



YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

1 Tressel Way, Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Academic Senate Meeting

Meeting Minutes – February 4, 2026

The Academic Senate met at 4:00 PM on February 4, 2026, in Debartolo Hall Rm 132. Attendance at the meeting has been logged separately from these recorded minutes. This meeting was video recorded and will be made available, along with supporting documentation for presentations made during the senate meeting separately.

The meeting was called to order by Dr Martha Pallante, Chair. Dr Martha Pallante certified that quorum was present (Excused absences: Robert Caven).

The meeting began with a revision to the agenda. The revision included the addition of President Bill Johnson. Motion to approve was made by Katherine Garlick and was seconded by AJ Sumell. The revised agenda was approved by senate majority. The recording of minutes from the December 3rd meeting was brought before the senate for approval. Matt O'Mansky put forward a motion to approve that was seconded by Molly Burdette. The minutes were approved by the senate majority.

President Bill Johnson addressed the senate. The following are highlights from the President addressing the senate:

- Reported positive progress on the Steubenville operation and community engagement. Transformation has begun. Anticipating classes beginning in Fall 2026. There will be a community open house tentatively in April 2026. Expected to expand number of students beyond reported number of 3,200 in 2011. The ODHE is helping to expedite the approval process for courses.
- \$20 million secured from Norfolk Southern for the East Palestine Fire Science Training Center; groundbreaking expected in late spring or early summer. Youngstown State is solely responsible for constructing and operating the facility. Endowment created to set aside funds to help maintain the facility.
- Reinvention of Summer concert series was also highlighted. July 10th and 11th weekend (same weekend as festival of the arts) was the weekend reported. Expected to have about 40-50,000 people on campus. Looking to expand concerts into the school year as well.
- Highlighted this is the 250th anniversary of the United States. A lot of activities are being planned. Refer to website for informational material (more to follow).

President Johnson took questions. No questions were posed at this time.

The meeting then shifted to a report from the Executive Committee by the chair, Dr Martha Pallante. Dr Pallante reported that a list of Senate committees with vacancies will be sent out to entire faculty within the next couple of weeks. Dr Pallante encouraged faculty to volunteer for vacancies and participate with committees to increase engagement. In March, the election of senators will be discussed with a call for nominations (department and at-large positions). No questions were posed by the senate body.

Senate Committee Reports

- Dr Thomas Wakefield submitted a report from the undergraduate curriculum committee. No Senate members objected to the report. The report was recommended for acceptance to forward to the Board of Trustees by majority consent.
- Dr David Asch submitted a report from the Academic Programs Committee. Dr Asch extended deadline for program submission due to previous week of bad weather (February 7th is the new deadline). The report was recommended for acceptance to forward to the Board of Trustees by majority consent.

Old Business

No old business was presented.

New Business

Academic Integrity Policy Revisions – Associate Provost Kristine Still/Ms. Joy Polkabila Byers/Ms. Betsy Johnson

Updates provided on academic integrity policy revisions, emphasizing faculty involvement and streamlined processes.

A summary of the proposed Academic Integrity Process Revisions was presented. The revisions are intended to improve procedural clarity, consistency, and fairness while maintaining faculty authority over academic determinations and safeguarding student rights. Identified concerns with the current process included inconsistent application of procedures, unclear timelines, documentation challenges, and the need for more structured appeals pathways.

Key proposed enhancements include the establishment of clearly defined timelines for notification, meetings, documentation, and decisions; implementation of a structured Academic Integrity Conference to promote early faculty and student engagement; and formal guidance for proceeding in cases where students do not respond, while preserving their right to appeal. The revisions further outline a more structured hearing and appeal framework, including defined committee composition, evidence submission procedures, and decision timelines. Centralized documentation and case management within the Office of Academic Affairs are proposed to ensure consistent recordkeeping and tracking of repeat violations. The proposed changes are designed to strengthen due process, support faculty in upholding academic standards, promote equitable treatment of students, and reinforce institutional integrity. Feedback from Senate members is being invited prior to finalization of the revisions. Review and provide feedback on the proposed changes to the student conduct academic policy by February 20, 2026. The final version will go before the Board of Trustees in March. A question was raised by Dr Dawna Cerney regarding how the number of individuals on the conduct board was determined. Feedback on this question was invited by the presenters.

Discussion ended.

Syllabus Progress – Associate Provost Hillary Fuhrman/Associate Provost Kristine Still

Common syllabus implementation discussed, with training planned from March to August 2026 for faculty readiness.

A progress update was provided regarding syllabus processes and related academic affairs initiatives. For Spring 2026, faculty will continue using the YSU Common Syllabus Template while the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) works with the CourseLeaf SYL project team on system implementation. Faculty training on the SYL platform is planned from March through August 2026 to prepare for broader adoption. A soft launch of CourseLeaf SYL is scheduled for Summer 2026, with faculty encouraged to begin using the system. Full implementation is planned for Fall 2026, when syllabi will be required in SYL no later than five days before the start of the semester (August 17th for the upcoming Fall 2026 Semester). Dr Bob Kramer asked about what happens when instructors aren't assigned until 2 days before the class (how can this meet the deadline). Dr Fuhrman stated that it would need to be approached accordingly to work with the Chair as needed.

