

Regular attendees of Penn State Board of Trustees meetings might have noticed that the university's governing body does not spend a lot of time talking about a proposal before voting on it.

While the gatherings often contain a lot of information — presentations by faculty leaders and students, comments by the university president, and committee reports — Spotlight PA analyzed five years' worth of public full board meetings to track how much time trustees spent debating proposals, discussing how they might vote, or asking questions.

Pennsylvania's [open meetings law](#) — referred to as the “Sunshine Act” — defines deliberation as “the discussion of agency business held for the purpose of making a decision.”

The newsroom found that, in the past five years, trustees spent about 7.6% of their meeting time deliberating university business, and the majority of these discussions were about athletics or internal board operations. Other items considered by the board — such as the university's \$9.9 billion budget, strategic plan, and building projects — often passed with no or limited discussion.

For this analysis, Spotlight PA measured deliberation during full board meetings, including special meetings of the board, between 2019 and 2024. We looked at full board meetings because they are where final decisions are made and the [board's bylaws](#) contain attendance requirements only for this type of gathering. Additionally, trustees cannot vote during a committee meeting if they are not a member of that committee.

Recordings were used to track total meeting time and the total amount of deliberation. Deliberation and total meeting time were rounded up or down to the nearest 15-second mark.

To measure deliberation, we reviewed each board vote over the past five years, recording any comments a trustee made after a proposal had been introduced and the board chair had opened the floor for discussion. In several instances, board leadership called for a vote on a proposal without offering trustees the opportunity to deliberate.

The total amount of deliberation in each calendar year was then divided by the total meeting time for that year to determine what percentage of the board's meetings were spent deliberating.

In this analysis, there are three important caveats. First, the board's special July 2024 meeting on changing its bylaws contained more than 36 minutes of deliberation from an approximately 94-minute meeting, which skewed the year's total. Second, our analysis did not include the board's December 2021 meeting during which Neeli Bendapudi was approved as Penn State's 19th president because it was a special meeting that did not follow the typical deliberation before voting format. And finally, the board's special April 2022 meeting, which lasted approximately 10 minutes, was not included in the analysis because the board's website did not have a recording of it.