

Inter Faculty Organization

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT: WHERE THINGS STAND

by [Don Larsson](#), IFO President

The end of fall semester approaches rapidly. Only a few weeks of class are left, the Thanksgiving holiday will finally give some of us a chance to catch up; spring semester registration has begun, and spring semester will follow rapidly. I've always said that once we hit Halloween, the academic year is pretty much spoken for, but the most recent developments mean that we cannot afford to rest or let down our guards. By January, we are going to be seeing even more developments that will directly affect our campuses, our students and our own working lives and contract. Here are a few of them:

A "New Reality" at the Legislature

See Russ Stanton's column [below](#) for an analysis of the state elections. Most people did expect a very tight race for governor, and despite the likely recount that will take place, it seems probably that Mark Dayton will prevail. But many people around the state were caught off-guard by the change in party leadership in both houses of the legislature. Already, we know that there will be fewer committees in both the House and Senate, and new leaders for those committees. Some of the legislators that the IFO (and MnSCU) could turn to in the past for support are no longer in charge; some are just no longer there. The IFO will work on its own and, as appropriate, with the Chancellor's Office to build new legislative alliances and promote our interests, but it could be a struggle as legislators of all parties try to grapple with a looming state deficit for fiscal years 2012-2013 of up to \$7 billion.

Contract Implications

It is far too soon to know exactly how the changes in the legislature will affect our prospects in the next round of

negotiations, but it will be crucial for us to make our case for the budget recommendation put forward by the Chancellor's Office. On November 16, I testified to the Board of Trustee's Finance Committee in support of that recommendation, and on the 17th I thanked the Board as a whole for passing it. But this budget—which represents less money than the MnSCU system received a decade ago in 2002—is a “best case” scenario. Even if approved by the legislature, not at all certain at this point, we will still be seeing cuts and calls for restructuring, “flexibility,” and “efficiencies.” As Russ notes, we could see budget gridlock dragging well into the summer. That means that any negotiations on wages and benefits are likely to drag out even longer. Be prepared for a long wait, but be ready to help make the system's case and our case that higher education cannot continue to fund other programs by cutting faculty, classes and needed support while deferring the costs to students.

As Pat Arseneault states in her column [below](#), the IFO has a stated commitment to fairness and support for domestic partners, but as Russ points out, this legislature will make meeting that goal even more of a struggle than it has been in the past. If fairness and equity for all of our faculty is still a value for you and for the IFO, we will need your help and input on this issue more than ever. It is clearer now than ever that we will need to find whatever solutions we can on our own. We face a legislature that is unlikely to even give domestic partners a hearing or to let any contract language permitting domestic partnership pass to the governor, whoever he may be. Even other state unions do not hold this issue as an especially high priority. If you care about fairness and equity for all of our faculty, we will need your help to find allies and strategies.

System “Maturity”

Partly due to these new budget realities, partly a result of changes in system leadership, and partly a result of a system whose individual parts are beginning to knit together, the MnSCU system office is shedding some work and initiatives while centralizing others. Some of these changes are improvements, or have the potential to improve operations and daily campus life. Other innovations are less certain in their outcomes or will require close scrutiny. The “Students First” initiative that is supposed to allow easy online access for students across the system in applying, registering, paying, and planning for graduation is moving ahead at full speed while other Information Technologies initiatives are on hold for this year at least. Students First is supposed to be up and running by May or June, but despite apparent progress many questions remain. The IFO, along with many campus staff and administrative members and even students, have voiced faculty concerns with this system repeatedly. Now we need to focus on what will be needed to make this system work for faculty and students, and not just create confusion and anger. The “Graduation Planner” portion of Students First is already being piloted at MSU Mankato and North Hennepin CC. We will see more pilots coming this spring, followed by implementation. We need your input about what is working with these Student First components, what is not working, and what could be improved.

One concern with system operations that continues to bother us is the “silo” approach to system issues. While in the last year, we have seen more communication and even cooperation between the system and the IFO, it is still apparent that different offices in the system still do not communicate with each other in any kind of efficient way. In the December newsletter, I'll take the time to talk about how this lack of inter-office communication complicates the already-complicated issues of student credit transfers, but in the meantime we need your vigilance to know when conflicting stories or incomplete information about system initiatives are revealing themselves on your campuses.

