

MUW FACULTY SENATE

February 14, 2025

Via Zoom

Present: Kristy Alpe, Hailey Bailey, Lynsey Baker, Ian Childers, Jianwen Crump, Rose Ford, Mary Helen Hawkins, Susan Hurley, Shyam Heda, Jared Quist, Jessica McDill (proxy for Ashley Chisolm), Kris Lee, Chad Murphy, Andrew Nguyen, Chanley Rainey, Melissa Smith, and Bronwyn Teague

1. Call to Order - 12:15 p.m.

2. President Miller provided an update regarding the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) request for proposals to expand the Mississippi School for Math and Science (MSMS).

MDE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

In December, MDE appointed a subcommittee of the State Board of Education to study the future of MSMS, so The W administration was expecting to hear something about the future of MSMS this year. However, they were expecting a lengthier process and a more thoughtful approach; instead, they were blindsided by a request for proposals (RFP) with a 3-week deadline and pitting MUW against MSU. The RFP is highly irregular and seems designed to favor relocation to MSU.

The RFP asks MUW and MSU to propose how they would support the expansion of MSMS on their respective campuses. MSMS would like to expand number of juniors and seniors from 200 to 300 and wants to add an additional 100 10th grade students in the coming years.

After the proposal are submitted, MDE's subcommittee on MSMS will, according to information provided by State Superintendent of Education Lance Evans, develop a rubric for scoring the proposals and seek stakeholder input. It will then issue recommendations to the Mississippi Legislature. The RFP says that implementation of the winning proposal will begin in the fall of 2026, but this seems extremely unrealistic.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

House Education Chair Rob Roberson hopes to use state funds to help pay for a new high school for Starkville-Oktibehha Consolidated School District, and this appears to be part of his effort: he can argue that state funding for the campus will benefit MSMS as well as SOCS and MSU's School of Education.

MUW RESPONSE & TALKING POINTS

Advocacy strategy

President Miller believes that we have little opportunity for influence at MDE or in the initial phase of the RFP process but feels that we can affect the decision by marshalling public opinion and lobbying legislators. In the meantime, we will submit a strong proposal that will be hard for MDE to dismiss. The administration has already begun behind-the-scenes lobbying efforts with legislators and plans to push especially hard during MDE's supposed public input phase.

Right now, the administration continues to gather data points to support its vision for MSMS on The W's campus and plans to have a draft proposal by Fri., followed by a strong proposal submitted by the Tue., 2/25 deadline. We also want to use the proposal to clarify the level of support MDE is requesting and to attach a price tag to those requests so that if, as we hope, MSMS remains on The W's campus, we can establish the costs that MDE and the legislature should expect to reimburse us for to cover all of those services.

In terms of the public debate, the administration has been pleased with reporting on this issue by *The Commercial Dispatch*, especially its latest story on crime and safety statistics. Alongside favorable editorials, they have provided phone numbers for people to call legislators, and President Miller hopes that everyone will use that information to begin contacting legislators to advocate The W's position. In response to a critique from *The Dispatch* (aired in the second installment of a new politics podcast) that President Miller has not been as engaged in the public debate as she should be, President Miller noted that she has been devoting most of her time to readying the proposal for MDE and lobbying key political figures directly.

On that front, President Miller has been in constant contact with the two officials who have been The W's most prominent advocates in the public square: Mayor of Columbus, Keith Gaskin, and with Trip Hairston, Chairman of the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors. She also met with MS House Speaker Jason White, MS State Representative (Columbus) Dana McLean, and Supervisor Hairston earlier this week to express concern over the timing and bias toward MSU in the language of the MDE RFP. She separately met with State Superintendent of Education Lance Evans to express concern over the RFP's timing, lack of public input, twelve-page limit, and lack of a scoring rubric in the RFP. Our Capitol Day a couple of weeks ago included a dinner with several legislators, featured student testimonials, and seemed very well-received. Several lawmakers told President Miller that this was exactly what they needed to hear. Speaker White was reserved but seemed very interested and understanding about the process. Overall, it seems like things are going well in the legislature, but the administration and the [Legislative Engagement & Advocacy Partnership \(LEAP\)](#) team will continue working with key legislators to make them see reason and explain the cost savings of keeping MSMS here.

