



**YOUNGSTOWN  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

**OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND  
OFFICE OF FINANCE & BUSINESS OPERATIONS**

Dear Campus Community,

The past several weeks have been filled with much activity and discussion as we face difficult decisions related to ensuring the academic vitality and financial sustainability of the university in the years ahead. We appreciate the hard work of everyone on campus in those decision-making processes. We wanted to share with you an article (below) that will appear in local news media over the next few days. The article, we believe, fairly and fully provides important context for the actions that will be taken related to academic programs. We have responded with courage and resolve to many hardships over the last nearly two years, and – as this article indicates – many challenges remain. Ample opportunity exists to shape our future, particularly with improvements to student success and curricular efficiencies as revealed in our recent program reviews. We will also seek ways to engage new students and explore new markets where appropriate. Still, engaging these opportunities must be a team effort employing multiple strategies appropriate to program areas. Cost-cutting, while not a strategy for a sustainable future, is necessary to free up resources to invest in growth opportunities. It is only together that we can most effectively face our challenges and assure a vibrant future for YSU.

Thank you for all your good work.

Sincerely,

**Brien N. Smith**

Provost and vice president for  
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# A measured approach toward tangible change and a sustainable future

By

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Much has been reported in recent days regarding Youngstown State University's enrollment, academic offerings and budget. In this column, we provide context to help clarify actions that are being taken and why they are necessary for the YSU's long-term sustainability as an institution of opportunity that inspires individuals, enhances futures and enriches lives.

**Program Review:** Let's start in 2018, when the Higher Learning Commission awarded YSU a full 10-year re-accreditation. While HLC offered much praise, it also required a comprehensive review of all academic programs to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and alignment with YSU's mission.

In response, more than a year ago, we launched an in-depth examination of our more than 140 academic programs – the first such review in decades. With the substantial participation of deans, department chairs, faculty and selected members of the Academic Senate, each program was assessed for alignment with mission, market and margin and each was placed into one of five categories, ranging from Grow+ (for programs with significant growth potential) to Sunset (for those facing ongoing enrollment challenges). Those assessments were shared with campus last June and accepted by the Board of Trustees in September.

**Enrollment/Budget:** At the same time, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, enrollment continued to sink, here at YSU and across much of higher education. Fall 2021 enrollment is down 11 percent from just three years ago. We are not alone. Unfavorable regional demographic trends, a crowded and hyper-competitive college/university market and, to an extent, the uncertainty of COVID-19, has dragged down enrollment at regional universities nationwide. In fact, enrollment has fallen at nearly every public university in Ohio over the last six years.

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With declining enrollment comes declining revenue. This fiscal year, our revenue from tuition and fees is projected to drop by \$5.6 million. It is only through millions in one-time COVID-19 relief funds that we are able to balance this year's budget. Those temporary funds, however, cannot be relied upon moving forward, and the result is a potential structural budget deficit in excess of \$10 million next fiscal year.

**Taking Charge:** Faced with those budget challenges, and with the academic program review process in place, now is the time to take action to ensure a future for YSU that is both sustainable and prosperous.

In late October, with the support of the Board of Trustees, the university decided to deactivate 26 academic programs identified as "sunset". In all, about 90 students – less than 1 percent of all YSU students - are enrolled those programs. Ten of the programs have no students at all, and three others have just one student each. The programs will be phased out to enable all students to complete their programs. They are the only programs being deactivated; all of our other more than 100 academic programs remain.

Consequently, a handful of faculty layoffs will be implemented. An exact number is not available at the time this column is being written. It is important to remember that, about a year ago, the university took similar steps with non-faculty employees, laying off more than 40, furloughing hundreds of others and cutting administrator salaries by up to 15 percent.

These are not easy decisions; they have significant, personal impact. They are, however, necessary and not unlike actions taken at other universities facing similar challenges.

Cost-cutting is part of a larger strategy for a sustainable future. We will continue to make strategic investments, including hiring new faculty in Grow+ areas and expanding technologies to optimize student success.

We believe YSU is positioned well as we head into the post-pandemic era. We will continue to take a measured and deliberate approach toward incremental, tangible change as we look forward to an even brighter future filled with even greater successes.

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