

Sul Ross State University – Faculty Senate Special Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, May 5, 2026

Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Location: President’s Meeting Room and Microsoft Teams (Webinar Format)

Meeting Type: Special Meeting — Advisory Presentations & Recommendations to Administration

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at approximately 1:00 PM by Faculty Senate President Jennifer Miller-Ray. President Miller-Ray welcomed attendees and introduced the purpose of the special meeting: to present to University President Dr. Carlos Hernandez and Provost Dr. Bernie Cantens the Faculty Senate's advisory recommendations developed by three working groups over the Spring 2026 semester.

President Miller-Ray noted that the Marketing, Recruitment & Admissions and Scheduling & Retention working groups had received formal Faculty Senate approval of their recommendations prior to the meeting. The Faculty Handbook Working Group had not yet finalized its recommendations; their presentation was shared as an update and discussion item.

2. Attendance

Faculty Senate Officers & Members Present:

Jennifer Miller-Ray
(President)

Dr. Jessica Velasco (Vice
President)

Dr. Ferhat Ozturk (Secretary)

Dr. Jose Mora

Dr. Billy Jack Ray

Dr. Clifton Albrecht

Dr. Minerva Gonzales

Dr. Oguzhan Basibuyuk

Dr. James Cho

Dr. Melissa Wesney

Administration Present:

Dr. Carlos Hernandez
(University President)

Dr. Bernie Cantens (Provost)

Betsy (VP,
Enrollment/Admissions)

Vince (*Web/IT*)

Michelle (*Academic Affairs*)

Al Brautigam

Working Group

Guests Present:

Dr. Joseph Velasco
(Handbook WG Chair)

Dr. Maureen Frank
(Marketing WG Chair)

Dr. Andria Rusk

Dr. Moinuddin Shaik

Dr. Alicia Trotman

Dr. Bushra Sajid

Julie Vega (ACE)

Edwin Urias

Thomas Matula

Amanda Workman

Dr. Ryan Luna

Dr. Wesley Wynne

Dr. Meara McMains

Dr. Mary Jane Saucedo

Dr. Jawanna Sanderson

Commented [MJ1]: Wes is a faculty senator.

Commented [OF2R1]: Thank you. I just overlooked it

3. Presentation 1: Faculty Handbook Working Group (1:00–1:30 PM)

Presenter: Dr. Joseph (Joey) Velasco, Chair

Working Group Members: Dr. Clifton Albrecht, Dr. Ferhat Ozturk, Dr. James Cho, Professor Jawanna Sanderson, Dr. Jose Mora, Dr. Ryan Luna, Dr. Mary Jane Saucedo, Dr. Meara McMains, Dr. Melissa Wesley, Dr. Minerva Gonzales, Dr. Oguzhan Basibuyuk, Dr. Jessica Velasco, Dr. Maureen Frank, Dr. Jennifer Miller-Ray, Dr. Billy Jack Ray

Background and Goals

The working group was tasked with reviewing Faculty Handbook Policy 2.08 (Workload Policy) and evaluating the administration's proposed addition of faculty workload tracks. The group's principal goals were: (1) to consider the proposed faculty tracks, and (2) to review Policy 2.08 holistically and propose revisions for clarity, consistency with other policies (FE3, FE4, tenure/promotion criteria), and reduction of faculty uncertainty regarding performance assessment.

Note: The working group's draft had not yet been formally approved by the Faculty Senate; the document shared with the administration included tracked changes and was provided for discussion purposes only.

Key Proposed Changes to Policy 2.08

- 1. Non-Tenure Track Teaching Load (New Standalone Section):** The standard teaching load for full-time, non-tenure track instructors shall be 5 lecture courses (or equivalent of 15 semester credit hours) each long semester. Non-tenure track faculty on a 5-5 load have no service or research obligations.
- 2. Remote Teaching and Tenure Track:** No faculty member hired to teach remotely will hold a tenure-track position unless approved by university administration; such appointments shall be rare exceptions. This was a deliberate revision to provide administrative flexibility.
- 3. Team-Teaching Workload Credits:** Faculty in team-taught organized classes will proportionally share workload credits. When a PhD student and a faculty member co-teach, the faculty member receives full workload credit (as the PhD student is learning). When two full-time faculty share a course, workload credits are split proportionally as determined by the department chair and dean.
- 4. 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 a barrier to faculty helping students graduate. This change does not apply to internships, practica, individual music instruction, student teaching, or thesis courses.

