



## **ROBERT HOLLAND FACULTY SENATE**

### **Uncorrected Minutes of August 20, 2021**

The Robert Holland Faculty Senate of Mississippi State University held its regular monthly meeting in the Grisham Room of the Mitchell Memorial Library at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, August 20, 2021.

Members absent and excused were Rachel Allison, Beth Baker, Gnaneswar Gude, Erdogan Memili, Paul Spurlin, Amanda Stone, and Mark Welch.

Members absent were Thu Dinh and Yucheng Liu.

The National Championship Trophy awarded to the MSU Baseball Team was displayed in the meeting room for the senators.

The meeting was called to order by Senate President Rebecca Robichaux-Davis.

President Robichaux-Davis asked for any corrections to the minutes of the April 9, 2021, meeting. She said one correction had been submitted for attendance. Beth Baker was able to make the meeting and will be removed from the list of excused absences. Hearing no additional corrections, President Robichaux-Davis accepted the minutes as presented.

### **GUESTS**

#### **Dr. Mark Keenum, University President**

Dr. Keenum began by referencing the National Championship Trophy and saying he is still beaming from the great success of the baseball team in Omaha, Nebraska. He said it was great to see the thousands of Mississippi State fans in Omaha.

Dr. Keenum said he hopes all the senators had a good summer and were able to recharge their batteries in preparation for the fall semester. He said it has been a busy August. Two weeks

ago, we welcomed 1,500 freshmen who participated in our New Maroon Camp to campus. This was by far the largest New Maroon Camp we ever had. Dr. Keenum said the camp gives students the opportunity to spend a week learning about our rich history and traditions. It also gives these students the opportunity to get acclimated to college life. Dr. Keenum said he applauds the students who plan and run this camp for their fellow students. They give their time to provide this for our freshmen. We also welcomed 840 young ladies during our panhellenic recruitment. This was a record number of participants. This year bid day was hosted in Davis Wade Stadium. The band, soccer team, volleyball team, and football team have been on campus for the majority of the month as well. The football season will kick off on our campus on September 4<sup>th</sup> against Louisiana Tech. Dr. Keenum said on Tuesday he had the opportunity to visit with over 100 new faculty members at the New Faculty Orientation.

Dr. Keenum said he was pleased to be able to participate in the 13<sup>th</sup> Maroon Edition Habitat House. We, as a university, partner with the Starkville Habitat for Humanity to build a home for a deserving family in our community. Our foundation makes a sizeable donation for the home, and our students, faculty, and staff contribute their time and hard work to build the home. This is something our students can get involved in and learn about homebuilding and the important value of service and helping others. Dr. Keenum said this is what we are about here at Mississippi State University.

Dr. Keenum said our last commencement ceremony was on April 30<sup>th</sup> and we were still wearing face coverings. Based on the available information, the decision was made to not require face coverings after graduation. This lasted for the months of May, June, July, and the beginning part of August. Dr. Keenum said he thought that the worst of Covid was behind us, but unfortunately, we have learned through the Delta variant that it is not behind us. The Delta variant is having a tremendous impact on those in the community who are not vaccinated. The plan for the fall semester was for a more traditional start with face coverings being optional. The Delta variant has changed this, and we have had to revert to requiring face coverings. Dr. Keenum said the administration has been in consultation with faculty leadership, student leadership, IHL leadership, and state leadership including Dr. Dobbs and Dr. Byers. Dr. Dobbs provided guidance to state universities and this guidance requires face coverings but does not require vaccinations. Dr. Keenum said he encourages anyone who is not vaccinated to please get vaccinated. We have partnered with the Delta Health Alliance. They have provided us with a sizeable grant to promote vaccination. It also allows for the funds to be used for incentives to get vaccinated. Dr. Keenum said the university is doing all it can to spread the word and get as many people vaccinated as possible. The most recent survey results indicate that 74% of the nearly 4,200 employees who responded are vaccinated. For our students, 52% of the nearly 17,000 respondents indicated they were vaccinated. Dr. Keenum said we are actively getting more and more students vaccinated. He said getting people vaccinated is the best way to get

out of this situation and move forward. Dr. Keenum said he has looked at multiple models for the Delta variant and one of these models indicates that the peak for our state was on August the 8<sup>th</sup>. He said he does not know that we have reached our peak. He said that he has not seen enough evidence to indicate that we have reached our peak. He said he does not know if we are even getting close to the peak. At some point the numbers will go down due to individuals either contracting the virus or getting vaccinated. He said not everyone who does not get vaccinated will contract the virus, but it will have a big impact on those who take the risk of not getting vaccinated. Dr. Keenum said this is why we are so aggressive in encouraging everyone to get the vaccine. The hope is that we will be able to revert to our original plans for the semester once the surge has passed and our numbers support doing so. Dr. Keenum said all of the presidents and the chancellor of the Mississippi public universities and the IHL Commissioner communicate weekly to share how things are going on our campuses. This will continue as we move forward.

Dr. Keenum said he is just as concerned as everyone in the room about the situation we are in. He said he feels we are doing the best we can to manage the situation. Dr. Keenum said the parents he has talked to are excited to have their children come to MSU, go to class, and start their college life. He said we may have to pivot based on the data and situations that occur. We may have to change what we are doing, and we are prepared to do that if necessary. The situation is monitored every single day. Dr. Keenum said he wants to remain in close communication with faculty and faculty leadership as we move forward.

