

FACULTY SENATE ROUNDTABLE

May 8, 2025

It's All About Authenticity

2025 Spring Faculty Roundtable Report from Vice President Mike Breazeale

The 2025 Spring Faculty Roundtable was held on May 8, 2025, at the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED) in the Thad Cochran Research Park on the Mississippi State University campus. The theme, *All About Authenticity*, was designed to encourage participants to think about the importance of authenticity in the way we tell our story to our stakeholders and in the way we prepare our students for lives and careers that will be lived authentically and ethically. Participation in the roundtable is significant in its inclusion of faculty and administration representatives from across the campus. This opportunity encourages open discussion and free thinking about topics that affect us all. The following table includes those representatives who participated.

Maroon Team	
Mike Breazeale	Professor of Marketing, Vice President of Holland Faculty Senate
Kevin Armstrong	Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology
Tracey Baham	Associate VP for Institutional Strategy & Effectiveness
Angi Bourgeois,	Dean of Architecture, Art and Design, Interim Dean of the Graduate School
Mary Dozier	Assistant Professor of Psychology
Ra'Sheda Forbes	VP for Access, Opportunity, and Success
Brent Fountain	Vice Provost
Zack Gillen	Assistant Professor of Kinesiology
Robert Grala	Professor of Forestry
Scott Grawe	Dean of Business
Melanie Harris	Instructor of Theater
Regina Hyatt	Vice President for Student Affairs
Nick Pashos	Director of Center for Entrepreneurship
Andy Perkins	Professor of Computer Science & Engineering
Les Potts	Associate Vice President for Finance and Administration, CFO
Rebecca Robichaux Davis	Assistant Dean of Education
Peter Ryan	Executive Vice Provost
Rick Travis	Dean of the Honors College
Jacob Tschume	Instructor of Math
Ryan Walker	Associate Professor of Education
Nicole Welch	Assistant Teaching Professor of Biology

White Team	
Robert Banik	Instructor of Mathematics, President of Holland Faculty Senate
Tommy Anderson	Dean of Shackouls Honors College
Jonathan Barlow	Assistant Teaching Professor of Data Science
Olivia Boatman	Assistant Professor of Music
Reuben Burch	Associate Vice President for Research
Wes Burger	Dean of Forest Resources
Annika Campbell	Director, Office of Study Abroad
Stacy Haynes	Professor of Sociology
Brien Henry	Associate Dean of the Graduate School
Michele Herrmann	Associate Professor of Building Construction Science
Gary Jackson	Associate Vice President of Outreach and Engagement
Silvina Lopez Barrera	Associate Professor of Architecture
Judy Middleton	Assistant Director of Operations, Office of Research and Development
Melissa Moore	Professor of Marketing
Tom Ritter	Chief Information Security Officer
John Rush	VP for Development and Alumni
Garrett Street	Associate Professor, Forestry,
Shelby Tschume	Director for Strategic Initiatives
John Walters	Director, Office of Technology Management

The purpose of the Roundtable’s discussion was to have a dialogue about ideas related to the authentic representation of the value of Mississippi State University and the best ways to prepare our students to thrive in a world that is embracing artificial intelligence. We, as faculty and administration, came together to talk about the process of telling our story in a way that resonates with key stakeholders and about how we can embrace new technology that will impact our students’ futures while encouraging critical thinking.

The Roundtable began with a welcome by current Faculty Senate Vice President Mike Breazeale and an explanation of the theme and rules by current Faculty Senate President Robert Banik. Mississippi State University President, Dr. Mark Keenum, also spoke to welcome everyone, and to thank them for their time and efforts in discussing these important matters. The following is the agenda from this meeting:

Faculty Senate Spring Roundtable

May 8, 2025

All About Authenticity

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 – Telling Our Story</u>
	<i>Question 1: What do you believe are the most unique or powerful aspects of MSU’s identity that we’re currently under-communicating—or not communicating at all?</i>
	<i>Question 2: When you hear how peer institutions talk about themselves, what do they do that you think MSU could learn from or build upon in our own storytelling?</i>
	<i>Question 3: How can we better align what’s happening in classrooms, labs, and community partnerships with the story we tell the public about MSU?</i>
2:25	Break
2:35	<u>Session Two – AI and Its Role at MSU</u>
	<i>Question 1: In what ways do you see AI impacting our students’ future careers, and how well do you feel MSU is currently preparing them for those changes?</i>
	<i>Question 2: What specific skills—technical or non-technical—do you believe students should be learning now to remain competitive in an AI-driven workforce?</i>
	<i>Question 3: How should MSU balance teaching about AI technology itself versus teaching how to ethically and effectively work alongside it?</i>
3:35	Team Reports and Discussion of Team Findings
4:15	Wrap-Up by Dr. Keenum
4:30	Reception

Team discussion and conclusions

Each team was asked to discuss three questions in two different sessions, for a total of six questions. Each team brainstormed answers while the facilitator listed those answers on poster board. At the end of each session, team members got to vote for their favorites among the listed answers. The top three choices are listed below in this report, which will be sent to our administration for future reference and suggested guidance.