5. **Professional Development in Track Percentages:** Jessica Velasco clarified that one revision made to the proposed faculty track percentages was the addition of a professional development component, to align with FE3 evaluations where professional development constitutes 10% of the evaluation.

Three Key Takeaways from the Working Group

1. **Draft Incomplete:** The draft is not yet finalized. The inclusion of proposed faculty tracks has introduced significant complexity, requiring further clarity on expectations for teaching, research, and service — as well as alignment with FE3, FE4, and tenure/promotion criteria.
2. **Faculty Tracks May Not Be Feasible at This Time:** The working group determined that implementing faculty tracks would require hiring additional faculty. Under the current budget deficit, this appears even less feasible than previously assessed.
3. **A Second Draft May Be Needed:** If the faculty tracks are not feasible, a second draft of Policy 2.08 should be developed that incorporates needed updates *without* the tracks component.

Discussion with Administration

Provost Cantens clarified that the proposed faculty track percentages had not been altered in substance by the working group — language was built around the structure for clarity rather than changing the proportions.

Dr. Jessica Velasco raised concern about a perceived trend of faculty being asked to move to "professor of practice" positions, and whether this was consistent with moving toward teaching-focused tracks. **Provost Cantens** clarified that this practice has only been applied in limited cases where faculty did not meet tenure requirements and the university sought a retention pathway rather than termination.

Dr. Jose Mora raised broader questions about SRSU's long-term institutional vision — whether the university is positioning itself as a research institution or a primarily teaching institution — and asked for greater definitional clarity in the policy. **Provost Cantens** noted that SRSU is classified as an RCU institution and that the proposed tracks are designed to recognize the range of scholarly activity already occurring on campus.

Dr. Hernandez raised a question regarding proportional workload credits for supervising doctoral dissertation students, suggesting that a single student in an independent study or dissertation course may not warrant full teaching load credit from a budgetary standpoint, and proposed exploring fractional overload compensation for small-enrollment supervision courses. Dr. Velasco confirmed that the working group has tools being developed to address these graduate-level teaching load translations.

Next Steps

- President Miller-Ray will send out a message to the working group to gauge summer availability for continued work.

- The Provost's Office (Michelle) will review all tracked comments and suggestions and respond, enabling the working group to convene for one additional meeting.
- The goal is to finalize a recommendation via Senate email vote by **August 2026**.

4. Presentation 2: Marketing, Enrollment & Admissions Working Group (1:30–2:00 PM)

Presenter: Dr. Maureen Frank, Chair

Working Group Members: Dr. Wesley Wynne (original chair; ill during semester), Dr. Andria Rusk, Dr. Moinuddin Shaik, Dr. Alicia Trotman, Marjorie Scott, Dr. Bushra Sajid

Note: The Faculty Senate formally approved this working group's recommendations prior to this meeting by unanimous vote.

Overview

Dr. Frank presented findings from a comprehensive analysis of the SRSU website, organized into **back-end** (search engine and technical) issues and **front-end** (user experience) issues. The presentation included live demonstrations and screenshots. The goal of the website should be to convert prospective students into enrolled students.

Back-End Issues

- **Search Invisibility:** SRSU degree programs do not appear in the first pages of Google search results for prospective students. Dr. Rusk found programs appearing as late as page 42. The agricultural science program appeared on page 4, and search results often point to the homepage rather than specific program pages.
- **Lack of Search Engine Guides:** The site lacks proper metadata, headers, indexing, and image descriptions, preventing search engines from accurately identifying page content and college names.
- **Poor Mobile Optimization:** Most students first visit the university website on a phone. The undergraduate student page is severely compressed on mobile devices. The homepage video causes a **21-second load time** on most devices — problematic since students typically decide within 10 seconds.
- **Outdated or Misleading Information:** Some search results return old blog posts or press releases. Outdated images (e.g., COVID-era masking photos on graduate services pages) send unintended messages. Pages not updated in two or more years are ranked lower by search engines.
- **SEO Tool Limitation:** SRSU had been using a free SEO application that only allowed one keyword. OIT has since identified an upgraded application that will allow multiple keywords.

Front-End Issues

- **Broken Admissions Flow:** Clicking "Apply Now" redirects directly to Apply Texas with no intermediary page, instructions, deadlines, or context — especially problematic for first-generation or first-time college students.