Talking points

The W's capacity to house MSMS is being unfairly called into question over the state of MSMS facilities that were never The W's responsibility. We contributed resources to found MSMS originally, as did the City of Columbus and Lowndes County, but we were not tasked with MSMS' perpetual upkeep. MDE's State Board of Education and the state legislature have severely underfunded MSMS even though the establishing grant agreement clearly gave responsibility for "major repair and renovation [of] facilities designated for MSMS use" as well as "maintenance, repair and replacement costs" to MSMS and the Department of Education. As things have developed, MSMS pays The W \$113,000 per year for some maintenance that we provide, and we have tried to provide additional support when possible. We are in the process of installing a chiller now, but capitol improvement funds for MSMS and The W are supposed to be separate affairs.

Housing MSMS on The W's campus remains the more logical choice given that everything would have to be recreated at MSU, and MSMS students currently have nearly everything they need within a two block, safe campus. As reported by *The Dispatch*, we are extremely safe in comparison with MSU, especially as it relates to serious crimes like rape. The one area where

we look relatively poor is burglary, and that is mainly the result of a person who was able to steal items from several unlocked cars in 2022.

Given their plans for expansion, MSMS does have some additional unmet needs, but these are already included in our campus master plan. We have identified options for the construction of a new residence hall to accommodate 10th grade students as well as a new parking lot—either South of the Hogarth Student Center, across from Fant, or behind Jones and Kinkannon where there is currently green space. We have contracted with Prior Morrow to generate renderings of these plans. Funding renovations and new construction here would make tax payer money go further and would be less disruptive for MSMS students, faculty, and staff than a move.

In the RFP, MDE is asking for additional services that we do not believe are truly needed. Some of them are things we have already offered but found no interest in from MSMS. Some are things that are only necessary at a larger campus like MSU; e.g., we don't need a campus shuttle service here, because students can easily and safely walk across campus. Whatever the MDE proposes, the legislature will have to fund it. So, we will see what kind of appetite there is from legislators.

Contingency planning

While we want MSMS to remain on our campus and believe that we are objectively the best host for it, we do not want anyone to think that we will be unable to continue operating if we lose MSMS. If MSMS relocates, we are preparing plans to make use of the additional space. For example, their dorms could provide special housing for single-parents, graduate students, and other adult learners. We also have done a lot of work to build enrollment—including the creation of new graduate programs and a dual enrollment agreement with Lowndes County School District that is being finalized—and we are seeing promising numbers for Fall 2025 enrollment.

3. Guest- Chief Vibrock to Discuss Parking Issues on Campus

The MUW Police Department (WPD) is currently conducting a parking census and will use that data to develop a digital map of parking spaces available on campus and walking distances/time of travel so folks can make informed decisions about where they can park and still get to their destination on time. The PD hopes to have this service available by Spring 2026 and anticipates that the digital parking map will empower the campus population to be more responsible about arriving in time to utilize parking even if it is not in the immediate vicinity of their destination.

According to the preliminary census results—which do not yet include the new Jones lot that was recently constructed—we have roughly 300 faculty/staff (green) and 800 (white) student spaces. These are and will remain rough estimates because of spaces like Cromwell's gravel lot, where the lack of fixed spacing means that capacity varies. The census does not and will not include parking that is on the perimeter of campus, though WPD is empowered to enforce parking laws on those city streets. About 60% of spaces are occupied between 8:00am - 10:00am and about 80% of spaces are occupied between 10am – 2pm. Results of the census will probably be published on the department's website alongside the digital maps.

