

September 18th, 2025, Meeting of the SAU Faculty Senate

Faculty Senators in Attendance: Wise, Valenzuela, Warrick, Faucett, Ivory, Stanberry, Lowther, Lambert, Al-Shami, McDermott, Mayo, Filbrun, Karim, Nelson, Almand, Samples

Proxies: Stanberry served as proxy for Greathouse, Valenzuela served as proxy for Islam

Ex-officio and guests: Sronce, Hicks, B. Logan, J. Logan, Plumlee, Stanford, Landry, Bloss, Lenard, Rowsam, White, Womack, Reed, Allen

Note: Senator Lambert has replaced senator Wilson as one of the Dempsey College of Liberal and Performing Arts senators.

Minutes

Call to Order 3:40

President Valenzuela called the meeting to order, identified proxies, and requested a motion to approve the August 28th minutes.

- **Approval of Minutes** – Motion by Sen. Nelson approve the August 2025 minutes, seconded by Sen. McDermott. Pres. Valenzuela noted on the second page, it says 28 faculty members, that was changed to 28 faculty and staff members in the resubmitted minutes. Motion carried.

- **Special Orders of the Day** –

Invitation to Dr. Hicks for remarks:

- Dr. Hicks gave a budget update, we are 8% down, 467 students, 440 of those are MCIS/International/graduate students.
- There are plans to schedule a campus-wide budget forum in early-November to present fiscal year projections and an enrollment management plan.
- One-time money from leftover budget last year was used to work with NICHE, the group who rated us as the top small public college in Arkansas. They do a very deep service around pushing schools and helping you find the right kinds of names to recruit those students. They've given us a fairly good estimate, details will be given in November at a campus -wide meeting.
- Dr. Hicks emphasized that we are not in a crisis situation, just a “belt-tightening” situation. He also stated that we are not looking at positions. Honestly, if you've got a position that needs to be filled, the request will go through the deans, Robin, and myself. If you can live without something, live without it. He also included that he will be very direct on what the budget situation is once we actually know. We're also

not looking at, as best we can, trimming back what's already a fairly narrow expense budget the departments receive to start with.

- Dr. Hicks noted our retention rate increased from 64% to 74% this year.
- In summary, we will continue NICHE work and one-time marketing investments; reinforce belt-tightening across campus and case-by-case hiring through deans/Provost.

Questions posed to Dr. Hicks from senators:

Sen. Filbrun: Ongoing searches that have been approved, will they continue as approved or will they be reviewed for faculty positions on a case -by -case basis?

Those will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. If you can live without it, this is a good year to live without. If you need to replace and expert in the area, submit the request to the dean, provost, and myself for review.

Sen. Nelson: What if we wanted to do a search to bring someone next year, like next August?

Put those forward and then we'll review them as well.

Sen. Warrick: Is there a possibility of a COLA or one-time payment?

Dr. Hicks stated that we are not in a position to do a COLA or to even think about the one - time payment. That will become clear once we know what the real number is.

Sen. Filbrun: How does this affect the campaign, the capital campaign that's happening?

It affects it and makes it much more important to bring in as much money as we possibly can. They're working on getting more scholarship money. That's the number one thing for us is scholarship money. Some of the funds will be going directly to endowed scholarships or some of it will actually be pass -through money. Which means the donations will go directly to the current students.

Sen. Warrick: So other schools went up. Did we identify why we think we went down?

We went down because of international, the inability for international students to gain visas.

Sen. Warrick: But we are down under -graduates too, but I saw some of the schools also went up.

Yes, we were down under -graduates too. I haven't dissected it completely, but I would say some schools have invested in using organizations like NICHE before we did.

Sen. Al-Shami: Our department, the computer science department, is the one who caused this decline in enrollment. Are we expecting something bad to happen to our department?

I don't believe it's your fault. This is how I would look at it, for you to remain vibrant, we need to think about what the next population of students are, and what those degree programs are. Nobody's on the chopping block.

Some of the work you guys are already doing on AI, and big data, and revising the master's degree, in order for students to be able to do that. We're going to help you market that, and get that out there, etc.

Sen. Warrick: We had talked about communication a lot and shared more. The announcement that went out about our enrollment stuff never came through the university.

Dr. Hicks said that he honestly did not think about sending it out to campus, but if it is something that people want, it can be sent out in the future. It was not intentionally withheld.

Sen. Warrick: Not that you have to have a number today, but how many people took advantage of our last dollar program?

At this time, we do not know how many students we picked up because we are in the middle of transferring to J-1 and things aren't working right now. It is going to be a little slow process during September and October. We've been in the process of transferring with financial aid and financial services, but things aren't working. We will know more when we get everything in.

Sen. Warrick: So, one -time money, that kind of thing. Is that still on the table for faculty and staff?

The one -time money that we've been used to is going away. Most of that came out of budgeting for 177 students in the MCIS program and then having 300 or 400 of them not counted in the budget. And that brought a lot of one-time money that could be spent on a variety of different things.

