughts on DEI as the faculty are interacting with others. Dr. Shaw stated as he has spoken with other colleagues at other institutions that taking a breath and waiting a moment to see what changes will happen in a day or even an hour. He said for example, with the indirect cost issue there is frustration and there are institutions in the nation that have 120% overhead. He does not believe 15% is the final number but rather something to be used and considered to get to a more moderate level.

Dr. Shaw said it is the same with DEI. He said if you step back, you will see that maybe this is something that we will see the pendulum swing one way and then we'll see it swing the other way, and somewhere in the middle is probably where we're going to land. He said lawsuits are being filed on an almost minute-by-minute basis, some challenges from the legislature itself at the federal level on overreach of the executive branch and then the ideas that are coming forward. Dr. Shaw stated there is so much that unfolds on a moment-by-moment basis that we don't need to get lost in the moment or on any one particular thing as we see some really unprecedented things start to play out. He said he believes things will be different in a year's time and the best advice he can give is to take a big breath but don't take it as the way it is forever, but as the way it is for the moment until the next conversation comes up. He said they are taking the behind-the-scenes approach that can actually get more done and that things are happening as we speak.

Senator Lemus stated that as administration is speaking with legislators and congressional delegations, he wanted to emphasize that there are a lot of things out there that highlight the impact that Mississippi State and the faculty have on those programs. Dr. Shaw said his point was extraordinarily well taken and said that almost word for word that was the conversation that President Keenum had with both Senator Hyde-Smith and Senator Wicker this week. He said at the very highest levels that we can reach, we are trying to be sure that people understand President Keenum. He said there are so many good programs that we do not need to just do a blanket repeal of funds when they have had such a huge positive impact globally and not just locally.

Senator Lemley stated she was concerned about the teaching grants being eliminated and having a teacher shortage within the state in many areas. The impact would be felt locally by not having quality training for teachers. The faculty in the College of Education would see a possible loss at the national level in funding and what that means for teacher training to move forward. Dr. Shaw said her point was extraordinarily well taken and they will continue to be advocated for. He said every time a question or something comes up, whether it's rumor or whether it's an executive order or such, we have tried to be sure that we weigh in at every level that we have the opportunity to be able to do so for advocacy for those programs.

REPORT OF THE FACULTY SENATE PRESIDENT

I hope that everyone is getting back in the full swing of the spring semester. This time of year is both exciting and nerve-racking for various reasons. I'm looking forward to a more consistent weather pattern, too. Basketball is in full swing, and baseball is just around the corner. The weather is having both good and bad days. Testing is kicking off for many classes.

The Undergraduate Research Symposium will be on us very quickly (April 9th/10th), with abstracts due by March 7th. Spirit of State Award nominations are open now and will close on February 20th with applications due by February 24th.

If you are interested in socializing with other faculty and staff members, on February 18th, there will be a King Cake & Connections social at the Omaha Club at Dudy Noble Stadium with karaoke, music, and (of course) king cake. It will be from 4pm – 6pm. Check it out at <https://www.oidi.msstate.edu/events/2025/01/full-court-festivities-king-cake-connection>

The Benefits Committee would also like to encourage everyone to complete the Benefits Survey that was emailed to faculty on Friday, February 7, 2025. It is due the 28th. https://msstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4Pla0MXbG7YAh5Y.

Reports from Committees on which I Serve:

Athletic Council – The council did not meet in February. The next meeting should be on March 19, 2025. The council has begun work on the year Athletic Academic Support Services report to give to Dr. Keenum. This report should be finalized by our April 2025 meeting for discussion.

Dean's Council – This council did not meet in February. The subcommittee concerning the Faculty Grievance AOP has met and is working on language to address some concerns from this council.

Design Review Committee – This committee met via MS Teams on February 6th to continue discussion on the Wise Center entrance signage. Dr. Nick Frank, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, attended to give his input on the signage. Dr. Frank discussed how the new signage would serve as a landmark aid to guide visitors to the correct place and make the building have a more modern look. The motion was to deny this signage for not meeting the policy standards and was passed unanimously to deny.