The Tally

Here is a quick rundown of some how budget issues are playing out at present:

Office of the Chancellor - 40+ staff positions cut; the lease on the 7th floor of the Wells Fargo World Trade Center in St. Paul will be given up

Bemidji - “Recalibration” planning is ongoing. Early separation incentives for faculty have been announced, but retrenchment of probationary and tenured faculty has been announced as a possible option by next year.

Mankato - Early separation incentives and other developments have put the Aviation program on a three-year reprieve. A retrenchment list of two dozen faculty members has shrunk to nine, but the campus will still lose about 80 full-time positions by May 2011.

Moorhead - President Szymanski has just announced for the first time this year that retrenchment may have to be an option, and that campus budget cuts could go to 30%.

St. Cloud - St. Cloud's process for dealing with the budget is messier than elsewhere, but as of now 26 probationary faculty and 3 tenured faculty have received retrenchment notices. But like Mankato, St. Cloud will lose about 80 positions by the end of this academic year.

Southwest - President Danahar has announced his retirement. Seniority rosters are being reconfigured in ways that are problematic for the IFO. We have been able to work with the system office for solutions to some of those roster issues, but others will probably go through the grievance process to arbitration.

Despite all this, I hope that we will take some to reflect on the things to be thankful for in our lives and our careers. I for one am thankful to work with such dedicated staff and faculty members who have made our organization as effective as it has been. I wish you all a restful Thanksgiving holiday.

MnSCU TRUSTEES SUPPORT \$1,260.7 APPROPRIATION FOR 2012-13 BIENNIUM

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

On Wednesday of this week the MnSCU Board of Trustees passed a motion to request a \$1,260.7 appropriation from the legislature for the next biennium (\$630.4 million per year).

The appropriation to MnSCU for the current year is for \$605.5 million. Last year the legislature passed legislation setting the base for the next two years at \$630.4 million. That will be the starting point for the new legislature and governor when they prepare their budgets. Thus, the MnSCU Board is essentially endorsing the base budget already in law.

Because the state is facing a \$5.7 billion budget shortfall, and the new Republican legislature is likely to oppose any tax increases, the legislature will have to cut state programs dramatically to balance the budget. MnSCU will face a significant challenge trying to simply maintain the base already in law. The IFO Board voted at its last meeting to support a budget request of \$630.4 million per year. This was much higher than the planning figures the MnSCU Board had been using earlier in the year to prepare its budget request. Chancellor McCormick had recommended requesting the \$630.4 base.

Student representatives urged the Board of Trustees to request only the current appropriation level, and support a cap on tuition. They also supported setting aside 2% of the appropriation for a "transformational fund" at the system level.

IFO President Don Larsson testified in favor of the \$1.260.7 appropriation request, noting that the current year appropriation for MnSCU is below the 2002 appropriation, but student enrollment has grown from 126,215 FTE to 158,011 FTE since 2002. Larson told Trustees "We have been doing a lot more with less money." Larsson also opposed setting tuition caps before we know how deep the legislature cuts state appropriations to MnSCU, noting there is a lot of uncertainty over what the next governor and legislature might do.

The MnSCU Board voted down a motion by student trustees to cap tuition, but there was a lot of sentiment expressed by trustees in favor of restraint on tuition increases.

The MnSCU request will now go to the Office of Management and Budget and the Governor's Office for use as they prepare the Governor's budget request to the legislature.

For a copy of the MnSCU budget request, click here: <http://www.mnscu.edu/board/materials/2010/nov17/fin-06-budget.pdf>

REPUBLICANS CAPTURE LEGISLATURE; DAYTON ELECTED GOVERNOR

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

Legislature Shifts to Republican Control

On November 2nd, Republicans won control of the Minnesota Senate for the first time since 1970. The Senate shifted from a veto-proof 46-21 DFL majority this session, to a 37-30 Republican majority next session. It takes 34 votes to pass legislation in the Senate, so Republicans will have a three vote margin.

