

TO: Staff Senate
FROM: Kristi Klien
DATE: February 18, 2026
SUBJECT: Staff Senate Meeting Minutes

In Attendance: Lucy Grissinger, Denise Kuzma, Melissa Eckenrode, Patti Tetreault, Sybil Keris, Melisa Gallo, Kelly Cook, Kristi Klien, Bridget Judge, Bridget Conlogue, Shawn Beistline, Brenda Amato, Hollie Roscioli, Brenda Clarke, Diane Collins Gilmore, Melissa Przewlocki, Joseph Medina, Melinda Finnerty, Shonna Emick, Raymond Kratz, Grace Crowley, Jill Eidenberg, Bridget Hunter, Rose Ann Jubinski, Bryn Schofield, Traci Vennie, Gina Butler, Meghan Eidenberg, Autumn Forgione

Not in Attendance: Gerianne Barber, Daniela Teneva, Marcella LaMura, Megan Sweeney,

Welcome: Kristi Klien called the meeting to order. Brenda Amato offered the opening prayer. A volunteer is needed for the opening prayer at the next meeting, Autumn Forgione volunteered. The Land Acknowledgement Statement was read. Attendance was checked, and a quorum was met.

Review of Agenda: A motion was made to accept the agenda and minutes. The motion was seconded, and the agenda and minutes were approved.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Michael Jenkins

Dr. Michael Jenkins, faculty co-chair of the University of Scranton's Middle States self-study, explains the purpose, structure, and importance of the accreditation self-study process. The self-study is a major component of maintaining accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and occurs on an eight- to ten-year cycle, involving a three-year review process that aims to secure accreditation for the next decade.

The process engages faculty, staff, and administrators across the university through a co-chair model. Each of the seven accreditation standards is led by two co-chairs—one representing faculty and one representing staff/administration—supported by a steering committee and a coordinating committee. The process is guided by university leadership and the Middle States institutional liaison.

The self-study is important both as a reflective exercise aligned with the university's mission and Jesuit values, and as a formal standards-based evaluation required for accreditation. Accreditation is critical because it enables access to federal funding.

Each working standards group addresses three key questions:

1. Whether the university meets the Middle States accreditation standards.
2. How can the university further support institutional improvement, collaboration, communication, and mission-centered growth.
3. A third, standard-specific question tailored to each area.

The university community will have multiple opportunities to participate and provide feedback throughout the process. A key upcoming event is a staff forum on Wednesday, March 25 at 3:00 PM, featuring Dr. Amina Massenburg, the Middle States liaison, who will conduct a preparatory campus visit.

Jenkins concludes by thanking participants and encouraging support for colleagues serving as co-chairs and working group members, especially as the process intensifies during the report writing phase.

Guest Speaker: Dan Cosacchi, Mission and Ministry

Summary: Mission Priority Examen (MPE)

A representative from Mission and Ministry explains the Mission Priority Examen (MPE), a Jesuit accreditation and reflection process that all 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the U.S. complete every seven to eight years. The University of Scranton's last MPE occurred in 2017–2018 and resulted in strong reaffirmation of its status as a Jesuit and Catholic institution by the Society of Jesus.

While the MPE serves as an accreditation by the Jesuit order (with final recognition coming from Rome), it is primarily an opportunity for institutional reflection modeled on the Ignatian Examen—reviewing what the university has done well, identifying areas for growth, and discerning how to move forward in fidelity to its Jesuit mission. The process emphasizes openness to people of all religious traditions and none. This MPE comes at a unique moment due to leadership changes in the Jesuit USA East Province and long-term shifts in how Jesuits will be assigned to institutions. Although fewer Jesuit communities may be physically present on campuses by 2034, the university's Jesuit identity remains grounded in Ignatian pedagogy and shared mission carried forward by both Jesuits and lay colleagues.

The self-study is organized around seven characteristics of Jesuit higher education:

1. Leadership and public commitment to mission
2. Academic life
3. Faith, justice, and reconciliation
4. Ignatian campus culture
5. Service
6. Relationship to the Society of Jesus
7. Institutional integrity

A 15-member committee representing all university constituencies is leading the work. Eight open forums will be held (for staff, faculty, students, alumni/friends, and a general “catch-all” session) to ensure broad participation. Upcoming staff forums include:

- Wednesday, February 25 at noon (Kane Forum, Leahy Hall)
- Friday, March 6 at 9:00 AM (same location)

After forums conclude, subgroup reports will be compiled over the summer into a self-study, which will be reviewed by peer visitors during a campus visit November 17–20. The overall goal is a collaborative, inclusive process that highlights what makes the University of Scranton distinctively Jesuit and mission-driven, while identifying opportunities for continued growth.