Inclusive Excellence Leadership Council – This council met on February 5th. Dr. Caroline Kobia talked through recruitment and retention initiatives she has been working on through the Office of Inclusive Excellence. We also discussed the multiple DEI bills that are currently proposed in the Mississippi Legislature. Three of the five bills have died in committee, but two others (SB 2515 and HB 1193) seem to have traction within the legislature. This council will hold an additional meeting later this month on February 19th.

There are a few events coming up. February is Black History Month, the African American Studies Program, Department of Art, Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College, and Office of Inclusive Excellence are among the sponsors hosting several events throughout the next few weeks. Check them out at <https://www.msstate.edu/newsroom/article/2025/02/msu-celebrates-black-history-month-arts-events-shackouls-lecture>

On February 27th, there will be an interactive workshop focused on supporting underrepresented students as they navigate various identities. Lunch will be provided. Check it out at: <https://www.oidi.msstate.edu/events/2025/01/pathways-belonging-empowering-students-across-campus>

Executive Council – This council did not meet in January 2025 due to the Spring General Faculty Meeting. The next meeting will be held on February 24, 2025.

Game Day and Special Events – No meeting is currently scheduled for this committee.

Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee – The committee did not meet in January 2025, but Athletics shared the MSU Athletics Master Plan with the committee. Some projects that have been done or are in progress include:

Humphrey Coliseum Team Areas, Training Room, and Courtside Club – Complete

Volleyball Locker Room – Complete

Palmeiro Center Upgraded Lighting and Ceiling Liner – Complete

Davis Wade Stadium Lighting – In Progress

There are several other projects in the works beyond this for upgrades to many facilities around campus.

Parking and Traffic Regulations Committee – This committee had no in-person meeting in January. The committee was sent an email of the preliminary data from the Campus Transportation Planning process concerning the transportation survey that was sent out to the faculty, staff, and students. The committee should be meeting in February to discuss data in the report thus far.

Sustainability Committee – This committee has not met since the last report.

United Faculty Senates Association of Mississippi (UFSAM) – This committee has not met since last year, but I wanted to give an update on the parental leave petition that began here and was passed last year in this senate. The House of Representatives in the MS Legislature has passed House Bill 1063 THE MISSISSIPPI STATE EMPLOYEES PAID PARENTAL LEAVE ACT 114-0 for January 31, 2025. Shoutout to Senator James Chamberlain for working on this petition last year. Our next meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2025.

Faculty Success Team – This committee now has a set date to meet. We will be meeting on the third Wednesday of the month at 11am. On January 15th, the committee met to discuss the objectives and goals of the committee. Topics for the next meeting were discussed along with recommendations for faculty retention ideas and improvements to faculty success.

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

Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee - This committee has not met since the last Vice President's report.

Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery Committee - Spring Undergraduate Research Symposium will be April 9-10, 2025. The deadline for submissions is March 7. The website is <https://urcd.msstate.edu>.

Also, this is just a reminder that ORED provides annual internal funding for faculty projects with undergraduate student participation.

Senator Williams asked if the Ombud answered to the provost. Senator Breazeale stated the Ombuds is in a unique position within the university and does not answer to anyone as it is completely independent. There are four standards of practice for ombuds: impartiality, independence, confidentiality, and informality. He said independence is a big one and taken very seriously. He has had nothing but support but will be completely independent. The only time he reports to anyone is called upward feedback. If he notices trends and things that are impacting more than 1 or 2 faculty or staff members or that administration needs to be made aware of, he takes those trends upward so that things can be done to address them.

Reports from Faculty Senate Designates on University Committees

Business Sent to Committee

Business to be Sent to Committee

Standing Committee Reports

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS — No Report

ANCILLARY AFFAIRS — No Report

CHARTER & BYLAWS

1. Senator Spurlin, on behalf of the Charter & Bylaws Committee, provided the committee report on the updates to Section V of the Faculty Handbook.

Senator Gregory stated her department requires that annual reviews be part of the P&T documents and that some junior faculty are told they are required to submit them to external reviewers which is a personnel issue. She asked if Human Resources also has access to that information.

