

Summary of the Mississippi State University

Faculty Senate Spring Roundtable

Conducted on April 25, 2024

This report summarizes the results of the April 25, 2024 Faculty Senate Roundtable. Participants included members of the executive team, the general faculty, and faculty senate. This roundtable focused on adapting for a stronger future at Mississippi State University. Context is provided through the roundtable's agenda, list of participants, and the course of action. The report reviews the roundtable's deliverables by describing the results of the two work groups, as developed by the participants in two structured brainstorming sessions held that day.

Faculty Senate Spring Roundtable
April 25, 2024
Adapting for a Strong Future

Agenda

12:00	Lunch
1:00	Welcome by Mike Breazeale
1:05	Overview by Robert Banik
1:10	Welcome by President Mark Keenum
1:20	Split into teams (Maroon and White)
1:25	<u>Session One – Energizing GenEd</u>
	<i>Question 1: In your opinion, what should be the goals of a General Education program?</i>
	<i>Question 2: How can MSU move from a “checklist of boring courses” to a GenEd program that students crave and value?</i>
	<i>Question 3: What are the primary impediments to implementing these changes?</i>
2:25	Break
2:35	<u>Session Two – Adapting to the New Learner</u>
	<i>Question 1: Think about yourself as an adult learner. What are the impediments to our existing structure and programs that would discourage you from enrolling at MSU?</i>
	<i>Question 2: As a result, what changes should be made to address these impediments?</i>
	<i>Question 3: Conversely, what would make MSU the ideal institution for non-traditional students?</i>
3:35	Team Reports and Discussion of Team Findings
4:15	Wrap-Up by Dr. Keenum
4:30	Reception

Faculty Senate Spring Roundtable Attendees

MAROON TEAM	
FACILITATOR: Robert Banik	Instructor, Mathematics
Ra'Sheda Boddie-Forbes	VP for Access, Opportunity, and Success
Andy Perkins	Professor, Computer Science & Engineering
Paul Spurlin	Associate Professor of Finance, Meridian
Iva Ballard	Instructor II, Quantitative Analysis
Angi Bourgeois,	Dean, College of Art, Architecture, and Design
Iva Ballard	Instructor II, Quantitative Analysis
Jason Keith	Dean, Swalm School of Chemical Engineering
Les Potts	Associate VP for Finance and Administration and CFO
Terry Jayroe	Dean, College of Education
John Rush	VP for Development and Alumni
Shelby Tschume	Director, Strategic Initiatives
Rick Travis	Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

WHITE TEAM	
FACILITATOR: Mike Breazeale	Professor, Marketing
Kevin Williams	Associate Professor, Communication
Michele Herrmann	Associate Professor, Building Construction Science
James Chamberlain	Associate Professor, Political Science & Public Admin
Lauren Priddy	Associate Professor, Ag and Bio Engineering
Kelley Wamsley	Associate Professor, Poultry Science
Rebecca Robichaux-Davis	Professor, Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, Faculty Director, Quality Enhancement Plan
Stacy Haynes	Professor, Sociology
Susan Seal	Dean, Professional and Continuing Studies
Tracey Baham	Associate VP for Institutional Strategy & Effectiveness
Peter Ryan	Executive Vice Provost, Dean of the Graduate School
Wes Burger	Dean, College of Forest Resources
Jackie Mullen	Assistant VP for Student Affairs
Brent Fountain	Vice Provost

Brainstorming Rules and Guidelines:

1. Everyone is on equal ground, titles do not matter during brainstorming
2. Bad ideas do not exist
3. Participants may pass when they do not have an idea to offer
4. Ideas are not judged during brainstorming period
5. Open discussion with expectations of confidentiality, e.g. “Las Vegas rules”
6. Aim for constructive, creative sharing

Team Brainstorming Process:

1. Participants share ideas to two questions and responses are recorded.
2. Duplicates and overlaps are identified and consolidated.
3. Participants vote on answers and responses.
4. Results are discussed and shared among groups.

The 2024 Spring Faculty Roundtable was held on April 25, 2024 at the Office of Research and Economic Development. The theme was *Adapting for a Strong Future*. Consistent with this theme, two topics were selected to be the foci for discussion – *Energizing GenEd* and *Adapting to the New Learner*. The roundtable began with a lunch that encouraged faculty and administrators to interact with each other and begin friendly discussions. Following lunch, MSU President Dr. Mark Keenum addressed the entire group, followed by a brief presentation by Angi Bourgeois on the findings of a task force she led on General Education trends. This presentation would inform the discussions that were to follow.

Below is a breakdown of the top answers to each set of questions, voted upon by each team. Each set of answers under each team (Maroon or White) is listed in order by highest number of votes. The top vote-getting response is listed first, second-most votes is listed second, third most votes is listed third, and the remaining responses that did not receive votes were not listed.