- **No Chatbot:** Students often visit university sites outside of business hours; a chatbot would allow them to get answers at any time.
- **Navigation Complexity:** The SRSU homepage navigation is horizontally overloaded and not oriented toward prospective students. Peer institutions (Sam Houston State, Lamar University) have a dedicated "Cost and Aid" tab prominently visible to prospective students.
- **Broken Faculty Directory:** The directory contains 504 category listings, ghost profiles, inconsistent titles, and incorrect department assignments. Faculty can manually override their department assignments, but this is not intuitive or expected for new faculty.
- **Degree Programs Not Descriptive:** Clicking a program from the degree list leads to the course catalog rather than a program description page, which is not useful for prospective students.
- **Course Prefix Confusion:** Some old course prefixes (e.g., CS vs. CSA for Computer Science, CSST for Cybersecurity) were inconsistently displayed; Dr. Shaik identified these. Some fixes appear to have been implemented since the working group's initial analysis.

Response from Administration

Dr. Hernandez thanked the working group and acknowledged the issues. He noted:

- The "srsu.edu/online" page for online programs exists and needs updated links to landing pages.
- Cost information should be prominently displayed on the homepage.
- The Lobo Life navigation issue will be investigated.
- The faculty directory is partially tied to Banner, not the website alone; corrections require Banner database cleanup.
- Content managers in each department/program can request access to the SR Info page (not .edu) with training from Vince for routine updates.

Dr. Frank reiterated that many fixes require little or no cost but do require dedicated time and expertise, and that the current website maintenance responsibility rests on a half-time staff member, which is insufficient given the scope of issues. Dr. Hernandez indicated that efforts are underway to fill the print shop position so that Vince can refocus on the website.

Dr. Frank was asked to email the full presentation to Dr. Hernandez, Provost Cantens, and Betsy for follow-up. Further detailed implementation discussions were directed offline between the working group and university web/IT staff.

5. Presentation 3: Scheduling & Retention Working Group (2:00–2:30 PM)

Presenter: Dr. Jessica Velasco, Chair

Working Group Members: Julie Vega, Edwin Urias, Cynthia McAlister, Dr. Clifton Albrecht, Dr. Minerva Gonzales, Thornton Larson, Dr. Joseph Velasco, Billy Jack Ray, Dr. Mary Jane Saucedo, Professor Jawanna Sanderson, Candice Ward, Thomas Matula, Xinyuan Qiu, Anirban Bhattacharjee, Amanda Workman

Note: The Faculty Senate formally approved these recommendations prior to this meeting.

Core Issues Identified

- Classes being scheduled at non-standard time slots, creating final exam schedule conflicts
- High absenteeism rates in Friday foundation classes
- Bottlenecks in popular time slots (especially T-Th 9:30–10:45 and 11:00–12:15)
- Courses increasingly offered during the 2:00–5:00 PM athletics practice window
- Advising model focused on completing all core requirements first, causing upper-division scheduling bottlenecks
- Lack of formal scheduling policy and inconsistent faculty involvement in course scheduling decisions

Recommendations (Formally Approved by Faculty Senate)

Course Scheduling:

1. **Adopt an Official Monday/Wednesday & Tuesday/Thursday Schedule:** Eliminate Friday classes for standard course offerings. This will reduce student athlete absenteeism (Fridays are the highest-absence day), reduce absenteeism in foundation courses, and open additional MW time slots.
2. **8-Week Course Alignment:** Eight-week courses must adhere to the established MW/TTh time block framework.
3. **Intentional Course Distribution:** Course offerings should be distributed more evenly across all standard time slots to reduce bottlenecks. Institutional Effectiveness data on current slot utilization was shared to support this recommendation.
4. **Protect the 2:00–5:00 PM Window:** Schedule standard courses to avoid the 2:00–5:00 PM block whenever possible to preserve the athletics practice window. Labs and specialty classes may be exceptions.
5. **Evening Lab Sections:** Offer at least one evening lab section per week starting at 7:00 PM per semester, with scheduling priority for student athletes.

Advising and Degree Planning:

6. **Early Major Course Integration:** Advisors should integrate major-area courses earlier in students' academic careers rather than front-loading all core requirements.
7. **Published Multi-Year Course Rotations:** Departments should publish publicly accessible multi-year course rotation schedules. Dr. Hernandez expressed strong

support for step-by-step degree plans, noting this will also support accreditation efforts.

