

Inter Faculty Organization

BEMIDJI - MANKATO - METROPOLITAN - MOORHEAD - SOUTHWEST - ST. CLOUD - WINONA

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IFO PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: Looking Back

by [Don Larsson](#), *IFO State President*

Dear Colleagues,

This is my last *IFO Update* column before I step down as your IFO President on June 30 and Nancy Black takes on this demanding but rewarding position.

Nearly two years ago, my first *Update* President's Column in August 2010 discussed several topics, whose headings are in quotation marks and **boldface** below. After two years, those topics are still relevant, even if their content has changed. Here is an update:

“Retrenchment at Mankato and St. Cloud”

For the first time ever under the IFO contract, major layoffs of tenured and tenure-track faculty were announced at Mankato and St. Cloud in 2010. More such announcements would follow at Bemidji, Moorhead and Southwest. Some of those retrenchments would eventually be rescinded and some cut programs restored, but even now some tenured and tenure-track faculty members will be out of a job this month.

“Planning for Budget Cut-Backs Continues”

The \$5 billion state budget deficit of FY 2011 took its toll. MnSCU's operating budget was reduced to its lowest level in a decade, while 60% of instructional cost was shifted from the state to student tuition. The result on our campuses, whether they announced actual retrenchment or not, has been severe. Statewide, 7.5% of tenured and tenure-track faculty positions have been lost, while part-time adjunct and community faculty positions have grown

by 13.5%. Faculty positions have been lost and programs have been cut at all of our state universities. The (largely-fictional) state budget “surplus” in FY 2012 has stopped most of the bleeding, but Chancellor Rosenstone has testified to the legislature that the system has cut not just the “fat,” but also the “meat” and “into the bone” of our campuses. At present, some forecasters think that the state will face another \$1 billion-plus shortfall by FY 2014.

“Planning for Students First Continues”

“Students First,” that over-hyped attempt to give students a “seamless” technological tool that would supposedly enable them to control their academic progress from application to graduation, has now officially closed as a MnSCU project. Some parts of this project may work more or less well. Some have been abandoned. Some may prove to create more problems than they solve, but the System Office’s resources and enthusiasm for such grand-scale projects have seriously diminished.

“New Trustees Named”

The MnSCU Board of Trustees continues to struggle to understand its own role in relation to the third-largest higher education system in the country. This summer, six Trustee positions (two of them community college and vo-tech students) will expire, but the state’s process for selecting their replacements has not yet even begun. It remains a challenge for this state-level Board to understand the realities of academic life at our universities and to articulate a clear message about the importance of baccalaureate and graduate education in this system.

“Vice Chancellor Baer Resigns”

Following the resignation of Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs Linda Baer 2010, Mankato’s Provost Scott Olson was appointed as Interim Vice Chancellor. During FY 2011, Dr. Olson worked closely with the IFO and the students and other bargaining units to create a new committee structure for MnSCU designed to improve communication and efficiency and achieve actual results. Nearly a year later, those committees are just starting to function in their intended way now that Dr. Douglas Knowlton has taken office as the New Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs under Chancellor Rosenstone. However, the myriad committees, task forces, work groups and other entities that previously had proliferated in the System Office with little clear purpose or results have largely disappeared.

“Chancellor Search Advisory Committee Appointed”

The appointment of Dr. Steven Rosenstone to replace retiring Chancellor James McCormick last August has upended “business as usual” in the system, to say the least. With a leadership and personal style that is 180 degrees different from that of the last Chancellor, Dr. Rosenstone has radically reorganized the System Office (including giving it that name instead of “Office of the Chancellor”) but continued the downsizing forced on the system by budget cuts. He has launched an ambitious but still not well-defined “Strategic Framework” to replace the Trustees’ previous Strategic Plan. And he has engaged the IFO directly, at first confrontationally but more recently with openness and candor at the Delegate Assembly and in meetings with the IFO Board of Directors. Our relationship is still a work in progress, but the IFO has made it clear that we can support and even welcome parts of the Chancellor’s agenda while expressing our skepticism and concern over others.