Dr. Keenum said the state revenues for FY21 were \$1.164 billion over estimates. This is an unprecedented amount of excess revenues. It is already looking good for FY22 with July realizing a \$53.5 million over estimates. Dr. Keenum said he has already been meeting with the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House discussing our needs going forward. There is a lot of work going on right now with legislative hearings and meetings. We may have a special session before the end of this year to address medical marijuana and the referendum process. They have also been having hearings on redistricting based on our most recent census. Dr. Keenum said the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker had said there will be pay raises for K-12 teachers next year. The Governor wants to have pay raises for K-12 teachers for the next two years. Dr. Keenum said our teachers deserve a pay raise, but higher education needs pay raises as well. Last year we received funding for a 1% pay raise. We ended up giving a 2.5% pay raise at MSU. He said he spoke to our state leaders about infrastructure investment, and he pointed out that we need to invest in human infrastructure as well. Given our excess revenues from last year, we may not have a bond bill this year. They may decide to fund the items that would have fallen under the bond bill with the excess revenues. Dr. Keenum said he suspects that we will have a bond bill, but it will be a smaller bond bill with the funding for the remainder of our capital needs coming from the excess revenues. Dr. Keenum

said he will go into more detail on funding during the General Faculty Meeting which will be held on Tuesday, August 31<sup>st</sup> at 2:00 p.m. in Bettersworth Auditorium.

Dr. Keenum said he is excited about the upcoming school year while recognizing that we have some issues and challenges to deal with, but he truly believes that working together we will get through this.

Senator Pelaez asked why the university has decided to not require vaccines. She said she too is excited about the upcoming year, but she is also concerned. She said it is easy to say that we will get through the upcoming year, but people will get sick. She said she knows that Dr. Keenum is doing his best but asked if we are doing all we can. There are other things that we could be doing such as restrictions for activities unless people are vaccinated. We could also randomly test those students, faculty, and staff who are not vaccinated. Dr. Keenum replied fear is a very real issue for all of us. He said it is an issue for him as well. He said his best advice is to get vaccinated and take other precautionary steps to protect yourself such as wearing an N95 mask. Dr. Keenum said there has been a lot of discussion about mandatory vaccinations. He said he does not have the authority to mandate vaccinations across the campus. He said the IHL communications official said that IHL sets a minimum requirement for vaccinations and institutions have the ability to go beyond the minimum requirement. He said he, General Counsel, and IHL board members do not believe that to be true. He said Commissioner Rankins sent him an official memo stating, "To date, the Mississippi State Department of Health has strongly recommended eligible students get a Covid-19 vaccination but has not mandated nor recommended that state institutions of higher learning mandate a Covid-19 vaccination as a condition of attendance. IHL board policy 605 Proof of Immunization prescribes the specific vaccinations students must receive to attend IHL institutions. Although IHL board policy 605 does not prohibit institutions from imposing additional vaccination requirements, the general practice has been for IHL institutions to not impose additional requirements because IHL board policy 605 was crafted based on recommendations from the Mississippi State Department of Health." Based on this guidance and additional guidance provided by members of the board, he does not have the authority to have additional vaccination requirements. The best thing we can do is to urge everyone to get vaccinated. Dr. Keenum said the vaccine does not guarantee that you will not catch the virus, as we are seeing with the breakthrough cases, but it does provide protection from getting the virus and limits the severity of the illness. Senator Pelaez said she understands that Dr. Keenum may not have the authority to mandate vaccines, but evidence shows that urging students to get vaccinated does not raise vaccination rates. She said she feels that we, as a university, are not doing all we can. We could say if you do not want to get vaccinated you are subject to random testing. She said it is her right to be in a safe environment. She asked why we are not doing all that we could be doing. Dr. Keenum said there is no perfect solution. He said even if we had a mandate, there is no perfect, fail-safe

guarantee that everyone is going to be completely safe. He said we have to deal with the conditions that we are in and make the best of them while relying on the guidance of our state public health officials, the board and commissioner, and all the CIO's at our sister institutions. He said there is no lack of fear or concern by any of these individuals. Dr. Keenum said he wants to do all that he can to protect his family and everyone across this campus. He said he does not know that what we are doing is the best thing. He said there are always other things we can do, and we will continue to explore these options. He said we are trying to do the best we can under these trying conditions.

Senator Hall said she taught all online last year because she is a high-risk individual and so is her partner. Guidance requires masks and encourages distancing. She said in her classroom distancing is not possible. Students come in without masks and she provides them, but it is a constant struggle to get them to wear them properly. Students are also walking the hallways without wearing masks. She said it is very difficult to educate and act as the mask police at the same time. She asked if someone else could monitor the hallways and instruct students to wear their masks and wear them properly. Dr. Keenum said he is glad Senator Hall is sharing this with him. He asked which building she was referring to. Senator Hall replied she was referring to Allen Hall. Dr. Keenum said he has taken note of this, and more aggressive enforcement actions will be taken. Senator Hall said she has heard that this problem is not isolated to the building she teaches in but is widespread over the campus. Dr. Keenum thanked Senator Hall for bringing this to his attention. He said this is just the third day of class and we will have some of this. He said the university will be more aggressive in enforcing the requirement.

Senator Gregory said this is a systemic issue. People are used to not having masks and the weather is really nice. She said it is also hard to talk and lecture in masks. She said she believes it is a matter of how we do something to make sure everyone remembers. She said we had so much diligence with social distancing in the past and had the option of online instruction. She said faculty and students both dislike online learning, but for some people this is the best option. If they have children at home who need to quarantine due to exposure, the faculty still want to teach. She said the impression is that we are trying too hard to get back to normal and are not taking more gradual steps. She said it is concerning that we are not doing some of the things, such as social distancing, which have worked so well in the past. Dr. Keenum said he appreciates Senator Gregory's comments. A lot of time was spent on this subject. He said our campus is not set up for social distancing. He said we go back to online when we do that. Dr. Keenum said the overwhelming sentiment from the board and parents is to have our students in a classroom. He said where we can distance, we are trying our best to do it. There are accommodations which can be made for faculty who have to quarantine. Dr. Keenum said he is prepared to pivot in a heartbeat if necessary. He said if we think this isn't working, we can go

back to what we did last year. We have a contingency plan to do that. He said the situation is being monitored as best we can.