We are not in a position to do a COLA or to even really think about the one -time payment. And particularly that will become clear as once we know what the real number is.

We will do everything we can do to make sure we live within the budget we have. And to not create any kind of, crisis around that. But I do think it's how we enforce the idea that this is not the time to just, you know, spend money if we don't have to.

Invitation to Dr. Sronce for Remarks:

Dr. Sronce congratulated everyone on the 74.8% retention rate. She included that faculty members submitting four-week grades and early alerts make a difference and are helping with student success.

J-1 training is ongoing, she encouraged everyone to attend the trainings, and she thinks there are a lot of things we will really enjoy.

The Faculty Development and Post-Tenure Review Committee meets every other Tuesday at 8:00. She encourages everyone to come. Reach out if you are interested in serving on that committee.

Recruitment & Retention – Dr. Sronce encourages everyone to put on their creative hats to think of new programs to attract and keep new students. Websites are being updated by the Marketing and Communications Department. They may be reaching out to faculty members for help with creating hard copy flyers. Also, encouraging undergraduate students to visit with Angela or one of the program directors to consider a graduate program would help increase enrollment. The School of Graduate Studies is putting on a beyond the bachelor event in Reynolds for students to visit with them about graduate programs, October 28th – 30th. So, while you're advising students, that's a good time to that connection with them.

The MCIS Program is talking about new programs. They're talking about AI and how they can help with programs that might fit with everybody's program at the undergrad level and add some interesting options at the graduate level. If you are interested in that and think that AI would be a good fit for your program, you also might reach out to them as we kind of develop that part of it.

Upcoming Events:

50 Years of Harton coming up next week.

The RCB Hall of Fame is the night before

Mulekick Happy Hour – directly after Faculty Senate

9/29 Cookies with the Provost

The question for Administration: When will we resume offering community education opportunities on campus? For example, in the past, we had community members come and teach cake/cupcake decorating, art-related projects, etc. The university can offer space and potentially make a little money from attendees at the events.

Dr. Sronce said the infrastructure has gone away so we do not have a person who oversees that anymore. We did tiptoe into that last year when we had AI Workshops for the community. We did three workshops and had about 25 people come and pay to go to those workshops and we're hoping to do that again in October.

She would like to hear what people are interested in teaching or would think that the community might be interested in. So, we might do some surveys. There have been a variety of things in town that people have tried and I'm not sure what's been successful and what has not.

If you have ideas and want us to help you, craft one -off things, we can do that until we get enough together to launch a program. I'm not quite sure what that would look like yet. But if anybody wants to help work on it, come see me.

Remarks from Dr. Scott White, NCAA Faculty Athletic Representative

- NCAA D2 athlete GPA avg: **3.21**; GAC avg: **3.16**; campus exceeded GAC by **0.03**, remains below D2 avg.
- Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) is required at D1/D2, optional at D3; reports to the president.
- NCAA defers to institutional academic policies; only NCAA teams on the handout fall under these requirements; other campus teams operate outside NCAA oversight.
- CARA segments (season, non-championship, out-of-season) set hour limits; self-reported violation caused a **2-hour** practice penalty (miscounted 4th class day).
- Retention improved to **≈74%**; 4-week grade checks trigger multi-office interventions.

Reports of Committees:

President Valenzuela asked for a motion to approve the committees. Motion by Faucett, seconded by Samples. Motion carried.

Handbook Committee – No report

Budget Committee – No report

Faculty Parking, Building, and Grounds Committee – No report.

Old Business

Committee Structure – Vice-President Filbrun suggested that we create an ad hoc committee to review all the committees. He suggested one representative per college to review and streamline university/academic committee structures; propose consolidation and reporting standards for end-of-year reports. Senators interested should e-mail President Valenzuela.

New Business

Changes to new Research Committee Forms – Vice President Filbrun

- Vice president Filbrun detailed the suggested changes were mainly to clarify language to ensure consistency from year to year.
 - The VPAA/Provosts Office will request reports and maintain records of completed reports and send out decision letters instead of the committee chair.
 - There is a \$4,000 grant for faculty and there's \$4,000 fellowship. Previously, faculty must take at least one full term off from summer teaching if they accept the fellowship. Since a \$4,000 fellowship is more equivalent to one three credit hour class offered in summer, now it states you must teach at least one less three credit hour class during one of the summer terms.
 - The committee recommended increasing the funds to present from \$750 to \$1,000 to present at a conference.
- President Valenzuela asked for a motion to approve the changes. Motion by Sen. Warrick to approve, seconded by Sen. Samples. Motion Carried.

Sharing of calendars for 2026-27 and 2027-28 academic years.

- Calendars were reviewed/discussed and approved.

Adjourn

President Valenzuela asked for a motion to end the meeting. Motion by Sen. Faucett, seconded by Sen. Nelson. Motion Carried.

Meeting adjourned at 5:05.