There will be all new Senate leadership next session. Senate DFL Leader Larry Pogemiller and Senate Republican Leader David Senjem were not re-elected to leadership posts by their respective caucuses. The new Republican Majority Leader is Sen. Amy Koch, and the new Senate DFL Minority Leader will be Sen. Tom Bakk. All of the DFL committee chairs will be replaced by Republicans (see [article](#) below).

Republicans also won control of the Minnesota House of Representatives. The House shifted from 87-47 DFL control this session to 72-62 Republican control next session. It takes a minimum of 68 votes for a bill to pass the House of Representatives.

The House will also have new leadership. House DFL Leader Tony Sertich was replaced by DFL Rep. Paul Thissen. House Republican Minority Leader Kurt Zellers will move up to become Speaker of the House next session. Rep. Matt Dean will be the new Republican Majority Leader. All of the DFL committee chairs will be replaced by Republicans.

Governor's Office Shifts to DFL Control

Although there will be a recount, it appears DFLer Mark Dayton will be the new governor, replacing outgoing Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty. Dayton is the first DFLer to be elected Governor since 1986. County canvassing results show Dayton won by 8775 votes (about .4%) over Republican Tom Emmer. Independence candidate Tom Horner placed a distant third.

What Will This Mean for IFO Members?

At this point, all we can do is speculate what might happen during the next legislative session. If past patterns hold, here are some challenges we are likely to face next session:

Budget Gridlock

The shifts in control of the legislature and the governor's office will probably mean at least two more years of budgetary gridlock. Dayton won on a campaign of increasing taxes (particularly the income tax on individuals earning over \$130,000 and joint filers earning over \$150,000) to solve the state's \$5.7 billion budget shortfall which he will inherit when he takes office. Dayton opposes cuts to education and higher education. The Republicans who will become the majority party in both the House and Senate won on a campaign against tax increases. They will likely block Dayton's attempts to raise taxes and propose deep cuts to balance the state budget. Minnesota's constitution requires a balanced budget, so ultimately this issue will have to be resolved.

A Tough Road for Domestic Partner Benefits

The IFO's leading goal in recent years has been to secure benefits for members who are in domestic partnerships that are equal to benefits received by married members. Last session domestic partner equity legislation passed the House of Representatives by one vote, however Governor Pawlenty threatened to veto any legislation that the measure was attached to, so the legislation was not taken up on the Senate floor. Support in the legislature fell along almost straight party lines—DFLers for and Republicans against. While Governor-elect Dayton supports equal benefits for domestic partners, it is unlikely the legislature will allow a bill of this kind to reach Dayton's desk.

Contract Ratification Difficulties—Possibly

DFLers, whose political base includes many union members, have traditionally honored collectively bargained contracts and have not sought changes to the contracts during the contract ratification process at the legislature. Republicans have been more willing to change the contracts after they had been agreed upon. In 2003, the Republican controlled House held up ratification of the state employee contracts until the unions agreed to remove domestic partner benefits that had been negotiated at the bargaining table. With a huge budget shortfall looming, conservative legislators may begin calling for pay freezes and take backs from state employees.

Possible Areas of Compromise

There may be some issues where Republicans and DFLers can find common ground. Bonding for state buildings is one area where legislators can often work across party lines. With interest rates on bonds at an all time low, and both parties looking for ways to create jobs, there may be bi-partisan agreement on a bonding bill. There might also be a possibility of allowing the children of undocumented immigrants who graduate from Minnesota high schools to attend Minnesota higher education institutions at in-state tuition rates. In the past, both the Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO supported this legislation, and it passed the legislature with bi-partisan support—only to be removed because of a veto threat by Governor Pawlenty. With a change in the governorship, there may be a new opportunity to pass the legislation.

Both parties will be under pressure to moderate their positions. Republicans, while they made large gains, only hold the House and Senate by small margins that were gained in a national Republican landslide. Some of these seats were won by very small margins (Republican King Banaian won a House seat in St. Cloud by just 10 votes). With only a slight shift in public sentiment, DFLers could recapture the legislature in two years. With the defeat of senior DFL legislators this year, Dayton will have difficulty selling large tax increases, even to some DFLers in the legislature.