Senator Varela-Stokes asked if Dr. Keenum thought we may see a mandate after the vaccine receives full FDA approval. Dr. Keenum replied he believed that full approval is a factor in the decision. He said there are people who, for whatever reason, are just not going to get vaccinated. He said people will argue for their civil liberties. People have their own values and beliefs. Dr. Keenum said he has spent time speaking to dear friends of his who will not get the vaccine. There is a lot of mistrust and whatever he or any medical official says will not change their mind. We are just in a tough spot. He said there are people in the state who are violently opposed to their children wearing masks. This is the world we are living in. Dr. Keenum said this is what he and all of us are confronted with at this moment.

Senator Hall asked what the trigger would be for the contingency plan. Dr. Keenum replied there is no specific trigger. He said we look and see where our campus and community are and consult with faculty and other leadership to determine when we would need take a different approach. He said we know how to make the change if necessary.

Senator Kelley said the University of Mississippi Medical Center is now mandating vaccination for students and employees. She asked if Dr. Keenum believed this could move the needle toward requiring vaccinations. Dr. Keenum replied that it certainly could. He said the board is using the current policy to allow for clinical health care facilities to require the vaccine.

Senator Kelley asked if there was any discussion of mandatory random testing. Dr. Keenum replied he has not heard any discussion of it from the board.

Senator Kelley said the limited quarantine options available this semester raises two concerns. First, there is potential financial hardship for the students who live great distances away. Second, is the concern that the quarantined students who return home have the potential to spread the virus to their families. She asked what options the students have to avoid the costs and risks of traveling home. Dr. Keenum replied we have more limited options this year. We have some off-campus accommodations which are intended to be used by students who have tested positive. He said we did aggressively communicate to students and their parents that if they were required to quarantine, they would have to find their own accommodations. He said if students are vaccinated, they would not have to quarantine. For those students who do not have any place to go, we do have accommodations for them. Dr. Keenum said there are three or four students currently in our isolation facility now. Senator Varela-Stokes asked if the facility was on or off of campus. Dr. Keenum replied we have one facility on campus and one facility off campus.

Senator Hall asked what the University's testing strategy is currently. She said she has heard that students are being tested off campus. She asked if we are still doing random testing. Dr. Keenum replied there is no mandatory testing. He said we don't force anyone to have a test. He said students will go off campus to get tested. The two situations which would prompt them to be tested are either they have been exposed or they are showing symptoms. Dr. Keenum said he hopes they do get tested and take the recommended precautions and quarantine or isolate if they are positive. Senator Hall asked if there are any state guidelines or recommendations regarding testing. Dr. Keenum replied there are not.

Senator Chamberlain said Mississippi public health has just offered the school districts support for screening. He asked why we cannot do mandatory testing. Dr. Keenum replied he has received no directive or recommendation to perform mandatory testing. He said he does not have the authority to require someone to be tested.

Senator Pelaez said many other universities are doing random testing. Last year there was guidance which said random testing was needed to understand the situation. She said we are coming into this year with less than last year. We are requiring the minimum of mask wearing, but we are not practicing social distancing, we do not have quarantine facilities, and we do not have the same flexibility for instruction. She said we are being very reactive. We will have a peak, but what are we doing to measure that peak. Senator Pelaez said we are a center of knowledge and science, and we should not be just waiting and seeing what happens. Dr. Keenum replied we live in a state and a society where people believe they have rights. We are a public institution, not private. If we were a private institution, there are additional things that we could do. Dr. Keenum said he is accountable to the Governor, 174 members of the legislature, and 12 members of the Board of Trustees. These individuals are listening to their constituents and are telling us what we can and can't do. He said we can say that we want to impose all of these requirements, but in practical application it is not doable. Dr. Keenum said instead of focusing on what we cannot do, he thinks about the things that we can do. He said if we get to the point where we need mandatory testing, we will just go back to what we did last year with online delivery. He said we are being reactive and that is the best we can do at this time. We put together a plan and we may have to change that plan based on what we observe.

Senator Williams said he appreciates that Dr. Keenum is probably the only one in the room who has talked to legal, academics, and Student Affairs and understands all of the facets involved in this decision-making process. Senator Williams asked what Dr. Keenum's biggest fear is if we had to return to online delivery. Dr. Keenum said that would be an unfortunate occurrence because when does it end. Senator Williams asked what the financial implications would be if that were to happen. Dr. Keenum replied if we have to go down that path, we will do what we need to do. The financial situation will not dictate that decision. He said it would be an

unfortunate set of circumstances if we have to return to online delivery, but we will do what we need to do. The Delta variant may pass, or it may stay with us for some time. The question becomes what the next variant is. It could be that the vaccines we have are not effective on the next variant. Dr. Keenum asked at what point do we as a society decide that we are going to try to live and cope with the virus as best we can while recognizing the risks. He said he feels we have to take personal responsibility for taking care of ourselves. Those who choose not to take precautionary measures are taking a risk. He said it is a sad situation that people will not accept what the cure is for not getting ill.

Senator Williams asked what Dr. Keenum's feeling is regarding the likelihood that the legislature will put money towards combating Covid since our state is in a positive monetary position. Dr. Keenum replied that the federal government has provided a lot of financial support for combating Covid. He said we are the beneficiaries of some of these funds and have used them to do such things as updating our ventilation systems and purchasing personal protective equipment. Dr. Keenum said there is nothing at this moment that he needs to combat Covid for which he would seek additional funding from the state over what has already been appropriated in our Covid budget.

