

Sul Ross State University – Faculty Senate

Meeting Minutes

Date: Friday, April 24, 2026

Time: 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams (Webinar Format)

1. Call to Order, Quorum Check, and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 PM by Jennifer Miller-Ray, Ph.D., Faculty Senate President.

The meeting was recorded in compliance with transparency requirements.

Attendance and Quorum

Faculty Senate Members Present:

1. Jennifer Miller-Ray
2. Jessica Velasco
3. Ferhat Ozturk
4. Minerva Gonzales
5. Billy Jack Ray
6. Wesley Wynne
7. Maureen Frank
8. Oguzhan Basibuyuk

Faculty Senate Members Absent:

1. Melissa Wesney
2. Jose Mora
3. James Cho
4. Ryan Luna

Guests Present:

1. Joseph (Joey) Velasco (Faculty Handbook Working Group)
2. Andria Erin Rusk (Website/Marketing Working Group)
3. Alicia M. Trotman (Website/Marketing Working Group)

Quorum:

✓ Yes — Quorum (75%) was established at 3:30 PM and maintained throughout the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Minerva Gonzales to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2026 meeting. The motion was seconded by Billy Jack Ray.

Any discussion on the minutes was invited; none was raised. ✓ **Motion carried.**

2. President's Report - Presenter: Jennifer Miller-Ray

Key Points:

- **Bylaws Change Overview:** President Miller-Ray provided background on the proposed bylaw changes, explaining that updates were initiated following guidance from "Nelly" at the Texas State University System Office to ensure alignment with new legislative requirements (SB 37). The primary change involves replacing the term "council" (used for sub-groups) with "working group" to avoid confusion with

the legislative definition of a Faculty Council as a governing body. Jessica Velasco clarified that the issue arose because the bylaws template returned by the system included language restricting council membership to faculty only, which conflicted with the Senate's longstanding practice of including non-faculty (non-voting) members on working groups.

- **Administrative Updates – May 6th Meeting:** President Miller-Ray announced that a 2-hour meeting with President Carlos Hernandez and Provost Bernie Cantens has been secured for May 6th, from 1:00–3:00 PM, in the President's Conference Room (Teams option available). All senators are invited to attend and will present formal advisory recommendations from the three working groups.
- **Vice President of Finance Interviews:** Three VP Finance candidates will be on campus the week after graduation. The Faculty Senate and Budget Oversight Council have been formally requested to have dedicated interview time with all three candidates. Dates will be communicated once finalized.
- **Senator Engagement Discussion:** Drawing from a post-meeting survey, two themes were identified: (1) strong interest in focusing on student retention, and (2) a request for greater engagement across the full Senate. The floor was opened for discussion.
 - **Billy Jack Ray** suggested adding a dedicated agenda block for all senators to raise issues, noting that the current format mainly involves reports and leaves little space for senator participation.
 - **Wesley Wynne** proposed considering an open-comment period modeled after city council practices, while acknowledging time constraints.
 - **Jessica Velasco** noted the challenge of cramming content into a 90-minute monthly meeting and raised the option of longer or more frequent meetings.
 - President Miller-Ray committed to sending a follow-up survey to gather input on meeting frequency and length, and to adding a senator discussion block to future agendas.

3. Vice President's Report - Presenter: Jessica Velasco

Key Points:

- **Slate Update:** Dr. Velasco shared that a draft working group slate has been prepared, with senators highlighted and those rotating off as of September 30, 2026 marked in red. A working group interest form will be sent out to all faculty to collect interest; final approval of the slate is planned for the first fall meeting.
- **Senate Election Update:** Per the bylaws, elections must be held in spring to establish staggered two-year terms. As the Senate is in a startup phase, three of the six elected senators (one per college) need to step down so that new elections can establish the staggered pattern.