Liaison Report: Patricia Tetreault

Cabinet Update on Finance, Enrollment, and Systems Planning

Over the past month, cabinet discussions have focused heavily on financial planning, budget development, and strategic planning, particularly as these relate to the university's strategic plan. Cabinet is also preparing for a presentation from Tambellini Group regarding the university's ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system. Tambellini has been gathering campus input on needs and priorities to help determine whether the university should:

- Upgrade Banner
- Move to a different system (e.g., Workday)
- Use a hybrid approach (e.g., Banner student + Workday Finance/HR).

Because this decision will involve a multi-year project and significant financial investment, careful planning and clear understanding of institutional needs are essential before engaging vendors.

On the budget side, many divisions are participating in zero-based budgeting, which requires rebuilding budgets from the ground up. While the process is labor-intensive, it:

- Improves transparency and accountability
- Helps leadership better understand where funds are actually spent
- Strengthens stewardship of university resources

Although zero-based budgeting may not result in major cost savings, it provides a clearer, more accurate picture of expenses and supports better long-term financial management. The goal is to expand this process to more divisions over time.

Overall, cabinet work is centered on financial stewardship, enrollment growth, data-informed planning, and long-term systems decisions, with an emphasis on being deliberate, realistic, and strategic.

Cabinet & Governance Updates

Board of Trustees

- Upcoming meeting: Next Friday.
- Agenda item: Financial presentation with an update on the current-year budget.
- Next-year budget: Formal projection/approval expected in May (not finalized for this meeting).

Structural Deficit & Financial Education

- Context: The university is operating with a structural deficit (recurring expenses exceed recurring revenues).
- Next month's briefing: Steve (CFO) and Pat Donahue will present to explain the deficit, drivers, and options under consideration.

Resource Management Committee (RMC)

- Hiring posture: Selective and needs-based; some interim coverage while needs are assessed.
- Hiring continues to be intentional and cautious, with only a few positions posted. In some cases, interim arrangements are being used while longer-term needs are assessed.

Enrollment & Admissions

- Royal Days: Strong attendance; one more on Monday. Weather is a risk factor for in-person yield.

Labor Relations

- Faculty negotiations have concluded, and the new contract was ratified last week, allowing the university to move forward with greater stability.

Provost Search, Graduate Programs, and Campus Safety Exercise

Provost Search – Process and Engagement

- Finalist visits on campus. Candidates participated in an extensive interview process, including:
 - Meetings with Fr. Marina
 - Meetings with Cabinet
 - Sessions with Provost's Office staff
 - Meetings with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee
 - Meetings with the Faculty Union Executive Committee
 - A faculty-only forum
 - A community forum
 - A student-led campus tour (no separate student forum, based on anticipated engagement)
- Two students served on the search committee and were highlighted as strong representatives of the university community.
- Feedback from campus forums is collected via a search-firm–managed survey, ensuring unfiltered input goes directly to Fr. Marina.
- The search committee will synthesize feedback and share observations (pros/cons) but will not rank candidates.
- Final hiring authority rests with Fr. Marina, with the goal of selecting a candidate who will provide stability and continuity in academic leadership.

Graduate Programs – Market Responsiveness Concern

- Participants at a recent graduate focus group provided feedback to the university to:
 - Embrace AI and emerging technologies
 - Integrate data literacy and modern tools into graduate curricula

Spring Convocation

- Spring Convocation is scheduled for tomorrow, including recognition of Sursum Corda award winners.
- Attendance and support for award recipients were encouraged.

Campus Safety / Emergency Notification Exercise

- An emergency notification exercise was conducted in January.
- Participants noted:
 - Students are generally more accustomed to drills due to their schooling experiences.
 - Staff may experience anxiety or skepticism due to perceived lack of follow-through on previously reported safety issues.
- Participant suggestions and themes included:
 - Considering more realistic drills to increase engagement (balanced against trauma concerns)
 - Exploring universal alerts (e.g., sirens or non-optional default notifications)
 - Reviewing ENS enrollment practices to ensure consistent and comprehensive coverage
 - Addressing unresolved physical security issues (locks, exits, glass offices)

Emergency Notification System (ENS) & Communication Gaps

- Students are required to have email and phone numbers on file and cannot opt out of emergency notifications.
- Employees, however, must opt-in and may not be fully enrolled across all notification methods (desk phone, cell phone, email), leading to inconsistent alerts.
- Some staff reported:
 - Receiving texts but no phone calls, or vice versa
 - Desk phones do not ring on shared or main office lines
 - Not realizing an emergency exercise was underway until after it ended
- It was suggested that ENS enrollment changes made in the last few years may not have been clearly communicated, contributing to confusion.
- Concern was raised that reliance on optional opt-in systems reduces effectiveness during real emergencies.