Senator Williams asked if the University has a building replacement strategy. Dr. Keenum replied we have a master plan for the campus which is currently in the process of being updated. Senator Williams said he has seen the master plan and asked where McComas Hall was on the list of buildings which will be receiving updates. Dr. Keenum replied he is not sure of where McComas Hall is on the priority list. He said the next big project is in Kinesiology. We were fortunate to receive funding through the bond bill and a large private donation to include student services and an autism clinic in the new Kinesiology building. We are also trying to secure the funding for a new Architecture, Art, and Design facility. This funding will hopefully be secured during the next legislative session. Dr. Keenum said construction costs have skyrocketed and thankfully we do not have an ongoing project outside the renovations to Humphrey Coliseum. At the IHL board meeting this week the budget for the Coliseum project was set to be approved. Dr. Keenum said he pulled it from the agenda to get a better idea of the construction costs. The architect for the project said that at the current prices the project would cost roughly \$70 million when it was initially supposed to cost \$50 million. We have plans and are securing funding, but we may have to go back and raise additional funding due the elevated costs. Dr. Keenum said the new music building is nearing completion. The new Civil Engineering building will have the ribbon cutting sometime in October. Dr. Keenum said we are also building new roads including the Famous Maroon Drive and Bulldog Way. We also partnered with the county to renovate Blackjack Road.



Senator Gregory asked if the Covid Task Force could hold an emergency meeting to look at other things, such as social distancing and limiting social events, that we can do to combat Covid like we did last year. She said nobody wants to go online because we know how hard it is on students. Dr. Keenum replied this would be a good topic for Dr. Shaw and Dr. Dickerson. He said it is a nightmare trying to schedule classes. Mississippi State is the most efficient university in the IHL system with regard to square footage. We are growing and do not have the luxury of some of the other universities who have excess space. Dr. Keenum said administration is open to suggestions on how to have better distancing on campus, but it will have to be some variation of distancing given our space limitations.

Dr. Keenum said he appreciates the leadership and passion of the senators. He said President Robichaux-Davis is their conduit to administration. She does not hesitate to come to him or Dr. Shaw with faculty concerns. He said when faculty submit ideas, they are considered. Dr. Keenum said the senators and all faculty are valued and are part of the decision-making process. He said he hopes faculty have a sense of the limitations we have to operate in. Things that we can do that will help protect us, we are open to. We are prepared to act if things start to go badly and will be calling on the Senate's leadership and support to help make the needed changes. Dr. Keenum said we owe it to our students to do the best we can and provide the best education. We need to do all we can to urge them to please get vaccinated. Dr. Keenum said he will be as open as he can and answer any question as honest and candidly as he can. Dr. Keenum said he respects what the senators do and thanked them for the relationship they have with him.

#### **Dr. Brent Fountain, Faculty Athletic Representative**

Dr. Fountain said it is always great to be back in the Senate. He said in his career he values the time he has spent in the Senate the most. Dr. Fountain said he appreciates all the senators and the service they provide.

Dr. Fountain thanked Leah Beasley and Matthew for bringing the national championship trophy to the meeting. He said John Cohen had a prior engagement that he had to attend. He will address the Senate at a later date.

Dr. Fountain said he appreciates the relationship that athletics has with faculty. Mr. Cohen's door is always open to faculty to ask questions and see what is going on. There will be an opportunity for all faculty and staff to get their picture with the trophy if they would like to. There is also discussion to hold another faculty day with the football team where faculty can sit in on a practice.

Dr. Fountain said he had the opportunity to speak with our new student-athletes as they arrived on campus. He said he will have the opportunity to speak to the athletic tutors on

Sunday. He said whether it is Leah Beasley, Eric George, Christine Jackson, or Jay Logan, they are there to support us and help us in our mission.

Senator Gregory asked what the status of the parking lot between the Sanderson Center and the Hump is. She said it has not been paved in the 10 years she has been at the university. Dr. Fountain replied he did not know the status of the lot, but he will find out.

**Dr. David Shaw, Provost and Executive Vice President**

Dr. Shaw said the Teaching Evaluation Task Force did a lot of great work and had a lot of hard conversations. There are widely divergent opinions of how to best compose a survey to evaluate learning outcomes and instruction. Dr. Shaw said he realizes we need to have further discussions as the proposed survey is further evaluated. He said he is very cognizant that this is just one tool to evaluate teaching and should not be the only tool used. This instrument will be used as a part of the overall faculty evaluation, but it will not be the driving force for evaluation.

Dr. Shaw said we are at the next phase on the discussion of clinical and instructional positions. The report has been received from the task force and the Senate recommendations are now with the Associate Deans Council.

The task forces on health science, data science, and autonomy have submitted their reports. There are now implementation committees which are in place to move forward on the recommendations. The health sciences discussions, amongst all the department heads with health sciences related faculty, have developed a spreadsheet which outlines faculty expertise and courses related to the health sciences field. He said the spreadsheet is quite overwhelming, which is exciting. They continue to work on ways we can think of interdisciplinary programs. Dr. Shaw said he had conversations with funding partners about opportunities to explore additional programs. With regard to data science, we have a master's program which has been a collaboration between Computer Science and Engineering and Mathematics and Statistics. We are looking at expanding this collaboration to other program areas as well as offering an undergraduate curriculum and additional graduate level programs. With regard to autonomy, a group of faculty submitted an application to the FAA to be certified in unmanned aircraft systems in undergraduate curriculum and we received this certification two weeks ago.

Dr. Shaw said the BAS implementation task force is moving ahead nicely. We have over 150 students in our second year who have already enrolled. We have 41 concentration areas across all our colleges.

The Graduate School Task Force report is posted and follow-up activities are underway in the Graduate School and the Graduate Council.

The Non-Traditional Course Offerings Task Force continues to work to identify ways we may be able to implement mini-mesters which tie into our student success efforts.

The Online Education Task Force has submitted their report. We are at an all-time high enrollment for our Distance Learning.

The Open Education Resources Task Forces was disrupted due to Covid, but they will be getting back to their work. Dr. Shaw said he believes there are a lot of opportunities, and we have been in discussions with Barnes & Noble about an openness they have to be able to work on other campuses and do some things that help reduce costs and add flexibility for our students.

The Recruiting Task Force has consulted with Ruffalo Noel Levitz to develop a strategic plan and deliver a report sometime in the fall semester. The Student Success Task Force is doing a wonderful job in trying to determine how we can do a better job in student retention and ultimately graduation. We received a gift of nearly \$1 million to support professional advising.