- **Minerva Gonzales** volunteered to step down.
 - **Melissa Wesney** indicated (via survey) she is okay with serving one year.
 - **Maureen Frank** confirmed she is willing to step down.
 - Jessica Velasco noted that Melissa, Maureen, and Minerva - "all the M's" - constitute the three needed. An election survey will be sent out the following week to solicit interest from the three affected colleges. Those who step down are not eligible for immediate re-election per bylaw term limits.
 - Appointed members may serve one-year terms up to six consecutive terms; elected members must take a two-year break after their term ends.
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4. Secretary's Report - Presenter: Ferhat Ozturk

Website Updates: The Faculty Senate website has been routinely updated with minutes, agendas, attendance, and relevant links.

Faculty Observer Invitation: Faculty were invited to attend today's meeting as observers; at least two faculty members were present as observers.

Newsletter: President Miller-Ray added that she and Dr. Ozturk met with library services this week and will be launching a Faculty Senate newsletter to improve communication with faculty. The first issue is expected in Fall 2026 (approximately August).

Archives: All Faculty Senate and Faculty Assembly files will be archived in the fall with the Big Bend Archives to preserve institutional records in hard copy.

5 Old Business: Working Group Reports

5.1 Faculty Handbook Working Group (15 min)

Chair: Dr. Joey Velasco

Dr. Velasco presented an overview of the working group's progress on revising Faculty Handbook Policy 2.08 (Faculty Workload). The working document is approximately 16 pages and reflects extensive collaborative commentary. Key highlights include:

- **Standard Teaching Loads Clarified:**
 - Tenure-track faculty standard load reaffirmed as **4-4** (not 5-5 as informally shifted under the previous presidency).
 - A new standalone heading was added to clarify the standard load for full-time, non-tenure track instructors (**5-5**). As VP Jessica Velasco noted, this language already existed in Policy 2.08 prior to the working group's review — it was simply relocated to the top of the document to make clear that non-tenure track faculty carrying a 5-5 load are not expected to fulfill service or research obligations.

- **Independent Studies:** Language was changed from "faculty members *shall not* teach more than one independent study per semester" to "*may* teach more than one," removing unnecessary gatekeeping and better reflecting the voluntary nature of independent studies for faculty. Item 3 (requiring a formal proposal and teaching plan for independent studies) was removed as it was seen as an undue barrier.
- **8-Week Courses and Summer:** New proposals (Items 10 and 11) address how short-term and 8-week courses should be counted more accurately and fairly. Summer teaching is confirmed as outside the normal 9-month workload and compensated separately.
- **Scholarly, Creative, and Professional Development Activities:** New language was added defining countable activities for research and creative scholarly work. It was noted that professional development was listed in the FE3 evaluation process but had not been reflected in Policy 2.08; this misalignment is being corrected. Jessica Velasco noted that none of the proposed faculty tracks included a percentage for professional development, and the handbook group recommends designating one.
- **DEI Reference:** President Miller-Ray and Jessica Velasco noted that a DEI reference in the professional development section needs to be removed from the draft. Dr. Velasco agreed to address this.
- **Faculty Tracks and Budget Concerns:** The working group noted that the proposed workload tracks—presented earlier by the Provost—would require hiring additional instructors, creating a significant budget implication. Given the university's current goal to cut approximately \$3.5 million, Jessica Velasco suggested clarifying with the Provost whether there is additional time before the tracks need to be finalized, given that publishing them in the handbook makes them official policy.
- **Next Steps:** The draft will not be voted on at this meeting. Dr. Velasco will share the cleaned-up draft with the Senate executive officers for inclusion in the Faculty Senate shared folder. The working draft will be presented (for discussion, not a final vote) at the May 6th meeting with the President and Provost.

5.2 Website / Marketing / Admissions Working Group (15 min)

Chair: Dr. Maureen Frank

Members: Dr. Andria Rusk, Dr. Moinuddin Shaik, Dr. Alicia Trotman, Dr. Wesley Wynne

Dr. Frank presented the working group's findings, framed around **front-end** (user-facing) and **back-end** (SEO/technical) issues on the SRSU website. The group is preparing a prioritized memo to present to the President and Provost at the May 6th meeting.

Front-End Issues Identified:

1. **Fragmented Admissions Flow:** Clicking "Apply Now" takes prospective students directly to the Apply Texas page without any intermediary landing page or explanation. No application deadline is prominently displayed, allowing students to lose urgency. Chatbots are absent, leaving student questions unanswered outside business hours.