Session 1, Question 1: What do you believe are the most unique or powerful aspects of MSU's identity that we're currently under-communicating—or not communicating at all?

Maroon Team:

- People at MSU need to be empowered to tell the story – micro stories, micro influencers.
- Our uniquely powerful sense of community, with people who care for each other and want to do good while doing well
- Every investment in MSU is an investment in the state of Mississippi and its future – and the ROI is excellent.

White Team:

- Humanize individual experiences, focusing on how MSU has changed lives and family trees.
- Lean into the niche of user-inspired applied research, how it's immediately impactful – “Science that Matters”
- Focus on career development and network connectedness.

Session 1, Question 2: When you hear how peer institutions talk about themselves, what do they do that you think MSU could learn from or build upon in our own storytelling?

Maroon Team:

- We need to focus more on our ability to forge emotional connections. This is where we can differentiate ourselves from other institutions.
- We need to overcome the legacy of Mississippi while highlighting where our people come from and where they go once empowered by MSU.
- We should partner with student orgs and recruitment teams to build an infrastructure that supports telling our story on a big stage.

White Team:

- Intense coordination of messaging up/down the university, how those messages get to the public
- Lean into the existing MSU community – keep them engaged and talking.
- Use social media campaigns to show hidden gems of MSU – People and Impact.

Session 1, Question 3: How can we better align what's happening in classrooms, labs, and community partnerships with the story we tell the public about MSU?

Maroon Team:

- Create a flagship report that media, the legislature, and other stakeholders can rely on to learn what we are doing here. There is relevance for all.
- Leverage students as content creators/collaborators.
- Highlight more of our participation in major industries/problem-solving around the country/world.

White Team:

- Tailor messages to specific audiences.
- Create a stronger culture of bragging on each other.

Session 2, Question 1: In what ways do you see AI impacting our students' future careers, and how well do you feel MSU is currently preparing them for those changes?

Maroon Team:

- We need to demystify what AI is and help them to think more creatively.
- We need to be less focused on its potential role in cheating and work to prepare them to use it to increase their efficiency.
- Teach them to utilize it from a career-readiness perspective.

White Team:

- Offer a certificate in AI literacy, ethics, and applicability in different subject matters.
- Emphasize students' need to understand and know how *they* are adding value.
- Educate students on how AI has and will impact their chosen fields.

Session 2, Question 2: What specific skills—technical or non-technical—do you believe students should be learning now to remain competitive in an AI-driven workforce?

Maroon Team:

- Important to emphasize personal interaction and how to express their thoughts and communicate with others.
- Students need to learn to fail/falter in order to excel (without it harming their grade)
- Students should be taught to challenge AI and to learn from it when it's wrong.

White Team:

- They need discipline-specific prompt engineering.
- They need to learn about ethics in AI usage.
- They need to learn how to challenge AI tools (when and how they can get it wrong).

Session 2, Question 3: How should MSU balance teaching about AI technology itself versus teaching how to ethically and effectively work alongside it?

Maroon Team:

- We need to ensure that the faculty narrative isn't all negative.
- Students need to know how to continuously learn.
- There are serious concerns around AI and confidentiality/identity – AI can easily re-identify data.

White Team:

- We need to offer/enforce AI literacy offerings.
- Have every discipline think about how it will be impacted by AI.

Conclusions

At the conclusion of session two, the teams came together to share the highlights of each team's discussions. The following are the conclusions reached by the collective group, summarizing each session.

Session 1 – Telling Our Story

Faculty and administrators at Mississippi State University identified several under-communicated strengths, including MSU's strong sense of community, life-changing personal stories, and the university's real-world impact through applied research and career development. They noted that peer institutions often excel at emotionally resonant storytelling, consistent messaging, and leveraging their communities to share hidden strengths—practices MSU could adopt. To better align internal efforts with external messaging, suggestions included empowering students as storytellers, tailoring communications for different audiences, and developing centralized tools like a flagship report to showcase the university's statewide and global relevance.

Session 2 – AI and Its Role at MSU

Faculty and administrators at MSU emphasized the urgent need to prepare students for an AI-driven future by shifting the focus from fear-based narratives to creative, ethical, and practical engagement with the technology. They called for demystifying AI, teaching students how to use it responsibly to enhance efficiency and value in their careers, and offering structured learning like certificates in AI literacy and ethics. To remain competitive, students should develop both technical skills—such as prompt engineering and understanding AI limitations—and non-technical skills, including communication, critical thinking, and resilience. The university should strive for a balanced approach that includes technical knowledge of AI while also fostering ethical, discipline-specific applications and a culture of lifelong learning.

Closing Comment from RHFS Vice President, Mike Breazeale

It was a true privilege to organize this event for a second year. Bringing faculty and administrators together to exchange ideas on strengthening our university's reputation—whether by more effectively communicating our value or by equipping students to demonstrate it through their readiness for today's world—is an invaluable experience. Once again, I was struck by the talent, insight, and deep commitment that Mississippi State University continues to inspire in its people.