Discussion ended.

[Plan for Peer Review/Annual Review Rubrics/Tenure Guidelines to Be Implemented – Associate Provost Kristine Still/Associate Provost Hillary Fuhrman](#)

Peer evaluation framework established to promote self-reflection and continuous improvement among faculty.

An overview of a proposed peer evaluation framework was also shared. The draft model emphasizes self-reflection, continuous improvement, and good-faith participation. Faculty input on the draft process will be gathered, with finalization expected by the end of the Spring 2026 semester. Updates were provided on faculty annual performance evaluations, including a February 9 deadline for colleges to submit evaluation rubrics that will inform a revised annual review process. Adjustments to the Watermark system will align with the newly approved policy, and annual evaluations will be due May 20 beginning in 2027. Finally, an update on tenure guideline implementation was provided. The Provost is finalizing a rubric, which will be shared in advance of the April 2026 Tenure and Promotion Workshop. Questions were taken. Mr. Mike Costarell was recognized and posed the question of whether the tenure and promotion was an appropriate discussion topic for senate instead of a different forum. Dr Pallante responded that they aren't asking for a motion, but this is a way for faculty to disseminate the information back to other faculty. Suggestion was made by Mr Costarell to have an all-faculty meeting to share this update. Dr Pallante encouraged the presenters to consider this idea.

Discussion ended.

[Steubenville Fall 2026 Offerings – Associate Provost Kevin Ball](#)

Dr Kevin Ball provided an update on Steubenville course offerings. A list of the offerings was provided during the meeting. Anticipation is for offering additional programs beyond those at initial launch. Plan is to expand to Bachelor's degree programs. Planning for 200 student enrollments in the Fall. Waiting for ODHE approval for offering these courses at the Steubenville site. No questions by the senate body.

Discussion ended.

[Feb 1 Due Date from State for Updates on SB1 and Where We Are – Associate Provost Kevin Ball](#)

ODHE requires proof of compliance for funding eligibility, emphasizing high stakes for academic affairs. The compliance report was shared to the senate body by Dr Kevin Ball. A copy of the report will be made available via the Senate website for viewing. No questions by the senate body.

Discussion ended.

Honoring The Team That Did the Hard Work for the Carnegie Community Engagement Recognition – Associate Provost Kevin Ball

Dr Kevin Ball introduced a resolution to recognize individuals who helped with the Carnegie Community Engagement initiative. Youngstown State earned the Carnegie Foundation's community engagement designation, highlighting significant collaborative efforts. Dr Ball highlighted the significance of this achievement and the work involved. Dr Ball offered the resolution to be voted on by the senate body. Theresa Peck made a motion to approve with a second from Stephanie Smith. The Senate voted in majority to approve the resolution.

Centralized Advising– Associate Provost David Graham

Centralized academic advising aims to improve student experiences and outcomes through shared leadership and reduced advisor caseloads. The presentation outlined the transition from strategic planning to operational implementation of a collaborative, embedded advising model intended to strengthen student support and improve academic outcomes.

The advising structure is designed to serve a broad advising community that includes college-based advising units (BCLASSE, BCHSS, Cliffe STEM, and WBCA), faculty advisors, and specialized advisors supporting student populations such as Intercollegiate Athletics, Exploratory students, and Strong Start participants. This framework emphasizes coordinated delivery of advising services while preserving discipline-specific expertise within academic colleges.

The advising initiative aligns with the institution's Academic Master Plan and is being implemented through a phased approach. The model centers on a Collaborative Leadership Framework featuring embedded advisors who work directly within colleges while remaining connected to centralized coordination through the Student Success Office. This structure is intended to ensure consistency in advising standards across the university while allowing flexibility to address program-specific student needs. Dr Graham emphasized that this approach promotes holistic student support by integrating academic guidance with broader student success resources.

Several guiding principles underpin the advising redesign. These include a shared leadership model with clearly defined roles, shared accountability for equitable and consistent advising practices, and a focus on advisor effectiveness through professional development and strategic use of technology. A strong emphasis is placed on data-informed decision-making and proactive outreach to improve student retention, progression, and overall academic success.

Operational enhancements planned for Spring and Summer 2026 focus primarily on reducing advisor caseloads to allow for more meaningful and timely student interactions. Current advisor-to-student ratios average 325:1, compared with a benchmark of 300:1. The institution's stated goal is to achieve an ideal ratio of 250:1 through the hiring of additional academic advisors. This hiring initiative is scheduled to begin immediately following the advising unit transition on March 17 and is characterized as a strategic investment in student success.