2. **Homepage Targeting:** The homepage primarily targets current students rather than prospective students. News and events, while useful for enrolled students, are front and center, which is not optimal for recruitment.
3. **Broken Faculty Directory:** The faculty directory defaults incorrectly to "Natural and Behavioral Sciences" for many faculty pages. Faculty were encouraged to log in and manually correct their department listing.
4. **Mobile Optimization:** Images on mobile view were cited as presenting poorly, which is critical since most prospective students make their first site visit via phone. Research indicates students typically decide within two minutes of visiting a website whether to pursue an institution.

Back-End Issues Identified:

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) gaps remain significant; program pages still struggle to appear prominently in Google search results for prospective students (issue previously presented by Dr. Rusk).
- A more official website audit has been conducted by Dr. Kenton and shared with Dr. Rusk, which will inform the prioritized recommendation memo.

Positive Framing: The group emphasized SRSU's genuine strengths—particularly affordability—that the website currently fails to communicate effectively.

Recommendation: The group is drafting a prioritized memo for the President and Provost. Jessica Velasco raised the possibility of restoring faculty-editable web pages (previously available through an "Owl" training system), which was noted for further consideration.

Motion: Dr. Wesley Wynne moved to formally adopt the working group's findings as a Faculty Senate recommendation to forward to the President and Provost. The motion was seconded by Oguzhan Basibuyuk.

✓ **Motion carried unanimously.**

5.3 Scheduling / Retention Working Group (15 min)

Chair: Dr. Jessica Velasco

Dr. Velasco presented recommendations developed through two working group meetings, noting this is a more focused and actionable area compared to the other two working groups. The group included representatives from across campus including the following: Jessica Velasco, Julie Vega, Edwin Urias, Cynthia McAlister, Clifton Albrecht, Minerva Gonzales, Thornton Larson, Joseph Velasco, Billy Jack Ray, Mary Jane Saucedo, Jawanna Sanderson, Candice Ward, Thomas Matula, Xinyuan Qiu, Anirban Bhattacharjee, and Amanda Workman.

Core Recommendations:

1. **Adopt Monday/Wednesday–Tuesday/Thursday Scheduling Model:** The primary recommendation is to formalize a MWTT scheduling model, eliminating Friday courses for standard class times. This is already practiced informally but needs to

become official policy. Support from the Academic Center for Excellence indicates this change would benefit students in foundational courses.

2. **8-Week Course Alignment:** 8-week courses must also adhere to the MW/TTh time block framework.
3. **Athletics Practice Window:** Six of seven coaches indicated preference for protecting the **2:00–5:00 PM** time block for practice over an early morning option. The recommendation is to avoid scheduling standard classes in that window.
4. **Evening Lab Option:** At least one evening laboratory section per week (starting at 7:00 PM) should be offered each semester to give student-athletes full access, with scheduling priority given to student athletes for that section.
5. **Distribute Course Offerings:** Current scheduling is heavily clustered in popular time slots (e.g., TTh 9:30–10:45 and TTh 11:00–12:15). A more intentional distribution of courses across the day is needed.
6. **Faculty Input in Scheduling:** Full-time faculty must be engaged in selecting their class meeting times, within the constraints of student need and enrollment trends.
7. **Advising Reform – Early Major Courses:** Working with Lobo Den to integrate major-area courses earlier in students' academic careers rather than front-loading all core requirements. Each discipline should provide a list of recommended early-entry courses.
8. **Published Multi-Year Course Rotations:** Departments should publish publicly accessible multi-year rotation schedules so students and advisors can plan.
9. **Advisor Hold for Online-Only Enrollment:** A request has been submitted to the registrar's office to explore an advisor-level hold in Banner preventing residential Alpine students from enrolling exclusively in online courses without advisor approval, ensuring in-person options remain accessible, especially for international students.
10. **Chairs and Deans Oversight:** Department chairs and deans should review schedules carefully before submission to the registrar to ensure MW/TTh compliance before errors reach the registration office.
11. **Senate Approval for Scheduling Changes:** Any major modality or scheduling structure changes must go through Faculty Senate before receiving provost approval.
12. **Communication:** Regular reminders should be issued to faculty and chairs about official time blocks and scheduling expectations.
13. **Final Exam Schedule:** A new adaptive final exam schedule will be developed to align with the formalized MWTT model.