One can only hope that the outcome of this legislative session parallels the 1971 legislative session. That year, newly elected DFL Governor Wendell Anderson faced a Republican controlled House and Senate. After several rancorous special sessions they finally reached a compromise on the budget, which was hailed nationally as the “Minnesota Miracle.” It increased funding for education and higher education, and equalized funding between rich and poor districts.

NEW REPUBLICAN MAJORITIES ANNOUNCE COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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

The new Republican Majorities in the House and Senate continue to surprise Capitol observers, first in their choices for new caucus leadership, and now with some of their choices for committee chairs. Click [here](#) for the new committee chair line-up in both the House and Senate.

The new Higher Education Committee chairs will be Rep. Bud Nornes in the House of Representatives, and Senator Michelle Fischbach in the Senate.

It was not a surprise that Rep. Bud Nornes (R-Fergus Falls) will be Higher Education Chair in the House. Nornes held that post prior to when the Republicans lost control four years ago and he had expressed an interest in returning to that post. Nornes is conservative, but he is not an ideologue. He was a very fair chair--he always gave the faculty opportunities to testify, even if he didn't agree with our points of view. This was a good choice, in my opinion.

The choice of Senator Michelle Fischbach was a big surprise. She has not been a member of the Higher Education Committee in the past. She is known mainly for her leadership advocating pro-life legislation. I thought that Senator Clair Robling, the ranking Republican on the Higher Education Committee for many years, was the heir apparent. However, Robling was appointed as chair of the very powerful Senate Finance Committee. It will be good to have someone with her knowledge of higher education in that position.

The choice of Sen. David Senjem (R-Rochester) and Rep. Larry Howes (R-Walker) as Capital Investment chairs bodes well for a bonding legislation. Both are pragmatic moderates that work well across party lines. This is important, because bonding bills require a 60% majority (which the Republicans do not have) to pass, and the Governor can line item veto individual projects.

The new K-12 Education chairs will be Senator Gen Olson (R-Minnetrista) and Representative Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington). Both are political moderates. However, the House also appointed Rep. Sonja Erickson as head of an Education Reform Committee. In the past, Rep. Erickson was a leading advocate of alternative teacher licensure

legislation that would allow teachers to be licensed without going through a college teacher preparation program. This issue will likely be on the front burner again next session.

The next step in the organizational process will be the appointment of the committee members. I would encourage faculty members to contact their local legislators, regardless of their party affiliation, and ask them to serve on the higher education committees. We need all the advocates we can get as we head into the next and biggest yet budget crisis.

BENEFITS EQUITY - A PRIORITY FOR THE IFO

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

The IFO has long been seeking equity of benefits for all faculty and their families. As early as the 1990 Delegate Assembly, the IFO adopted organizational goals to seek insurance benefits that were more equitable for non-traditional families and to extend other benefits to domestic partners. In Delegate Assemblies since then, the IFO membership added legislative and contract goals that aim for a more equitable distribution of benefits by extending all benefits to domestic partners or members of a faculty member's household. In the most recent 2010 Assembly, the delegates included a resolution to support legislation that would provide same sex couples in a committed relationship with the same rights and legal protections as state law provides for married couples. The 2010 Assembly further resolved that achieving equity of benefits for all faculty and their families, without regard to sexual orientation, is recognized by the IFO to be a human rights, civil rights, and labor equity goal of highest priority.

One limitation for faculty members in committed same sex relationships is the connection between benefits and marital status. State laws governing pension and retirement benefits allow a faculty member to include his or her spouse in the benefit but not a same sex partner. Similarly the state offers long term care insurance coverage to the spouses of employees but not to an employee's domestic partner. The state also will not allow employees to extend their health, dental and life insurance coverage to their same sex partners.

Although five states (Iowa, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont and Massachusetts) and the District of Columbia allow same sex couples to marry, in Minnesota, faculty in same sex relationships are prohibited from marrying under the Minnesota Domestic Relations Statute, as amended in 1997 by the Defense of Marriage Act to specifically ban marriages between persons of the same sex.