Dr. Shaw said the additional task forces focus on quantum computing, outreach and engagement, student experiential learning, general education, and new faculty/future faculty preparation. The quantum computing task force has provided a report to recommend ways we can take advantage of the international reputation we have in high-speed computing and leverage that into quantum computing. The Outreach and Engagement Task Force report has been received and provides some hard-hitting recommendations on what we as a land grant institution need to be doing to further recognize the important role we play in service, outreach, and engagement. The Student Experiential Learning Task Force is being chaired by Brent Fountain. They are looking at how to more heavily incorporate co-ops, undergraduate research, internships, service-learning opportunities, and study abroad into the learning experiences all our students have. The General Education Task Force was established to continue the work of Dana Franz and many others on rethinking the approach we take to gen ed. The focus is not on box checking but is on what are the outcomes we are striving to have with a gen ed curriculum. The New Faculty/Future Faculty Preparation Task Force is looking at how we can proactively prepare our faculty and improve their classroom skills.

Dr. Shaw said with regard to strategic planning and implementation, Cedric Gathings had a great opportunity come up at Meridian Community College and has left MSU. Dr. Shaw said he is currently in conversations on how we can rethink this position in ways that we can bring a stronger faculty voice. Dr. Shaw said he welcomes any input faculty have on this.

Senator Pelaez asked how the student evaluations of teaching for last year, when faculty had to transition to online instruction, will affect tenure. Dr. Shaw replied that the overall university-wide scores actually increased slightly. He said this surprised him and is a testament to the great job faculty did and the understanding that students had that last year was a challenging

year. Dr. Shaw said he has discussed with the deans and department heads that last year was an anomalous year and if a faculty member's evaluations are not what they have been in the past, we need to have full consideration of the circumstances that faculty were in.

Senator Pelaez asked what the accommodations are for faculty who have children in school who are required to quarantine. Dr. Shaw replied he has signed off on three accommodation requests in the last 24 hours to allow faculty to teach remotely for the short term. He said he fully understands that we are in a crazy world right now. He is trying to make the necessary short-term accommodations when instances like this arise.

Senator Pelaez asked if the link on the website for faculty to provide feedback is still active. Dr. Shaw replied that he is not sure if the link is still active, but it can easily be reactivated. He said if faculty do not mind their name being associated with the communication, he welcomes them to email their thoughts directly to him. He said he monitors the conversations on social media to determine the concerns and fears faculty have because he can make better decisions if he knows what the concerns are.

Senator Pelaez said the communication with faculty was much better last year. Dr. Shaw said he and Dr. Hyatt have been discussing what they need to be doing from a communications standpoint. Dr. Shaw said he is not one to send out a message when he does not have anything new to say, and he knows that we all get too many emails from the university. He said he wants to provide good information. Dr. Shaw said this is why he needs feedback. If there is something that the university community needs to have an answer to, he wants to provide that.

Senator Pelaez asked if Dr. Shaw could provide more information on the work of Ruffalo Noel Levitz with the enrollment management study. Dr. Shaw replied that a significant part of the conversation has been affordability of higher education. He said he expects the recommendations to cover scholarships and the approaches we are taking to consider student debt and help students to minimize debt. He also expects it will address how we can get additional resources and grow enrollment in a sustainable way.

Senator Tseng said Plant and Soil Sciences is planning to create an online master's program. He asked if the transcript would reflect whether a student was online or on campus. Dr. Shaw replied that the transcript would not reflect that at this time. He said we have to show our accreditation body that the online and on-campus versions of a degree program are equivalent and as such there may be some issues with designating a degree program as online. He said there are designations of classes being delivered in an online format.

Senator Williams asked if there has been any discussion on incentivizing students to fill out the online evaluations. Dr. Shaw replied that the task force did provide some recommendations

regarding this. He said he welcomes any feedback or ideas that faculty have about this. Dr. Shaw said he understands the repercussions of having a small percentage of students participate and that it is something that we need to address. Senator Williams asked if Dr. Shaw would be open to recommending or requiring a second form of teaching evaluation to be performed by the department head. Dr. Shaw said he cannot say that we would mandate additional forms of evaluations, but the department heads have already been told that we expect additional forms of evaluation.

## **REPORT OF THE FACULTY SENATE PRESIDENT**

Over the summer, most of the University Committees on which I serve met at least once. In addition to those regular activities, I also represented that faculty at various Alumni Association “Send Off” Parties and continued to serve on the COVID-19 Task Force, where our focus was on planning for everyone’s safe return to campus in the Fall 2021 semester. In July, I have met every other week with Provost Shaw and will continue to meet regularly with him during this next academic year. I am looking forward to continuing to foster a great collaborative working relationship with both President Keenum and Provost Shaw throughout the coming year. They both remain committed to working closely with the Robert Holland Faculty Senate.

With the start of a new academic year, one of my first responsibilities as President was to assign senators to the various university committees for which we have a designated seat. Many of the committee representatives are specifically identified based on position, which is true of those that I and Vice-President Hopper currently serve. The others are open to any current senator. To determine which senators would be appointed to each of the other committees, I requested in volunteers for those in summer update emails. In instances where no one had volunteered for a committee, I asked the previous representative. Through this, I was able to confirm appointments to each of the university committees for which we have a seat. The current list of representatives for each of the standing university committees is provided below.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
Academic Accommodations Committee	Ted Wallace
Academic Deans Council	Missy Hopper
Academic Review Board	Charles Freeman
Associate Deans Council	Randy Follett
Athletic Council	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Calendar Committee	Randy Follett
Commencement Committee	Brian Davis
Committee on Campus Access	Missy Hopper
Committee on Courses and Curricula	James Sobaskie