“IFO Names New Academic Affairs Coordinator”

Dr. Donna Brauer (Mankato) gave great service to the IFO as full-time Academic Affairs Coordinator in FY 2011, including working with Vice Chancellor Olson on that MnSCU committee redesign (dubbed by Olson himself as the “Brauer Plan”!). This last year she returned to half-time duty as AAC, the other half going to former IFO President Nancy Black (Metro). Between the two of them, the IFO Academic Affairs Coordinators positions have taken on new importance and gained renewed respect from the MnSCU system and the other student groups and bargaining units we work with. Now, Dr. Cindy Phillips (Moorhead), another experienced and highly qualified IFO veteran, will fill out the remainder of Nancy Black’s term.

“Rod Henry Steps Down as IFO President”

This item now can be retitled **“Don Larsson Steps Down as IFO President”** as Nancy Black steps up. As I prepare to take a sabbatical and then return to teaching at MSU Mankato, I wish that I could leave better headlines—one about a ratified contract with a salary increase, for example!

I do take comfort that on my watch the IFO achieved some small successes—including a complete overhaul of our own Constitution and Operating Procedures, acceptance of the “Brauer Plan” by MnSCU, and some tentative agreements in Interest-Based Bargaining. And I take comfort that some potential disasters—especially in the legislature—have been (so far) averted.

But I take no personal credit for any of those efforts. They were the result of hard work by our IFO staff members—especially Pat Arseneault, Connie Howard, and Russ Stanton—and our Negotiators, led by Brent Jeffers (Southwest), and they were made possible by your own voices and support. I take the greatest comfort in knowing that those staff members and negotiators—and YOU—will still be there for Nancy Black as she turns to the challenges of the next two years.

I wish you all a productive and renewing summer, and I wish the IFO continued success in safeguarding faculty rights and ensuring that our voices will be heard.

DEVA Dependent Audit Reminder

by [Donna Lynn Blake](#), *IFO Controller*

This is just a reminder to please return your Dependent Eligibility Verification Audit (DEVA) materials to HMS Employer solutions by May 11th, 2012. **The consequences of not complying by this date are severe as your dependents will be dropped from insurance coverage and you won't be able to add them back until the next open enrollment period!** If you have any questions on what materials should be submitted for your dependents, and/or how to submit them, please call

HMS at 1-866-832-6622 or visit their website at www.auditos.com.

FY13 Dues & Fair Share Fees - NO INCREASE

The 2012 Delegate Assembly approved to keep the member dues and fair share fees the same for FY13 (**no change since 2008**), so there will not be any dues or fair share fee increases next year. The current dues and fair share fee amounts that will continue for next year can be viewed [here](#).

LEGISLATURE PASSES A SMALL HIGHER EDUCATION BILL

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

The House and Senate have passed a very small Omnibus Higher Education Bill and have sent it to the governor for his signature. The bill has no appropriations, and is only ten pages long. There are four provisions of importance to MnSCU:

- The bill allows MnSCU to continue its operations during future state government shutdowns, if any, using reserves and tuition funds. During the shutdown last summer, Governor Dayton ruled that MnSCU could keep operating using its available reserves and tuition revenue, and that ruling was never challenged. This provision of the Higher Education Bill puts MnSCU in a safer legal position should anyone challenge its ability to keep operating during a future shutdown.
- MnSCU's ability to use revenue bonds was increased from \$300 million to \$405 million. Revenue bonds are used to borrow money to build revenue generating projects (dormitories are a good example). The bonds are repaid from the revenue generated from the project (rent receipts in the case of dormitories), and there is no cost to taxpayers.
- The bill sets up a workgroup within MnSCU to work on ways to reduce the cost of textbooks. It also increases the prior notice that faculty must give to bookstores regarding required and recommended course

materials from the 30 days required in current law to 45 days.

- Finally, the bill requires the Board of Teaching to report back to the legislature by January 15th of next year on eliminating lower priority tests and assessments to offset the additional fees (estimated at about \$300) charged to students for taking the Teacher Performance Assessment. This provision was requested by the IFO.

Here is a link to the final bill: [S.F.1573, Conference Committee Report](#)

CONSERVATIVES MAKE LAST MINUTE PUSH ON ANTI-EMPLOYEE BILLS

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

As the legislature nears completion of the session, conservative legislators have been trying to pass legislation that is designed to interfere with collective bargaining rights and employee benefits.