To permit faculty and other state employees in committed same sex relationships to marry would instantly provide to those faculty and other employees access to a wide range of benefits that many married employees may take for granted. With the ability to marry, faculty in committed same sex relationships would have the opportunity to extend health and long term care insurance, pension and retirement benefits, and even death benefits, to their significant others. This is one important reason the IFO will need to look to the legislature to support changes in those state laws that have the affect of imposing an unequal distribution of benefits to our faculty.

In furtherance of our benefits equity objectives, the IFO's Government Relations Committee recently recommended several legislative goals for the IFO Board's adoption, including opposing legislation that would seek to amend the Minnesota Constitution to prohibit same sex marriage, and supporting legislation to allow same sex marriage and to recognize same sex marriages legally performed in other states. Also, the GRC is recommending that the IFO Board supports legislation to require the state to provide the same health and long term care insurance coverage and retirement benefits for same and opposite sex domestic partners and their dependents. The Board will be voting on the GRC's recommendations at its December meeting.

FIC SEEKING APPLICATIONS FOR FEMINIST ISSUES GRANT

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

The IFO Feminist Issues Committee (FIC) is seeking applications for the 2011-2012 Feminist Issues Grant of up to \$3,000. The grant period extends from March 2011 to March 2012.

To apply, submit your proposal by [email](#) (in Word or PDF format) no later than February 1, 2011.

The FIC will conduct a blind review of proposals, and the successful grant applicant will be notified by March 1, 2011.

The one-year \$3,000 grant is made possible by funding from the Inter Faculty Organization through the statewide Feminist Issues Committee (FIC). The Grant is designed to promote research, projects, or creative works that contribute to the advancement of women in the IFO and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

For more information, please see the 2010-2011 FI Grant Announcement and Outline on the [IFO webpage](#), or contact your local campus Feminist Issues Committee representative.

THRESHOLD HRA ACCOUNT BALANCE CHANGES TO \$700 IN DECEMBER 2010

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

This is a reminder that the December 31 threshold balance for determining whether your health care reimbursement money will go into a Health Care Savings Plan instead of your Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) account has increased to \$700.

Now is the time to review the balance in your HRA account.

If you have \$700 or more in your HRA account on December 31, 2010, the employer's \$800 contribution for 2011 will go into a Health Care Savings Plan instead of your HRA account. Money deposited in a Health Care Savings Plan is tax free, but you cannot access the funds to pay for medical expenditures until you separate from employment.

If you desire to have your \$800 contribution deposited in your HRA account in 2011, then you must have less than \$700 remaining in your HRA account at the end of 2010. If you want to spend down the balance in your HRA account to below \$700, your medical expense claims must be **received** by Eide Bailly on or before December 31, 2010.

REMINDER: INSURANCE OPEN ENROLLMENT ENDS NOV 30TH

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

Open enrollment for the State Employee Group Insurance Program (SEGIP) for the 2011 calendar year will end on November 30th. You will not be able to make changes after the November 30th deadline.

During open enrollment you may make changes to your health and long term disability (LTD) coverages. You make the changes online, at www.state.mn.us/employee. You will need your employee ID and password to login. Your ID number will be on the address label of the SEGIP newsletter that will be mailed to you on October 18th—do not discard the newsletter until you have completed your desired enrollment changes.

At the Minnesota Management and Budget website (www.mmb.state.mn.us) you can find a wide range of information to assist you during open enrollment, including a dependent eligibility chart, links to carriers, a directory of clinics and their cost levels, and objective information on the quality and value of clinics in the plan. You are strongly encouraged to check the cost level of your clinic to see if there will be a change in its cost level in the coming year.

There are several ways you may be able to lower your health care expenditures during open enrollment:

- You can save money through lower deductibles, co pays, and out-of-pocket expenses by moving to a lower cost level clinic. You can find a directory of clinics on the MMB web page.
- You can save \$5 on office visits for both you and your covered dependents by taking the JourneyWell health assessment during open enrollment and agreeing to be contacted by JourneyWell coach.
- Finally, you can save tax dollars by enrolling in the Medical Dental Expense Account (MDEA) to pay for regularly occurring health care expenses on a pre-tax basis. You must re-enroll each year during open enrollment.

CONTACT US

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