Physical Space & Safety Concerns

- Safety experiences varied significantly by building:
 - Megan, Leahy, and McGurkin: Mostly solid wood doors; staff felt safer.
 - Leahy classrooms/offices: Solid doors with glass sidelights—staff felt vulnerable.
 - Dean’s suite and similar areas: Glass walls and limited shelter options heightened concern.
- Staff noted that “shelter in place” guidance is difficult to follow in offices with:
 - Glass walls
 - Doors that cannot lock from the inside
 - No safe areas to get low or out of sight

Drill Participation & Effectiveness

- Many staff acknowledged they were aware of the drill but became distracted, continued working, or did not treat it seriously.
- Others said they missed notifications entirely or did not realize the exercise had started.
- Feedback suggested:
 - Advance notice may reduce realism and participation
 - Lack of visible or audible cues (beyond phones/email) makes it easy to ignore
 - Overhead alerts or a universal signal (short of a fire alarm) might improve awareness
- There was recognition of the tension between:
 - Avoiding panic or trauma
 - Ensuring meaningful preparedness
- Several participants noted that students are more accustomed to drills, having grown up with them, while staff may be less prepared or less engaged.

Suggestions Raised

- Review ENS enrollment defaults and communication practices for employees
- Explore non-optional notification methods (e.g., overhead announcements or campus-wide alerts)
- Revisit unresolved physical security issues (locks, glass exposure)
- Consider gradually increasing realism of drills to improve engagement without causing distress

Follow-Up Action

- With group permission, feedback will be shared with Jerry and Lauren as Staff Senate feedback, without individual attribution, for further discussion with IT and campus safety partners.

Additional Updates

- Voluntary Retirement Plan (VRP):
 - 31 positions originally included
 - 16 positions will not be replaced
 - Projected savings are now expected to be closer to original estimates
 - 4 positions remain on hold pending final decisions
- Supervisor Group Meeting:
 - A follow-up session will be scheduled to build on feedback from September
 - Finance will be a key discussion topic
 - Date is being coordinated with Provost search timing
- Engagement & Governance:
 - Participation in upcoming roundtable discussions was noted
 - Continued communication and transparency emphasized

Presidents Report – Kristi Klien

Strategic Plan Implementation (UPC)

- With the Strategic Plan approved by the Board of Trustees, the University Planning Council (UPC) has shifted focus to implementation.
- Current work centers on:
 - Identifying priorities (Priority 1, 2, etc.)
 - Mapping actions across Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3
- The first working session took place this morning, with participants breaking into four work groups by topic.
- This implementation plan will continue over the coming weeks.

Previous Business

- Graduate tuition benefits for staff dependents remain on the agenda and will be revisited.
- Constitution and Bylaws amendments:
 - Being presented to the Governance Committee on Thursday
 - Moving to the Board of Trustees next Friday

Roundtable Planning

- Dates are being coordinated for a March or April roundtable involving all three constituencies.
- Format:
 - One combined session
 - Pizza will be provided (using an external vendor due to Aramark limitations)
- Budget:
 - Target is \$600 total, aiming to stay under budget (previous roundtable cost ~\$850)
- More details are forthcoming once the date is finalized.

IT Issues: Scranton Login & Authentication

- Ongoing issues related to:
 - Transition from Duo to Microsoft Authenticator
 - Repeated authentication prompts
 - Problems opening, saving, or closing cloud-based documents
 - “Expired certificate” errors in Word
- An itemized list of issues has been sent to Cindy Green, who is open to speaking directly with affected users.
- Staff were encouraged to:
 - Continue logging IT tickets
 - Share issues (via the chair) for coordinated follow-up with IT

Staff Senate Elections – 2026

- **Current constituency counts:**
 - Professional: 339
 - MTP: 174
 - Clerical: 82
 - Total staff: ~595
- Senate structure:
 - 27 senators + 2 alternates per constituency (33 total senators)
- Needed for this election (if fully filled):
 - Professional: 7 senators + 2 alternates
 - MTP: 7 senators + 2 alternates
 - Clerical: 2 senators + 2 alternates
- Ongoing challenge:
 - Difficulty recruiting enough nominees
 - Frequent mid-year vacancies due to workload or staff turnover
 - Alternates are often exhausted, leaving no replacements
- Key discussion points:
 - Whether 33 senators are still appropriate given reduced staff numbers
 - Whether bylaws should be revised to:
 - Reduce the total number of senators
 - Adjust representation ratios
 - Use percentages instead of fixed numbers
 - Allow more flexibility in constituency representation
- Consensus themes:
 - Strong desire to maintain representation from all constituencies
 - Recognition that participation capacity has declined
- Timeline constraints:
 - Nominations: March 16–26
 - Elections: March 27–April 7
 - Bylaw changes require Board approval, making changes impractical for this election cycle
- Likely approach:
 - Proceed with elections under current rules