Timeline: The recommendations are aimed at implementation starting with Spring 2027 scheduling, with spring 2027 schedule submissions due imminently for some colleges.

Motion: Dr. Velasco moved to adopt the scheduling recommendations as a formal Faculty Senate recommendation to the President and Provost. The motion was seconded.

✓ **Motion carried unanimously.**

6. New Business

6.1 Bylaw Change Vote

President Miller-Ray presented the proposed bylaw changes (shared in the Faculty Senate folder with tracked changes). The two substantive changes are:

1. **Replacement of "council" with "working group"** throughout the bylaws to avoid confusion with SB 37's use of "faculty council" as a governance body, per guidance from the Texas State University System Office.
2. **Part-time faculty membership clarification:** Part-time faculty are eligible to serve on the Faculty Senate provided they hold a current faculty appointment as defined by board policy and maintain that status throughout their term. If their appointment lapses, a vacancy is created.

Discussion addressed whether working group membership should be limited to faculty only. Jessica Velasco noted the Senate has always had non-voting staff members on groups (e.g., athletics council includes athletics staff and the Dean of Students); the bylaw change acknowledges this by not restricting membership to faculty only.

Quorum was confirmed (8 members present, meeting the required threshold).

A motion to accept the bylaw changes was made by Billy Jack Ray and seconded by Jessica Velasco.

✓ **Motion carried.** The approved changes will be forwarded to the Texas State University System Office.

6.2 Vice President of Finance Interviews (May)

President Miller-Ray noted that three VP Finance candidates will be on campus the week after graduation. Faculty Senate has formally requested dedicated interview sessions with all three candidates and will communicate dates once known

6.3 Academic Excellence in Coaching Award – Policy Clarification

President Miller-Ray raised a concern that this award was presented to a graduate student serving as a coach, which was not explicitly prohibited by the current policy language but was viewed as unintended. Dr. Workman (Athletics) expressed concern about the outcome.

Discussion: Billy Jack Ray suggested revising the policy to clarify that the award is for **staff** coaches, not students. Maureen Frank urged Faculty Senate members to refer to the email from Dr. Joseph Velasco that provides explanation of the intent of the award to include all coaching staff. The Senate agreed to revisit the award eligibility language.

No formal vote was taken at this meeting; the item will be followed up.

6.4 Senator Engagement

Per discussion during the President's Report, a senator-led open discussion block will be added to future meeting agendas. President Miller-Ray will distribute a follow-up survey to gather feedback on meeting frequency and length.

7. Council and Committee Reports

- **Website/Faculty Directory:** Faculty were reminded that the directory defaults incorrectly and all faculty should log in to correct their department listing on their personal faculty page.
- **Working Group Slate:** Jessica Velasco is distributing a Qualtrics survey (shared in chat) to all faculty to collect interest for working group participation; this information will be used to finalize the fall slate at the first fall Senate meeting.
- No additional committee reports were presented.

8. Announcements and Adjournment

- **May 6th Meeting:** All senators are encouraged to attend the 2-hour meeting (1:00–3:00 PM) with President Hernandez and Provost Cantens to present formal working group recommendations. Attendance available in-person (President's Conference Room) or via Teams.
- **All-Faculty Meeting:** An all-faculty meeting is scheduled for Friday or the following Tuesday; specific date to be confirmed.
- **VP Finance Candidate Visits:** Scheduled for the week after graduation; calendar invites will be issued to senators once dates are confirmed.

Adjournment: President Miller-Ray thanked all senators and working group members for their contributions throughout the semester. The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By

Ferhat Ozturk, Ph.D.
Secretary, Faculty Senate
Sul Ross State University

Date Prepared: May 11, 2026