

Inter Faculty Organization

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Faculty Update Newsletter

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

by [Nancy Black](#), IFO State President

Dear Colleagues:

As the fall semester reaches its crescendo of activities, it is finally beginning to look like Minnesota in December. Our Update this month is brief, not intruding on your limited time for reading final papers, examinations, theses, and submitting final grades.

In the past few months there has been a good deal of publicity concerning perceived skills gaps and the claim that many jobs in Minnesota are left unfilled because of the lack of qualified applicants. This fall, Chancellor Rosenstone initiated a series of more than fifty work groups with business communities and other employers around the state to examine the unmet needs of employers. On December 3, 2012, the fifty-fourth session was hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and Securian Finance in downtown St. Paul. It focused on the needs of the financial sector including banks, credit unions and financial management. While their discussion of supply and demand measures in accounting, bookkeeping, finance, insurance, and taxation pertained primarily to four year institutions, Jeff Kolnick (Southwest Minnesota State faculty on sabbatical leave) and I were surprised to find ourselves the only state university faculty or administrators in the room. By contrast, the community and technical colleges were well represented including Century College, St. Paul College, Normandale College, Minnesota Community and Technical College and Dakota County Technical College.

What was not surprising to us was the conversation among employers that emphasized the liberal arts curriculum that state universities excel in teaching. It was reassuring to hear that the business community values critical thinking, math skills, communication (written and verbal) skills, active listening, as well as reading comprehension and analysis. Except for bookkeeping, we were informed that for 95 percent of their positions, business requires at least baccalaureate degrees if not graduate degrees such as MBAs. Minnesota businesses today must be globally competitive and favor bilingual or trilingual speakers. They emphasized the need for graduates with demonstrated leadership qualities who can also follow instructions, employees with the ability to take a business problem and pursue it to conclusion, and, of course, they should be technologically savvy. In response to questioning about having a certain skill set such as programming, a Securian Human Resource representative stated, "we will train on skills."

He went on to comment on the value of English majors as employees. Jeff and I came away wondering why state universities' core curriculum, especially foreign languages, have suffered such devastating cutbacks in the last four years when they appear to be precisely what the business community is seeking.

From all of us at the IFO state office, we wish you the happiest of holidays and peace in the New Year.

IFO Adopts Legislative Goals for the 2013 Session

by [Russell Stanton](#), *IFO Director of Government Relations*

At its December meeting the IFO Board of Directors adopted an ambitious list of goals and positions for the 2013 Legislative Session. The goals will guide our lobbying efforts at the legislature next year. Key items in the goals are a 2.5% per year increase in funding for MnSCU institutions, improved financial aid for part-time students, domestic partner benefits, comprehensive tax reform to eliminate the state's structural deficit, and of course, ratification of the IFO contract as soon as an agreement is reached.

The IFO positions on the MnSCU budget differ significantly from the MnSCU budget request. Whereas the MnSCU request for \$97 million is directed at new initiatives, mainly for workforce development (\$21 million for matching grants for leveraged equipment, \$12 million for match employer money for internships, etc.), the IFO goal for a 2.5% per year increase (\$103 million) is meant for distribution to the local campuses for improvement of the core instructional programs, which have suffered from deep funding cuts during the last decade. While the MnSCU request includes a 3% per year tuition increase, the IFO goal states that if the legislature provided the \$103 million appropriation increase, IFO would support a tuition freeze for students.

Now that Governor Mark Dayton supports domestic partner benefits for state employees, IFO is going to make a major push to negotiate equal benefits for people in domestic partnerships and to push for equal benefits under the law. Recent polls have shown the public overwhelmingly supports equal benefits for domestic partners. With the recent defeat of the proposed constitutional amendment restricting marriage for same-sex partners, the political climate is ripe for making progress on this issue.

A complete list of the IFO 2013 goals and positions is listed on the home page of the IFO website at [Inter Faculty Organization](#)

NEGOTIATIONS REPORT – IMPORTANT IFO ISSUE IS WITHIN REACH

by [Brent Jeffers](#), *Chair of the IFO Negotiating Team*

As part of a settlement agreement in the 2001-2003 contract negotiations, the IFO and MnSCU agreed to language that treated domestic partner benefits exactly the same as benefits afforded to a spouse in our contract. During the ratification process in March 2002, the legislature stripped out this single language item, hence, the authority of both negotiating teams was circumvented. For the next 10 years and 5 contract negotiations, domestic partner benefits have been a priority for the IFO. I want to make it very clear that the MnSCU Negotiating Team and the Chancellor's Office have not been the road block to the recognition, equality, and acceptance of our LGBT colleagues; it has been either the Governor's office or a conservative legislature that has refused to do the right thing. Public opinion, on the other hand, is overwhelming favoring our position. President Obama has come out in favor of same sex marriage; on November 6th four states including Minnesota demonstrated support for marriage equality. Our state became the first state to defeat a constitutional amendment that would have limited marriage to one man and one woman. Most recently, Governor Dayton announced that he intends to include domestic partners in the state health plan for the 2013-2015 biennium. In 2001, we were pioneers working for the LGBT equality frontier. Now we should be able to capture the moment and join the inevitable trend in social justice. At our next joint session on December 18, the negotiating team will once again invite the MnSCU negotiators to agree to domestic partner benefits.