Governor Dayton Vetoes HF 1974

Governor Mark Dayton vetoed HF 1974—a bill that would have prevented negotiated pay increase from going into effect when a collective bargaining contract is in extended status. For IFO members, this would have meant the career steps and promotional increases due to take effect July 1st would have been blocked. It would have also prevented the final year two step increase for retiring faculty members. This bill barely squeaked through the House with the minimum 68 votes necessary to pass a bill.

Right to Work (RTW) Loses Steam

The proposed constitutional amendment for a so-called “Right to Work” or “RTW” seems dead for the session. The amendment would require unions to represent non-union members in the bargaining unit in negotiations and grievances, but would prevent unions from collecting any fees or dues for those services. In RTW states, unions become very weak and employee compensation is significantly less than in non-RTW states like Minnesota. The RTW passed the Senate Judiciary Committee by a vote of 7-6 and it was sent to the Rules Committee. When the bill was heard in the Judiciary Committee, approximately one thousand union workers flooded the halls and union leaders testified against the bill. Legislators were flooded with e-mails against RTW. Senate Majority Leader David Senjem (R-Rochester) told the press he didn’t think there were enough votes to pass the bill, and the measure is still in the Senate Rules Committee.

In the House, Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan) tried to pull the RTW bill out of committee and on to the floor for a vote—the motion was tabled by a vote of 118-9. Even strong supporters of the measure seem to have concluded that the measure doesn’t have the votes to pass, and are moving on.

Removal of Restrictions on Outside Contracting of State Employee Work Defeated

The Minnesota Senate voted down legislation that would have removed statutory restrictions on contracting out state employee work. The vote was 28-35, with a handful of Republicans joining the Democrats to defeat the bill. The House version of the bill, HF 1975, is currently on the calendar for consideration by the House.

Bill to Allow Commissioner to Ask Unions to Negotiate Furloughs is in Conference

SF 1755, as introduced, allowed the Commissioner of Management and Budget to ask unions to negotiate furloughs and/or reduced hours to avoid layoffs. It was a fairly innocuous bill, since the commissioner can already do so under current law. The problem is the bill was amended to require the commissioner to reveal the state’s collective bargaining offers to the members of the Legislative Subcommittee on Employee Relations (LSER) and to make the information public data. It would also require the commissioner to present Memorandums of Agreement to LSER in advance of making the agreements. These amendments would allow unprecedented legislative meddling in the collective bargaining process by conservative leaders of the LSER, Sen. Mike Parry (R-Waseca) and Rep. Steve Drazkowski (R-Mazeppa). If the amendments are not removed, I believe the legislation will be vetoed.

SALARY REVIEW UPDATE

by [Patrice Arseneault](#), IFO Director of Grievances and Equity

Our collective bargaining agreement with MnSCU provides for the annual review of the initial salaries of new hires, and a review of faculty salaries at the time of promotion and the award of a terminal degree. A joint union employer committee called the Salary Review Committee or "SRC" conducts the salary reviews in order to ensure equitable placement on the salary schedule.

Last year, the joint IFO MnSCU Salary Review Committee completed the FY08 and FY09 annual reviews of new hires for academic years 2007-08 and 2008-09. Probationary track and fixed term faculty who were hired in FY08 or FY09 who received equity step increase(s) as a result of the salary review by the SRC were notified about their equity step adjustment last fall.

All faculty who were first hired in a fixed term or probationary position for the 2007-08 or 2008-09 academic year will receive a letter from the SRC with your salary information for your year of hire. **The letter from the SRC containing the data used by the SRC in its review of salaries for those hired in FY08 and FY09 will be sent to your home address in May, and will include information on how to notify the committee of errors in your data.** The sooner you notify us of errors, the sooner we will be able to correct your data and reconsider our review of your initial salary placement.

Over the summer and into next fall, the SRC will be meeting to continue annual reviews for new terminal degrees and promoted faculty, to reconsider our review of initial salary placement for faculty hired in FY08 and FY09 who notify us of data errors, and to conduct a review of the initial salary placement of faculty hired during the 2009-2010 academic year.

If you have a question as to whether you are included in the 2009-2010 new hire review, please consult the [list of faculty new hires for FY10](#) on the IFO website, under the "Salary and Equity Issues" link. Please contact [Pat Arseneault](#) if you believe you were omitted erroneously from the list of newly hired faculty for the 2009-2010 academic year.

You may contact [Pat Arseneault](#) or your campus representative on the IFO's [Salary Equity Committee](#) if you have questions on the salary review process.