Senator Spurlin stated the Senate remains silent on the issue of annual and third year reviews. He said that means that as far as the university document is concerned, there is no policy on whether you can or can't include it and leaves it to lower levels in colleges or schools and departments who can then require it if they want to.

Senator Spurlin said he believes Human Resources does have access to personnel files, but he does not believe they are going to weigh in on someone's P&T dossier. He said we only speak to promotion and tenure.

Senator Gregory had concerns that the wording may need to clarify if Human Resources would need to be added to the list of those that have access or if it's clear enough that it is only academic department heads and deans. Senator Spurlin stated they tried to be clear with respect to promotion and tenure but if this body thinks the statement should be more explicit, they can vote to edit that statement.

Dr. Shaw stated everything Senator Spurlin said was correct. He added that all the college and departmental documents will need to be looked at regarding the changes that have been proposed to be in compliance with the superseding document, which is the faculty handbook. Dr. Shaw said they have had conversations on several occasions that departmental and college documents can add to but cannot diverge from.

Senator Zuckerman asked about annual reviews coming up and stated there is language in each section in her area about how we contribute to diversity equity, inclusion and access. She asked if they complete that or leave blank at this time. Dr. Shaw said he was not familiar with the document and asked that she forward it to him for review.

Senator Parker stated on line 407 about the annual faculty review evaluation. She said line 407 is describing a different population than line 568 with the same subheadings and wondered if those were addressing two different tracks. Senator Spurlin asked if she is suggesting putting a parenthetical behind each one for professional track faculty where appropriate, and then previously for tenure track faculty. He stated the committee would review before the next meeting.

Senator Lemus stated we need to be very careful with the evaluations and that when you expose faculty and evaluations to the whole department it becomes a legal issue because you are exposing the confidentiality of the applicant. Senator Spurlin stated any changes the Faculty Senate recommends must be approved by Legal and they let us know if we violated some sort of lower confidentiality standard.

No further discussion.

2. Senator Spurlin, on behalf of the Charter & Bylaws Committee, provided the committee report on the Faculty Apportionment.

The motion to accept the committee report on Faculty Apportionment passed unanimously.

FACULTY AFFAIRS – No Report

STUDENT AFFAIRS

1. Student Voting Letter

Senator Haynes, on behalf of the Student Affairs Committee, provided the committee report on the Student Voting Letter submitted at the November 2025 meeting.

The committee recommended the Senate review AOP 12.09 Class Attendance and Reporting Absences.

The committee recommended the Stennis Association work with the Division of Student Affairs to create a website that has detailed voter information about all the resources in different states about voting.

The committee recommended educating faculty about how excused absences work and being able to do more than what is listed in the AOP, not just the things itemized.

Senator Taibi stated he remembered from the November meeting that we agreed on the importance of our student to be able to practice their voting rights but there were concerns raised about the consequences and concerns. Senator Haynes stated she has a list of concerns that people have raised, but this recommendation is only to pull the AOP for review.

Senator Carr stated that he agreed there should be means to educate students on what they need to do to vote based on where they live. He also stated giving students an excused absence for something they can plan to do is not something the faculty senate should necessarily be involved in. He then stated his concerns about verifying students voting for the excused absence.

Senator Gregory stated there was not early voting in the state of Mississippi and that to absentee vote you must get it notarized which costs money as there is a payment to send it. She said it is an onerous process to not go in person and vote.

The motion to review AOP 12.09 Class Attendance and Reporting Absences passed by with 29 yay to 8 nay.

President Banik stated the AOP will be assigned to the Academic Affairs Committee.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES – No Report

Old Business

New Business

1. Student Course Survey Letter

President Banik presented a letter from Senator Carskadon about Student Course Surveys and asked for a motion that we accept the letter.

Senator Lemley gave the motion to accept the letter and Senator Haynes gave the second. The motion passed by majority hand vote.

Submitted for correction and approval.

Stacy Haynes, Secretary

Dinah Jenkins, Administrative Assistant