Although we are approaching two years of negotiating this contract, we should not agree to a contract simply due to bargaining fatigue. Remember, ongoing negotiations are better than a poor settlement. In our negotiations, progress toward a settlement is always accelerated when the MnSCU team is motivated to get it done. There are some factors that seem to indicate such motivation: 1) the MnSCU allocation and available economic variables for the IFO Master Agreement are now known; 2) the recent election has dramatically improved the climate at the Capital; and 3) the 2013-2015 contract negotiations are due to open in a few short months. We have not had a joint session since the November election; therefore, we are eager and cautiously optimistic to bargain at our December meeting.

IFO NEGOTIATED MNSCU HRA ACCOUNT ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION, SEGIP HRA ACCOUNTS FROM 2009 AND 2011, AND ADMINISTRATIVE FEES

by [Patrice Arseneault](#), *IFO Director of Grievances & Equity Issues*

MnSCU HRA accounts

One of the benefits the IFO negotiates on behalf of faculty is an annual tax-free contribution to a medical expense reimbursement account. Each January, \$800 is contributed to either your MnSCU Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) account for paying current medical expenses with pre-tax dollars, or into a Health Care Savings Plan, which you can use to pay for medical expenses after you separate from employment. **The IFO also negotiated for MnSCU to pay the administrative fees associated with your MnSCU HRA account.**

The balance that you have remaining in your current MnSCU HRA account as of December 31, 2012, will determine whether your new \$800 contribution will be deposited in your HRA account or into a Health Care Savings Plan.

If you have a balance of less than \$700 in your MnSCU HRA account as of December 31, 2012, the employer's 2013 contribution of \$800 will be added to your MnSCU HRA account at the beginning of the 2013 calendar year. **If you have \$700 or more in your MnSCU HRA account as of December 31, 2012, the employer's \$800 contribution for 2013 will go into a Health Care Savings Plan** instead of your HRA account.

SEGIP HRA accounts

Through SEGIP (State Employee Group Insurance Program), the State of Minnesota provided a second HRA account to state employees in the amount of \$250 in 2009 and in the amount of \$150 in 2011, with surplus money that resulted because state employees were successful in keeping health care costs down. The state has been paying monthly administrative fees to maintain each state employee's SEGIP HRA since 2009, but the administrative fees for the SEGIP HRA monies from 2009 and 2011 will begin to be deducted monthly from any balances remaining in your SEGIP HRA beginning in January 2013. The SEGIP HRA accounts from 2009 and 2011 are separate from your MnSCU HRA account – MnSCU will continue to pay the administrative fees for your MnSCU HRA account pursuant to our collective bargaining agreement.

Time to Review Medical Expense Accounts with Eide Bailly

Faculty members should review their medical expense accounts with Eide Bailly to determine if you have money remaining in your SEGIP HRA left over from 2009 or 2011, as you may want to submit claims to spend down a SEGIP HRA balance in order to avoid administrative fees.

In addition, if you want to have your annual \$800 MnSCU contribution deposited in your HRA account in 2013 (rather than a Health Care Savings Plan), remember you must have less than \$700 remaining in your MnSCU HRA account at the end of 2012.

In order to facilitate spending SEGIP HRA account funds left over from 2009 and 2011, the state will alter the payment order beginning in January 2013, so that medical expense claims are paid from your SEGIP HRA first, then

from your MDEA (flexible spending account), and last from your MnSCU HRA account.

IFO OFFICE HOLIDAY HOURS

Please note that the IFO office will be closed from December 21st through January 1st. In the event of an emergency, please call 651-227-8442, extension 19 and leave a message. That voice mail will be checked periodically.

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

CONTACT US

The IFO Faculty Update is published and distributed by the [Inter Faculty Organization](#). If you need to contact the Inter Faculty Organization, our mailing address is 490 Concordia Avenue, Suite 125, Saint Paul, MN 55103, or you can reach us by phone at 800/325-9644 or 651/227-8442. You can also send us an email by clicking [HERE](#).