8. **Advisor Hold for Residential Students:** Request a Banner-level hold to prevent residential Alpine students from enrolling exclusively in online courses without advisor approval, particularly to benefit international students.

Compliance and Communication:

9. **Chair and Dean Review:** Department chairs and deans should review submitted schedules for standard-time compliance before they reach the registrar's office.
10. **Faculty Senate Approval for Major Scheduling Changes:** Any major changes to course modalities or scheduling structures that affect undergraduate course offerings must be presented to the Faculty Senate for discussion and require Provost approval.
11. **Regular Scheduling Reminders:** Faculty and chairs should receive regular communications about established time block expectations during schedule creation periods.
12. **Updated Final Exam Schedule:** A revised final exam schedule must be developed to align with the new MW/TTh model.

Discussion with Administration

Dr. Hernandez expressed strong support for all recommendations, particularly the step-by-step degree plan and first course rotation recommendations.

Implementation Timeline Discussion: Dr. Hernandez noted it is too late to implement the Friday elimination in fall 2026, as schedules have already been submitted. Earliest potential implementation is **Spring 2027**. However, Dr. Hernandez indicated that with the planned adoption of **Ad Astra scheduling software**, the Friday exclusion can be built directly into the software parameters so that Friday classes simply cannot be scheduled beginning with the next cycle.

Dr. Velasco raised that even for the current Spring 2027 scheduling process (which some colleges have already begun), non-standard time slots should be caught and corrected now, before they create advising and registration problems.

Dr. Hernandez expressed support and asked that the scheduling recommendations and PowerPoint be forwarded to the deans for communication.

On Scheduling Policy: Dr. Velasco asked whether the recommendations should be formalized as official policy. Dr. Hernandez indicated a preference for communicating the recommendations to deans first, rather than formalizing them as policy immediately.

On 8-Week Courses: Discussion arose regarding how 8-week courses fit within the MW/TTh model and how to ensure that students taking sequences of 8-week courses (e.g., Accounting I in weeks 1–8 and Accounting II in weeks 9–16) are not disadvantaged in multi-course enrollment. Dr. Hernandez confirmed that 8-week courses should use two time slots (e.g., Monday/Wednesday with a standard start time), not four days per week as some current schedules reflect.

6. Closing Discussion and Next Steps

Following all three presentations, President Miller-Ray opened the floor for closing remarks and to gather feedback from Dr. Hernandez and Provost Cantens on how the Faculty Senate can continue to assist the administration.

Retention and Enrollment Context: Dr. Hernandez emphasized that early award letters are critical to enrollment. Students typically commit to a university in February–March but current financial aid award letters may go out as late as May. This needs to be addressed to be more competitive.

AI in Education Discussion: A broader discussion emerged about the role of AI in higher education and how SRSU is responding. Dr. Hernandez noted that through the Presidential Challenge AI National Science Foundation program, several top national AI experts — including members of the EduCause board — are coming to SRSU this summer. The Senate was invited to potentially engage these consultants on AI curriculum questions. The discussion touched on the need for discipline-specific AI integration rather than a single general AI course, and on the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate AI-generated content.

Faculty Handbook — Final Guidance:

- Provost Cantens indicated that the working group should proceed with refining Policy 2.08 with a focus on the comments and the professional development/evaluation alignment issue.
- If the tracks component is addressed and approved through the Faculty Senate, the Provost's Office would be prepared to implement the tracks for fall.
- President Miller-Ray confirmed she will email a final recommendation to the full Senate for a vote and aim to have something in place by **August 2026**.

Working Group Continuity: Dr. Hernandez affirmed that the three working groups should continue into the next academic year. He recommended that the working groups critically assess which scheduling recommendations are realistic for Spring 2027, which can be piloted in Summer 2027, and which should be targeted for Fall 2027.

Faculty Senate Newsletter: President Miller-Ray noted that the Faculty Senate newsletter (launching August 2026) will help communicate working group progress and outcomes to the broader faculty.

7. Adjournment

President Miller-Ray thanked Dr. Hernandez, Provost Cantens, and all attendees for their time and engagement. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By

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Sul Ross State University

Date Prepared: 05/12/2026