SESSION ONE – *Energizing GenEd*

Question 1.1: *In your opinion, what should be the goals of a General Education program?*

MAROON

- Life skills, communication skills, transferability of those skills to students' futures
- Higher-order learning that marries content and context

WHITE

- Brand GenEd and better tell the story
- Focus on perspective taking for the world's problems
- Need to communicate why being well-rounded matters in students' lives

Question 1.2: *How can MSU move from a “checklist of boring courses” to a GenEd program that students crave and value?*

MAROON

- Place a greater value on contextualizing the value of what is being taught (advisors, students, public)
- Reform the checklist to a cohesive program

WHITE

- Offer more super courses
- Need our best/most passionate instructors
- Change how we evaluate/assess learning

Question 1.3: *What are the primary impediments to implementing these changes?*

MAROON

- Professional development, formal training for faculty (a la Maroon Academy)
- Time to do it for faculty

WHITE

- Bureaucracy that stifles creativity
- Need to foster a culture of change
- Large sections / Need smaller classes for this to work well

Session One Conclusion

Three questions focused on the importance of GenEd and how we can create a culture that recognizes the importance of GenEd. The first question asked what the goals should be for the program. The Maroon team proposed that life skills and communication skills are vital and that there needs to be an emphasis on connecting learning outcomes to students' futures. The White team shared similar thoughts about the need to communicate why being well-rounded matters in students' lives, while suggesting a need to better brand GenEd so that all constituents understand its true value.

The second question asked how we can energize GenEd so that students will feel excited about these courses. The Maroon team highlighted the need to shift from a checklist of courses to a cohesive program that prioritizes practical value. The White team provided ways that this can be accomplished – through offering more super courses (cross-curricular), involving our best/most passionate instructors, and changing the way we assess the learning outcomes of these courses.

The third question asked about impediments to making the required changes. The Maroon team focused on the need for formal training for faculty and providing time to participate in this training. The White team mentioned the bureaucracy that impedes the creativity necessary to create a culture of change and the importance of smaller class sizes for these courses.

Overall, both teams seemed to get very excited about the possibilities created when we place a greater emphasis on the value of GenEd as a precursor to learning that is specific to one's discipline. Many employers will teach our graduates the kinds of things they need to do their jobs efficiently. With a focus on the life and learning skills that our students need to be successful, regardless of their selected discipline(s), we can better prepare them to be lifelong learners who recognize that MSU contributed in a significant way to their success.

SESSION TWO – *Adapting to the New Learner*

Question 2.1: *Think about yourself as an adult learner: What are the impediments to our existing structure and programs that would discourage you from enrolling at MSU?*

MAROON

- Lack of accessibility
 - Times of classes

- Term Lengths
- Variability of audience
- Course Offerings
- Executive-style programs
- Lack of support/ease in enrolling
 - Too much red tape
 - Regulations and rules

WHITE

- May not need full degree/ courses for skills
- Need for custom scheduling
- Pedagogy needs to target specific skills/needs

Question 2.2: *As a result, what changes should be made to address these impediments?*

MAROON

- Time and incentive for faculty to design and teach for these learners
- Central portal, or “front door” for an adult learner to see what we have to offer

WHITE

- Improve the Direct Admit process
- Develop a non-traditional model (perhaps with different faculty)
- Support Services scaled for specific needs of adult learners

Question 2.3: *Conversely, what would make MSU the ideal institution for non-traditional learners?*

MAROON

- First-gen identity – “Your student can get a degree, and so can YOU.”
- Scrub records to engage with early leavers
- Tying in of existing strengths (e.g., military experience) to market to adult learners

WHITE

- Commitment to meet students where they are
- Emphasize our great relationship with stakeholders (e.g., alumni, employers)
- Convenience/ease of access for a legitimately quality education

Session Two Conclusion

In the second session, the emphasis shifted to focus on the need to adapt our offerings to better suit adult learners. With the pending demographic cliff and the enrollment cliff that will accompany it, the university needs to better position itself to serve non-traditional learners, who

can make up a large target audience and a significant source of revenue. Much of this discussion was consistent with the ideas that informed the session on GenEd. The first question asked participants to consider the impediments built into our system that might prevent adult learners from enrolling at MSU. The Maroon team raised several issues that related to the ease of accessibility and a lack of support regarding the difficulties these students can face when trying to enroll. The White team raised the issue that many of these students may not need full degrees and are looking, instead, for certain skills that will allow them to advance in their careers.

The second question asked participants about the changes that would be needed to address the issues they mentioned. The Maroon team suggested that faculty need to be incentivized for the amount of time it will take to adapt their pedagogy and the need for a portal designed for adult learners so that they can easily access and evaluate what we offer for them. The White team suggested that our existing Direct Admit process be refined for this type of situation and that we may need to completely re-evaluate our model for this type of learning.

The final question of the day asked how we can make MSU the clear choice for adult learners. The Maroon team mentioned reaching out to former students who had not completed their degrees and allowing them credit for the strengths/skills they have built in their careers. The White team described how important it is to meet these students where they are by emphasizing the convenience we can create for them to earn a nationally recognized degree and the value we provide through our extremely strong network of alumni and employers.

This session encouraged participants to first think like consumers and then to think like marketers. Adult learners, as consumers of our services, have specific needs that will drive their decisions regarding whether and where they will advance their educations. MSU, as a provider of an excellent service, should take the steps necessary to ensure that our services are as customer-friendly as possible, while maintaining the rigor that is a hallmark of our R1 institution.