Community Engagement Committee	Missy Hopper
Dining Advisory Committee	Amanda Stone
Dining Advisory Committee	Sorina Popescu
Employee Benefits Committee	Molly Zuckerman
Executive Council	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Executive Enrollment Management Committee	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Faculty Research Advisory Committee	Todd Mlsna
Faculty/Staff Housing Appeals Committee	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Galleries and Museums Committee	Kevin Williams
Gerontology Committee	Lyndsey Miller
Inclusive Excellence Leadership Council	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Information Technology Council	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Institutional Effectiveness Committee	Erdogan Memili
Instructional Improvement Committee	Tom Carskadon
Instructional Improvement Committee	Stephanie King
Instructional Technology Advisory Committee	Iva Ballard
Library Committee	Derek Marshall
Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee	Missy Hopper
Parking and Traffic Regulation Committee	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
President's Committee on Planning	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Registration and Scheduling Committee	Stephanie King
Special Events and Game Day Operations	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Sustainability Committee	Rebecca Robichaux-Davis
Teaching Evaluation Committee	Alexis Gregory
Textbook Committee	Paul Spurlin
Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery Committee	Missy Hopper
University Health & Wellness	Sol Pelaez
Work Life Balance Committee	Kimberly Kelly

Thank you to each of the senators who volunteered and accepted an appointment to represent the Senate on the above standing university committees. I appreciate your time and committee to that service.

#### **Status of AOPs:**

The following AOPs are not under review to the best of my knowledge, but are past the four-year review cycle:

<b>AOP</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
10.05	Nepotism	12/5/2012
10.08	Classroom Regulations	4/26/2016

11.11 Auditing a Class	11/3/2016
12.02 Withdrawal from the University	3/23/2017
13.06 Sabbatical Leave for Faculty Members of State IHL	6/9/2014
31.02 Legal Resident Status	2/5/2013

### **Reports from Committees on which I Serve:**

*Athletic Council* – This committee has not met since my last report, but I met with Brent Fountain, the chair, to discuss meeting times and dates, as well as the potential faculty members who could replace those faculty who have rolled off of the council. Our monthly meetings will begin in September.

*COVID-19 Future Planning Task Force* – During June and July, this task force met every other week. However, as the start of the semester approached, we went back to meeting every week and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Information from each of these meetings is provided through my updates, emails/announcements from the Office of the Provost, as well as from MSU’s Office of Public Affairs. The COVID-19 website has been updated with the most current guidance, information, and other resources, along with Vaccine Clinic information. COVID-19 Pop Up Vaccine Clinics have been held since August 14 and will continue to be made available until September 10<sup>th</sup>. The locations of these clinics are in the Colvard Student Union, Joe Frank Sanderson Center, Newell Grissom Athletic Facility, Mitchell Memorial Library, Old Main Academic Center and Barnes & Noble Bookstore. Appointments can be made for these clinics, but walk-ups are welcomed, too. See [www.msstate.edu/covid19](http://www.msstate.edu/covid19) for more information.

*Design Review Committee* – This committee met on July 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss the new Engineering Student Center that is being designed. This facility will allow engineering majors of all types to have a place to come together. It will be located at the existing Walker Annex Building between McCain Hall and Walker Hall. The building previously served as a structures testing lab and is now a Civil Engineering storage facility. This renovation will create 4800 square feet for teams rooms, a recording booth, a high-tech maker space, staff office space, break space and various collaboration spaces.

*Inclusive Excellence Leadership Council* – This council has not met since my last report.

*Executive Council* – This committee met on July 26<sup>th</sup>. We approved OP 03.03 – Discrimination, Harassment & Retaliation which included an updated name of the office who receives such cases, the Office of Civil Rights Compliance, and an updated definition of harassment. We also approved AOP 13.09 – Credentials for Teaching and Degree Program Coordination.

*Executive Enrollment Management Committee* – This committee met on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The Strategic Enrollment Project that we are currently implementing was in the “Strategy Development” phase during the 2021 Summer. At the July meeting, we discussed that strategies we choose to employ should have a high-impact yield on enrollment, should impact a significant number of people and the cost and effort should warrant its implementation. Each of the working groups shared the strategies that they recommended we adopt. Some strategies were shared across different working groups and those were included in the final selection of strategies. The enrollment strategies that we decided to fully develop were: Expand and Increase Market Reach; Enhance and Execute an Incoming Student On-Boarding Experience; Engage in a Comprehensive and Holistic Review of Undergraduate Financial Aid Awarding; and Optimize the Online Cost Calendar.

*Fall Convocation Group* – This committee met on July 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss Convocation for the upcoming academic year. There will be a Keynote Speaker and the band and men’s choir will perform. The Academic Banner will already be in place on the platform. Students will have E-tickets and paper versions will be available for those students who weren’t able to download an E-ticket. Pedestal scanners will be at the entrance to each portal. Doors will be open at 4:30. After being recently postponed, a new date has not yet been set.

*Game Day and Special Events* – This committee met on Monday, August 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss and approve of three requests for specific tailgate locations. These included a tailgate location for the opposing teams’ alumni fans, a one-time only tailgate location for the Department of Ag & BioEngineering, and the use of all of the amphitheater grounds for tailgates rented through Southern Traditions. All requests were approved.

*Information Technology Council* – This committee met most recently on August 8<sup>th</sup>. A pro-active phishing campaign has been approved by the university administration and plans for this campaign are underway. Communication about this will be forthcoming from ITS. The network refresh is now 74% complete. Etheridge Hall and McArthur will be refreshed on August 20<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Two-factor authentication is now required on all ITS-supported classroom lectern PCs. Faculty will need to bring devices (cell phones or fobs) with them to class to be able to use those classroom lectern PCs. Members of the ITC were asked to share any needs that the groups which they represent currently have. These requests ranged from specific software needs to tracking systems for various campus operations to various hardware and network needs.

*Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee* – This committee did not meet in June or July.

*Parking and Traffic Regulations Committee* – This committee has not met since July 1<sup>st</sup>.