- Revisit structural changes for next year
- Continue the practice of backfilling across constituencies when needed

Staff Senate Elections & Recruitment Challenges

- Last year's elections barely filled all seats, highlighting ongoing difficulty recruiting nominees.
- Discussion emphasized the need for new strategies to cultivate interest, as traditional methods (e.g., meet-and-greets, mass emails) have been less effective.
- Suggestions included:
 - Engaging managers and supervisors to actively encourage staff participation
 - Presenting at a managers' meeting (tentatively March 12) to explain the value of Staff Senate and normalize participation as part of work life
 - Encouraging direct, personal outreach to potential candidates, which has proven most effective
- Acknowledgement that workload and burnout are barriers, but leadership encouragement may help legitimize participation.
- Election timeline has some flexibility:
 - Target remains mid-March nominations, but dates could shift slightly if outreach opportunities arise.
- Consensus: proceed with elections as usual this year, place Senate structure on a future agenda, and begin longer-term work on reform.

Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) – Staff Senate

- Staff Senate participated in zero-based budgeting at the request of Steve Hitch.
- Due to a tight turnaround, the process was handled by the chair with assistance from Ray Schwank (LCHS).
- The submitted budget:
 - Includes all recent Senate activities and events
 - Anticipates continued use of Aramark
 - Has been submitted for approval; outcome pending
- Apologies were noted for not involving all officers due to timing constraints.

Staff Appreciation Party (2027)

- Preliminary discussion about Staff Senate involvement in planning the 2027 Staff Appreciation Party.
- Bridget and Franny are open to Senate participation but emphasized the need for hands-on support, not just ideas.
- Suggestion raised that faculty involvement could make the event more collaborative and community-building.
- No decision is needed now; topic will be revisited in the fall.
- Members were asked to consider whether they would be interested in participating.

Graduate Tuition Benefits for Staff Dependents

- Item remains on the agenda.
- A request was made to ensure the issue is raised during budget season, so it is not overlooked.
- Acknowledgement that the current structural deficit makes new benefits challenging, but leadership awareness remains important.

- It was confirmed that the faculty contract, which includes graduate-level tuition benefits, has been ratified and signed and should be publicly available in the Faculty Handbook.

Closing Notes

- Encouragement to:
 - Personally invite colleagues to consider Senate service
 - Invite interested staff to observe a Senate meeting or speak with officers
- Recognition that email alone is not sufficient for engagement.
- Plan to keep Senate structure, recruitment strategies, and participation capacity as ongoing priorities.

Graduate-Level Benefits & Campus Climate

- It was clarified that graduate-level benefits did change and are now reflected in the faculty contract (Article 22), which has been posted.
- A concern was raised regarding a recent campus-wide email from Fr. Marina following faculty negotiations:
 - While the message acknowledged reconciliation and campus climate, it announced a newly formed Advisory Board composed only of faculty and administrators.
 - Staff representation is not included, despite staff being significantly affected by the prolonged negotiations.
 - The exclusion was described as narrow-sighted, given staff experiences and morale during the six-month process.
- A request was made to bring this concern back to Cabinet, specifically advocating for staff inclusion on the Advisory Board.

Committee Reports

Communications Committee

- Decision made to host a communications symposium in collaboration with the Idea Center.
- Thomas Bryant will be involved; coordination to be handled by Jill.
- Interim co-chairs have been confirmed for continuity.

Elections & Membership Committee

- Staff Senate elections will proceed in March as planned.
- Registrar's Office is seeking a staff representative for the Calendar Committee; communication to go out shortly.

Finance Update

- Zero-based budgeting changes apply to the next fiscal year, not the current one.
- Holiday gathering finances:
 - Total spent: \$6,950.19
 - Remaining balance: \$3,970.66
 - Agency account balance: \$102.62 (pending confirmation of transfer)
- Additional expenses:

- \$160 receipt from Superior for a new plaque (forthcoming)

Social Events & Community Building Committee

- Roundtable event scheduled for April 8 (midday).
 - Format: combined constituencies
 - Food: Pizza (external vendor)
 - BYOD (bring your own drink)
 - Goal: stay under budget
- Coordination underway with Melinda; room reservation confirmed.

Staff Development Committee

- Room reservation system will soon transition to the same platform used for work orders, per update from Madonna.

Staff Recognition & Excellence Committee

- End-of-Year Luncheon:
 - Date: May 13, 12:00–2:00 PM
 - Planning underway (e-vites, dietary needs, work orders)
- Imagine Award:
 - Nomination process ongoing
 - Encouragement given to broaden participation beyond the usual nominators
 - Suggestion made to promote nominations during the supervisors' group meeting

Assessment Committee

- No report provided.

Motion to Adjourn

- Motion to adjourn: Kelly
- Second: ?
- Meeting adjourned.