Heda asked about signage that could alert drivers about which colors are available for parking by different populations; Chief Vibrock said that we may be able to put up a sign in a prominent location, but we have so many mixed lots that it would be inefficient and confusing to put up a sign for each lot.

Rainey noted that she and other senators believed faded paint striping was contributing to problems in some instances, particularly in the dark green striping for faculty-designated parallel parking. Chief Vibrock said that the WPD is aware of the need for better striping and has been trying to work with Facilities Maintenance to ensure that we do get new striping as well as more uniform spacing, which he identified as a related issue. Chief Vibrock will propose that this work be done on a routine summer schedule, but that will be worked out in collaboration with Facilities Maintenance.

Senators also encouraged Chief Vibrock to install signage at the entrance to the Cromwell gravel parking lot that alerts the public that the lot is for MUW faculty, staff, and students only. Chief Vibrock agreed and shared that there was, at one point, such a sign in the lot, but that it was destroyed in a crash.

4. Approval of Minutes from November (Childers, Smith)

5. Committee Reports

a. Administrative Council Report (Murphy)

Those who attended Capitol Day reported back to the Council and agreed that it went well. Dr. Tollison discussed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) bills, which have both passed out of their respective committees in the MS House and Senate, with the council and noted that the administration will continue to watch their progression.

As President Miller mentioned, we are pursuing dual enrollment opportunities with LCSD.

There are ongoing searches for directors for the Women's College and the Kossen Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) as well as for Dean of the Library.

There was a small editorial change and an updated url for Policy #6708.

b. Meeting with the President (Murphy)

Murphy will meet with President Miller again on Tuesday to discuss the MSMS situation, so faculty were asked to solicit questions from colleagues and share them with him ahead of the meeting.

c. Academic Council (Alpe)

Council discussed adding a provision addressing the use of AI to the Academic Integrity Policy and academic misconduct incidence report. Also discussed guidance for students re. potential Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) deportation raids and the prudence of students carrying identifying documents.

d. PIE (Rainey)

PIE Council made preparations for the FY26 budgeting process in its January meeting. It reviewed feedback gathered by members from colleagues regarding the ranking of strategic priorities and voted to retain the rankings used in 2025. PIE also crafted an explanatory statement on Zero-Based Budgeting to be included in the instructions sent to budget managers.

6. New Business

7. University Policies in Review

Only PS 6708 (informational edit; PS 6708 is not in review)

8. Book store

A faculty person reached out to Murphy saying their entire department was having issues with the bookstore.

Hurley has issues with books arriving very late (approaching 4th week) in the semester and hearing from colleagues that they have been told by the bookstore staff that their book were dropped by the publisher, but when Hurley called her publisher, they told her it was our bookstore dropping the ball.

Rainey, Smith, Murphy, and McDill all expressed frustration that they cannot enter their book orders personally because they took a class at some point in the past and are now permanently assigned the status of a student in Barnes & Nobles online platform. This leads to many issues, from late orders to orders not being placed at all.

Murphy will talk with Dr. Tollison about this, since it sounds like more than Trish Caston should be trying to handle independently. Senators were asked to solicit additional concerns from faculty to share with him ahead of that meeting.

9. UFSAM Attending February IHL board meeting

Murphy and other Senate Presidents will attend the IHL Board Meeting on Thursday, 2/20 as part of an initiative to attend at least once per semester and make a visual statement of faculty engagement.

10. Bathrooms in Stark

Murphy met with Glen to discuss the bathrooms in Stark. One issue is that Stark has been under Athletics and other units in the past and is only recently functioning with its own budget and director. now it is independent and Glen has begun making plans for long-term maintenance. Heda suggested that some of the issues are simply related to regular cleaning, which shouldn't require long-term planning.

Parkinson has many labs with locks that are broken and need to be replaced. Work orders and even direct appeals to Jodi Kennedy have failed to get anything fixed since Oct. 2024.

11. Adjourned at 1:37 PM (Lee, Quist)

Next Meeting: March 14th (if needed – Spring Break)