*Sustainability Committee* - This committee has not met since July 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **REPORT OF THE FACULTY SENATE VICE PRESIDENT**

### **Academic Deans Council**

Deans Council meeting on August 6 was cancelled via WebEx due to a conflict with the DAFVM awards held that afternoon.

### **Committee on Campus Access**

Committee on Campus Access meeting on August 2 was cancelled to gather more information for the September meeting.

### **Community Engagement Committee**

### **Master Plan Development and Advisory Committee**

### **Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery Committee**

No meetings were held since the last Vice President's report.

Updated on August 17, 2021

Respectfully submitted, Missy Hopper

## **FACULTY DESIGNATES ON UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES**

### **BUSINESS TO BE SENT TO COMMITTEE**

#### **1. Evaluation of Teaching Task Force Recommendation (Student Affairs)**

Senator Gregory made a motion to assign the Evaluation of Teaching Task Force Recommendations to committee. Senator Follett seconded the motion. The motion to send the item of business to committee passed by unanimous hand vote.

### **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

<b>Academic Affairs</b>	<b>No Report</b>
<b>Ancillary Affairs</b>	<b>No Report</b>
<b>Charter &amp; Bylaws</b>	<b>No Report</b>
<b>Faculty Affairs</b>	<b>No Report</b>

**Student Affairs**                      **No Report**

**University Resources**              **No Report**

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **PENDING BUSINESS**

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **1. Faculty Senate Bylaw Revision to Allow for Electronic Meetings**

President Robichaux-Davis read aloud the following item of new business:

“Revise the bylaws statement, ‘For elected senators to be counted as present, they must be physically present for all regularly scheduled faculty senate meetings unless granted an excused absence,’ to allow for hybrid online/in-person meetings as conducted in the 2020-2021 academic year for all future meetings as approved by a 2/3 majority of the Faculty Senate. This will be revisited at the beginning of each academic year to determine if hybrid meetings will be necessary and can also be revised during the academic year if deemed necessary by a 2/3 majority vote.”

Senator Fincher asked if last year was different than this. President Robichaux-Davis replied that last year the bylaws were suspended because the university went online the previous spring.

Senator Barrett said it seems a little extreme to go to the extent to change the bylaws for these circumstances. He asked if the Senate could suspend the bylaws as they did last year if the need arises. Senator Freeman said he did not believe the bylaws could be suspended according to Robert’s Rules. He said it is his understanding you can modify, adapt, and suspend procedural rules, but not for voting. Senator Follett, as the President over the suspension of the bylaws, said the argument for the suspension is that Senate would not have been able to meet until we were able to meet in person. He said he felt it was a necessary violation of the normal way of doing business due to the fact that Senate was prevented from doing business in the normal fashion. Senator Follett said he would not like to see the bylaws modified because he sees value in the way Robert’s Rules of Order describes a meeting to be in one space at one time.

Senator Gregory said the modification she is proposing is not just for the current situation. She said research is showing that Covid will become endemic. She said because of that we will have to be more flexible with how we communicate both academically and as a Senate. It was worded to be revisited on a regular basis based on the situation. She said that while she

respects Robert's Rules of Order, she feels they are old and paternalistic. She said we need to be open minded and think about what we need as a faculty to make sure we are representative of everyone on the faculty.

Senator Freeman said that since we violated Robert's Rules of Order last year, this amendment to the bylaws would permit us in the future to continue on operations without violating Robert's Rules of Order. Senator Gregory said that is her understanding.

Senator Freeman said he travels a lot for conferences and research and has missed many Faculty Senate meetings because of that. He said he would love to have the opportunity to access the meeting and participate if he had the time while away. He said he felt we would have more involvement if we had more options available. Senator Hall said she agrees that having the remote option will allow us to have more flexibility, and she believes this is a good change.

Secretary King said she has concern about senators joining remotely when they just do not feel like coming. She said she feels we lose a lot when we are not together in a room. Senator Barrett said he believed we saw some of this last year when senators had the option to attend remotely. He said we spent a lot of money to secure a space that would allow for social distancing for all senators, and we ended up with 8 to 12 senators attending in person for each meeting. Senator Williams said he agreed with what Secretary King and Senator Barrett said. He said we need to consider the consequences of this change as well as the benefits it provides. He said it can be abused. The Starkville Board of Alderman meetings have alderman who frequently phone in to meetings. Senator Williams said people put their trust in us to come here and pay attention and interact. He said he would hate if he had to face a sea of silhouettes in Senate as he had to with some of his classes last year. Senator Tseng said in order to avoid this abuse a limit could be imposed for the number of meetings which can be attended remotely. President Robichaux-Davis said the current rules allow for any number of excused absences but only three consecutive unexcused absences.

Senator Gregory said she does not feel last year is a good example for this year. She said we were not vaccinated then, and senators were taking the safest path, which was virtual. Senator Gregory said she agrees that looking at some limitations is a reasonable discussion to have so it is not abused. She said we are all professionals, volunteered for this job, and were elected by our peers for this job. If senators make the decision that they should not be in an in-person meeting and they choose to attend virtually, we should respect that decision.

Senator Freeman asked for clarification of the vote at the meeting today. He asked if the vote was to send the item to committee. President Robichaux-Davis said it is.

Senator Follett said there are additional expenses for offering the virtual option. He said it is also very difficult to manage an online or hybrid meeting. It is not nearly as easy as it may look. He said last year as Secretary he barely had any time to listen to what was being said since he was monitoring the chat, keeping up with who was bumped out of the meeting and needed access back in, all of the technical difficulties which kept arising, and having to go to the microphone for senators who were not able to communicate for one reason or another. One thing that Robert's Rules of Order is very clear on is that you must have simultaneous oral communication possible in any setting. He said we were not able to guarantee that last year, and he is not sure we would be able to guarantee it this year either.

