

MUW FACULTY SENATE

April 11, 2025

Via Zoom

Present: Kristy Alpe, Hailey Bailey, Lynsey Baker, E. Ashley Chisolm, Jianwen Crump, Rose Ford, Mary Helen Hawkins, Ghanshyam Heda, Susan Hurley, Lindsay Kemp, T. Kris Lee, Chad Murphy, Andrew Nguyen, Chanley Rainey, Stephanie Salvaterra (proxy for Jared Quist), Robert Sample, Melissa Smith, and Bronwyn Teague.

Absent: Ian Childers

- 1. Call to Order - 12:15 p.m.**
- 2. Approval of February Minutes (Lee, Smith)**
- 3. Committee Reports**
 - a. Administrative Council (Murphy)**

UPDATES RE. STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Admin. Council discussed updates at involving the work of the state legislature. Most conversation focused on lawmakers' failure to pass a budget before adjourning and the likely timing of a special session for the purpose. Currently, the administration is expecting Governor Reeves to call a session in June, but sooner would be preferable. Even before the end of session, leadership was expecting a budget cut of roughly 1.5%, and now they believe our funding could be reduced by as much as 2%.

There was no additional info. on MSMS to discuss.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Admin. Council discussed the campus visit made by Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith and plans to arrange a summer meeting with Senator Roger Wicker. This was Hyde-Smith's first visit to The W, and it did not begin as an initiative of the university leadership. It grew out of an invitation from Julia Mortyakova for Sen. Hyde-Smith to attend the Music by Women Festival, and while she couldn't attend that event, she did follow up and request a campus visit. This resulted in a 45-minute visit with Nursing, Speech-Language Pathology, and Early Childhood—programs selected for their alignment with her interest in rural healthcare and early childhood development policy. She did not discuss DOGE or other federal policy trends.

A change to The W's mission statement was made—replacing “diverse and inclusive” with “welcoming”—without following the normal process because of the need to ensure compliance with federal rules that determine access to federal funding.

b. Meeting with the President (Murphy)

Murphy did not meet with President Miller in March but encouraged faculty to reach out with questions and concerns ahead of their Tuesday, April 15 meeting.

c. Academic Council (Alpe)

Academic Council discussed the State Board of Education's recommendation that the legislature relocate MSMS to MSU, and Alpe relayed Dr. Tollison's belief that we would survive in the event that the legislature follows through on the recommendation. He believes this despite acknowledging that the loss of these residential students would reduce our dual enrollment numbers and spending in the cafeteria.

Academic Council also discussed the policies currently before MUW Faculty Senate.

d. PIE Council (Rainey)

PIE Council reviewed the procedures and forms (in the case of staff) used during faculty and staff evaluations and discussed ways to improve supervisor feedback. While changes to the form and to policy were considered, PIE decided instead to begin broader campus conversations about these processes. PIE plans to organize a panel discussion, workshop, or other event highlighting best practices across campus.

Rainey noted that the university webpage describing the priorities set by PIE was not currently available, so that the link provided to budget managers for the purposes of justifying their budget requests was broken. She asked Murphy whether this was a result of administration efforts to comply with federal rules, similar to the change made to the university mission statement, but Murphy said he had heard nothing about the university priorities. Other senators were also unaware of any changes. Rainey promised to follow up with PIE Chair Brian Anderson.

4. New Business

a. Policy Statements

Approved changes to PS 3526 Academic Calendar Committee (Chisolm, Alpe), PS 3525 Graduate Council (Chisolm, Smith), and PS 3544 MUW Council of Chairs (Chisolm, Baker).

Approved deletion of PS 3505 Institutional Animal care and Use Committee (IACUC) (Alpe, Smith) because all of our research involving animals is done in partnership with MSU, so we do not need to have a committee of our own duplicating the approval process

Approved PS 3543 Graduate Student Scholastic Appeals Committee with the recommendation that clarification be made as to the meaning of the term "excluded" in Section 3 and "working day prior to the published registration date for the semester." (Chisolm, Rainey). Senators are concerned that the current description of the appeal deadline could be interpreted as either the first or last day of registration. The term exclusion might also lead to confusion, since it suggests that a student could appeal their denial of admission to an MUW graduate program even though senators assume the policy is intended to apply to previously admitted graduate students who are expelled from a program.

b. UFSAM Letter to IHL

Approved motion to co-sign the UFSAM Letter to the IHL in support of Dr. Dawn McLin's appeal of her termination from JSU (Rainey, Lee).

BACKGROUND

Ahead of the Fall 2024 semester, Dr. Dawn McLin, JSU Professor and Faculty Senate President, received a termination letter from JSU President Marcus Thompson. There was a great deal of concern raised across university communities and in the press that her termination was in retaliation for her leadership of the Faculty Senate, which had declared no confidence in the administration several times (including under the previous president).