The implementation timeline includes three major phases. The Structural Foundation phase (August–December) establishes the organizational and leadership framework for the new advising system. The Operational Transition phase (January–April) focuses on staffing changes, advisor integration within colleges, and workflow adjustments. The final phase, Stabilization and Growth (May and beyond),

emphasizes refinement of processes and scaling of the advising model. Long-term planning extends into FY27 and FY28, with the goal of sustaining a scalable, data-driven advising system that maintains the 250:1 caseload ratio.

Questions were taken from the senate body. One student shared the need for faculty to be active participants in the process as this could impact their timeline for graduation. Dr Bob Kramer seconded the need for advisor collaboration and recalled one student who had to take a class at Kent State to meet the graduation requirements. Another question was posed about whether there was a way to encourage students to meet with their advisors regularly. Dr Graham highlighted the need to train advisors and to improve communication with colleges. No further questions were posed.

Discussion ended.

Federal Digital Accessibility Requirements – Mrs. Sharyn Zembower/Mrs. Rosalyn Donaldson

The presentation emphasized that digital accessibility ensures all individuals, including those with disabilities, can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with digital content. Within the classroom setting, this includes slide presentations, instructional software, Word and PDF documents, learning management system (LMS) materials, and multimedia resources such as video and audio content. Accessibility practices support students who rely on screen readers, keyboard navigation, captioning and transcripts, magnification, and contrast tools.

Presenters underscored that accessible course materials are both a legal requirement and a pedagogical best practice. Accessibility removes barriers to learning, supports non-native English speakers, enhances mobile and remote learning experiences, fosters inclusivity, and aligns with principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

A significant regulatory update was highlighted: the U.S. Department of Justice issued a Final Rule in 2024 establishing April 24, 2026, as the enforcement date for updated ADA Title II digital accessibility regulations. These requirements apply broadly to institutional digital content and systems.

The presentation clarified that accessibility must become a proactive, integrated practice rather than reactive accommodation. Digital content and software must meet the four foundational accessibility principles: content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. While faculty and staff are not expected to become accessibility experts, they are encouraged to be intentional and informed in their choices and practices.

Institutional efforts toward accessibility were outlined, noting that the university has been working intentionally on digital accessibility since 2014. Progress includes the work of the Digital Accessibility Committee, improvements to university websites (currently reported as 95% accessible), collaboration with student groups, communications and marketing initiatives, training related to digital signage, and updates to procurement guidelines. Required remediation and expanded training initiatives through YSU Online and IT Training Services were also described.

Colleges and departments were encouraged to incorporate accessibility planning into academic scheduling and course development processes. Recommendations included beginning with manageable improvements, promoting faculty participation in training, using institutionally supported and accessible tools, engaging in IT early when adopting new software, and documenting progress toward accessibility goals.

Faculty-specific guidance emphasized reviewing course content within the LMS, which is currently reported as 78.8% accessible, and developing plans to address inaccessible materials over time rather than removing them immediately. Archived or unused materials are not required to be remediated. Faculty were advised to use built-in LMS accessibility tools, verify third-party vendor compliance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards, and request documentation such as VPATs, HECVATs, or vendor accessibility roadmaps when adopting required software. Particular attention was noted for STEM courses, courses involving equations, and handwritten materials, where accessibility solutions may require additional support and resources. Faculty were also reminded that syllabi should include a statement encouraging students to request alternate formats or access as needed.

A variety of tools and support services are available to assist faculty and staff. These include Ally within Blackboard for course content review, captioning and transcription tools in Webex and Microsoft platforms, accessibility checkers for Word and PDF documents, and consultation services through YSU Online and IT Training. Procurement guidance is available for evaluating software accessibility, and documentation may be submitted to the university's software compliance office. Questions taken from senate body. Dr Stephanie Smith voiced concerns that MAC teaching stations on campus do not have closed captions. Mrs. Zembower stated that there is a way to turn it on and that the tech department has found a recent solution. Dr Bob Kramer also questioned whether faculty will be forced to use specific university supported programs for accessibility. Highlighted the use of other programs that could also meet the accessibility standards. Mrs. Zembower stated that other programs can be used to meet the accessibility requirements. Another question was brought up on whether STEM engineering software meets accessibility requirements and how to tell if it is. Mrs. Zembower stated that IT is working on reviewing the software and the need for possibly reaching out to the vendor for further information. For free software, the process for reaching out to the vendor may take longer and all software will need to meet accessibility requirements.

Discussion ended.

[Student Government Announcement – President Sofia Myers](#)

Sofia Myers reported opening of candidacy for student government for representatives and senators. Encourage students to declare their candidacy for student government positions starting Monday, with a closing date of February 19. Direct questions to SGA President Sofia Myers.

Dr Pallante asked the body if there were any other business that needed to be attended to. None was present. A motion to adjourn was received with a 2nd. Dr Pallante officially adjourned the meeting following a majority consent.

Minutes submitted by:

Edmund Ickert

Secretary, Academic Senate