MnSCU, others fall for a fad: The job-skills mismatch meme

by [Monte Bute](#), Professor of Sociology and Social Science for Metropolitan State University

Printed in the StarTribune, April 20, 2012

Lori Sturdevant was right to call out the Legislature for failing to pass a bonding bill with significant funding for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities ("[Sharp strategy for MnSCU. One catch ...](#)," April 1. However, she gave a nod of approval to Chancellor Steven Rosenstone's Workforce Assessment Initiative without adequately investigating his basic premise.

Employers claim that many jobs are going unfilled because the labor pool is unqualified. This thesis remains unproved. Business lobbies are playing Rosenstone like a fiddle. Their disingenuous strategy has little to do with reform or producing well-educated persons. Rather, they want the public sector to pick up the tab for employee training in order to reduce labor costs and maximize profits.

Let us not mince words: Workforce development is corporate welfare.

To be fair, Sturdevant and Rosenstone are not alone in their enthusiasm for workforce development. Business leaders, legislators, state agency commissioners, reporters and editorialists, and even Gov. Mark Dayton have fallen prey to this latest institutional fad. The sociologist Joel Best's recent book captures this phenomenon:

"Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads."

How does this bedazzling process work? Every institutional fad needs a good story—a perplexing problem and a compelling solution. What is the problem that Rosenstone seeks to solve? Minnesota's jobs-skills mismatch. How is he going to resolve this predicament? He has made an "all in" bet on workforce development.

Where did MnSCU's "mismatch" story line come from? Credit David Olson, president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and chairman of the MnSCU Board of Trustees from 2007-10. Olson proselytized the jobs-skills mismatch for the chamber while simultaneously reshaping MnSCU's educational mission as workforce development.

MnSCU is planning 50-plus "listening sessions" with "Minnesota employers to gain a better understanding of their current and future workforce needs." Sponsoring this initiative with MnSCU are the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and none other than the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Does Rosenstone really expect unbiased data from these listening sessions? His workforce-development strategy depends not on dog-and-pony shows, but on reliable evidence of a jobs-skills mismatch.

Economists from Columbia University, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and New York University devised a sophisticated skills-mismatch index that they used in a 2011 study, "Measuring Mismatch in the U.S. Labor Market." They published a follow-up paper on March 29. Their conclusions raise doubts about any significant structural or long-term mismatch:

"Based on this mismatch index, we conclude the following: First, the index displays considerable cyclicity, increasing notably in recessions. Second, the index has fallen appreciably during this recovery and is now near its pre-recession level. This pattern suggests that although mismatch rose considerably during the Great Recession, that rise proved temporary."

In other words, the market has been working out the mismatch. Even during the recession, the problem was, to some extent, an illusion. It was often not a shortage of skills but employers' inability to find workers at the wages offered. The way to resolve a labor shortage in a free market is for employers to raise wages. If they don't, workers are free to pursue other opportunities.

The jobs-skills mismatch may be little more than a public-relations ploy by employer associations to get the public sector to pay for apprenticeships and job training that employers once provided. These same business lobbies have spent a small fortune seeking lower taxes, resulting in higher-education cuts that made tuition increases inevitable. Corporations not only want to call the tune for public higher education, they want students and their parents to pay the piper. Back in the day, students became well-informed citizens; today, they become commodities for industry.

These policy decisions about the future of higher education constitute a moral hazard. Economist Paul Krugman defined moral hazard as "any situation in which one person makes the decision about how much risk to take, while someone else bears the cost if things go badly." Rosenstone and Olson, on behalf of MnSCU Board of Trustees and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, are making a risky gamble on Minnesota's future. Students, faculty and taxpayers will bear the cost if this wager is lost.

NEW IFO WEBSITE COMING SOON

by [Donna Lynn Blake](#), IFO Controller

The Board of Directors approved funds for a new IFO website this year. We are in the process of developing the new website with a local company from St. Cloud called Meta13. The estimated rollout date for the new website is sometime in the fall of 2012. The website will have a new design look to it using the IFO letterhead color scheme. The new website will also be easier to navigate and have special features such as committee password protected pages and homepage links to the contract, calendar/events, update newsletter, and local faculty association websites. Any comments and/or suggestions on the new website project can be sent to blake@ifo.org.

CONTACT US

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