In September 2024, MUW Faculty Senate voted to decline an invitation to sign a letter from the United Faculty Senates Association of Mississippi (UFSAM) addressed to JSU President Thompson. That letter expressed the collective concern of faculty senates regarding an “apparent lack of adherence to due process and the protection of academic freedom” in Dr. McLin’s firing. Our discussion, held over email, highlighted the lack of public information available and the fact that the termination and appeals process available to Dr. McLin at JSU were still playing out. We did not want to act on speculation and did not feel the letter’s concerns with due process were borne out by the facts available. Nevertheless, every other Faculty Senate in UFSAM voted to sign the letter, and it was sent to President Thompson.

Over the course of the 2024-2025 academic year, Dr. McLin’s appeal of her termination was heard by JSU’s Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC), which—noting the permissible grounds for termination of tenured faculty outlined in both IHL Policy 403.0104 and JSU’s Faculty Handbook (December 1, 2011, p. 48)—concluded that “the University did not make specific allegations nor provide substantive evidence to support [its] claims of malfeasance, inefficiency, contumacious conduct, and ‘other cause.’” The FPC recommended that “the termination process conclude and that Dr. McLin should be immediately reinstated as a full professor.”

Disregarding the FPC’s findings, JSU administrators proceeded with Dr. McLin’s termination, and she has now filed an appeal with the IHL Board. This letter urges the IHL “to accept and find in favor of [Dr. McLin’s] appeal.”

DISCUSSION

Concerns about signing the UFSAM letter were similar to those raised against signing the initial letter to President Thompson. Largely, they centered on the fact that we lack the requisite information to judge for ourselves the merit of Dr. McLin’s termination and claims that her firing was in retaliation for her leadership of an assertive Faculty Senate during a time of conflict with the administration. Senators were also wary of asserting ourselves in another institution’s internal policies and procedures.

Arguments in favor of signing relied on the JSU FPC’s findings and the fact that IHL policies are also implicated in the case. They pointed to the fact that JSU’s internal due process resulted in a finding that the IHL and JSU requirements for termination were not met in Dr. McLin’s case and that claims of retaliation had substance. Senators felt the claims of retaliation and policy violation were no longer speculative in light of the FPC’s work and thought it appropriate to urge IHL’s involvement in the case given the Board’s own policies on termination of tenured faculty. Given that IHL policy on this matter and the Board’s willingness to hold institutions to account for violating this policy impact all tenured faculty in the IHL system, senators felt it was important to advocate for Dr. McLin’s appeal and to urge a Board decision that will reinforce tenure and shared governance protections throughout the system.

c. Fund A & B Updates

Fund A has only roughly \$300 with requests pending. Fund A has level 1 (presenting at conference) and Level II (just attending) funding available, and the ceiling for funding is \$350 for Level I and \$175 for Level II. Fund B retains \$3,919.00 and grants are capped at \$400 and may be used for classroom projects. All funding requests must be requested and spent by the end of June.

d. Parkinson Hall Lab Locks

Heda raised concern about the need for new locks on the doors of labs in Parkinson Hall. Murphy is going to meet with Heda on Monday, April 14 to see the problem first-hand.

e. University Guidance on DEI Policies

Nguyen raised concerns from PSY & FSC about the types of language they might need to avoid in public-facing texts and asked that Murphy ask President Miller for guidance. Murphy shared that the administration is waiting on the Gov. to sign the DEI bill passed by the legislature and then expects IHL to provide guidance. While IHL Board will meet April 15, it may be later before we have any statement from them.

Nguyen also asked that Murphy convey to President Miller faculty concern over how elimination of the state income tax may affect the university's budget and ask her to share her outlook.

f. Bookstore

Following up on issues discussed in our March meeting, Murphy forwarded Faculty Senate concerns re. the bookstore to Trish Caston. The only thing that he has heard is that the issue with faculty being unable to order their books because they are categorized as students should be resolved, but this has not been true for him. Smith and at least one other senator reported that they were now able to place orders, so some progress has been made.

5. Elections for the 2025-2025 Executive Committee

Faculty whose terms ended this session left the meeting, and their replacements were installed. Murphy reviewed the roles and responsibilities associated with the offices of president, vice president, and secretary and called for nominations for the 2025-2026 executive committee.

Chad Murphy was nominated (Chisolm, Lee) for a second term as President and was voted into office unanimously (Chisolm, Teague).

Kristy Alpe was nominated (Chisolm, Lee) for a second term as Vice President and was voted into office unanimously (Chisolm, Teague).

Chanley Rainey was nominated (Chisolm, Alpe) for a second term as Secretary and was voted into office unanimously (Lee, Teague).

6. Meeting adjourned at 1:49 PM (Lee, Alpe)

Suggested 2025-2026 Dates: September 12th, October 10th, November 14th, December 12th (if needed), February 13th, March 13th, April 10th (for installation of new Senators and Elections).