Senator Carskadon said when you are not able to make it to a ball game it is pretty good to watch it on television. He said as long as all we are voting on is to send this to a committee to look at it in depth, he is fine with doing so. President Robichaux-Davis said all Faculty Senate meetings are televised.

Senator Pelaez asked what would happen if a senator was required to quarantine. President Robichaux-Davis replied that an excused absence would be granted for a senator who has to miss a meeting due to quarantine.

Senator Freeman asked if we suspend the bylaws to allow for virtual meetings does it suspend all of the bylaws or specific ones. President Robichaux-Davis replied there are two bylaws which are affected when we hold virtual meetings. The bylaw on being present and a bylaw on voting.

Senator Barrett asked if this would require every meeting to be offered in a hybrid format, or if this just gives us the ability to switch to a hybrid format if we need to. President Robichaux-Davis replied that would depend on what the committee brought back to the Senate. Senator Gregory said her submission requires us to hold hybrid meetings moving forward and establishes a regular review to determine if it is still appropriate. Senator Williams said this seems to fly in the face of what we are telling our students. He said we are telling them they must be here face-to-face, but we would be that we can change our meeting patterns. Senator Gregory said faculty are asked to work with students who must miss so they can fully participate. An unexcused absence because you are quarantining is not full participation. Senator Williams said if a senator is quarantining, it must be an excused absence. President Robichaux-Davis said it would be an excused absence. Senator Marshall said the senator would not have to be absent if there was a hybrid option.

The motion to send the recommendation to committee passed by majority hand vote.

Senator Marshall asked if there is a way to suspend the bylaws so the next meeting could have a virtual component. He said some senators such as himself have underlying conditions currently and he is in attendance against his doctor's orders.

Senator Pelaez asked if the Senate could have more space if the next meeting cannot be conducted in a hybrid format.

Senator Gregory said it seems like it would be appropriate to have the meetings go hybrid until the committee reports back on the new business.

Senator Freeman said we cannot suspend the bylaws no matter how great our desire is according to Robert's Rules of Order unless it is stated within the bylaws. Senator Follett said there is a provision to suspend bylaws in Robert's Rules of Order with a two-thirds vote of the senate. He said it is not provided for in Robert's Rules of Order to suspend the bylaws of future meetings. It only accounts for suspension of bylaws in the current meeting. Vice President Hopper said when Robert's Rules of Order came out, no one was expecting a pandemic and they are currently revising the rules to add much more on online meetings. She said until these are released the Senate should not be debating Robert's Rules of Order but should be debating what we need to do as a Senate that meets the requirements of the Senate and helps us go forward. She said clearly, when the university shut down, we did not have any choice and we had to do what we did at the time. She said we now are encouraged to be face-to-face. Vice President Hopper said she would hate to see us not face-to-face, but she realizes that there are other things to consider. She said she hopes the senators think about the Senate and how to best act as a Senate. She said senators were elected to be here and not elected to be at home looking in. Vice President Hopper said she was the president of the honors society Phi Kappa Phi. She said they were forced to go to online meetings, and Senator Follett's earlier comments about conducting a virtual meeting are true. It is not a 3-ring circus, but a 6- or 8-ring circus.

Senator Carskadon said he believes we just need common sense and consideration. He said the health of his colleagues is more important than the fine points of Robert's Rules of Order.

Senator Hall said we are in a very acute phase of this crisis, and we are nowhere near herd immunity levels. She said even if we decide that the phrasing to go online should be more restrictive, we are in a crisis right now. She said we will have to adjust to Covid long-term, but now is not the time to be going back to normal.

Senator Gregory made a motion to hold all future meetings in a hybrid format until the Charter & Bylaws Committee provides a report on the new business. Senator Marshall seconded the motion.

Senator Follett said he is not certain the motion can be voted on as it violates the bylaws. Senator Freeman said not if the bylaws are suspended. Senator Follett said the bylaws may not be suspended for future meetings, only the meeting in which the motion is made. He said this change was not distributed to senators three days prior to the meeting and does not follow the process described in the bylaws.

Senator Barrett said, to him, this would seem like a slap in the face to administration. He said Dr. Keenum just spoke to us and told us there is no mandate, he wants to go face-to-face, and he is aware of all the circumstances. This would be the Senate saying we heard you, but we are all going to go to a hybrid format. Senator Gregory said we would not all be hybrid. She said she is asking for the opportunity for those with health concerns to have the option.

Senator Kelley said Mississippi currently has the highest rate of infection in the world. She said she is not an individual who has a medical condition which makes her more susceptible to Covid, but clearly some of her colleagues do.

Vice President Hopper suggested this decision be deferred until closer to the meeting. She said as Dr. Keenum said in his remarks, the situation is very fluid, and changes can occur daily. Senator Gregory said if the hybrid format is as complicated as Senator Follett described earlier, it would seem that making a decision sooner would be better. President Robichaux-Davis said the logistical challenges of a hybrid meeting occur during the meeting, not for the setup of the meeting.

Senator Wang asked if it was possible to find a larger venue to better accommodate the senators in the meantime. President Robichaux-Davis replied she would try to find a larger venue. Senator Follett said hearing the comments made and remembering how tight our current space is makes him feel we should identify a larger space.

Senator Gregory rescinded her motion.

Senator Gregory made a motion for the consideration of a hybrid meeting format for the foreseeable future be considered by the Executive Committee to decide before our next regular meeting. Senator Kelley seconded the motion.

The motion which directs the Executive Committee to decide the meeting format before the next regular Senate meeting passed by unanimous hand vote.

Senator Stokes said there was an announcement from the Mississippi State Department of Health which states there is now an order for the isolation of individuals diagnosed with Covid-19. You must remain in the home per a fine or imprisonment, etcetera.

Senator Follett made a motion to adjourn. Vice President Hopper seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed by unanimous hand vote at 4:50 p.m.

Submitted for correction and approval.

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Stephanie King, Secretary

Jason Cory, Administrative Assistant II