

# Inter Faculty Organization

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

## *Faculty Update Newsletter*

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### NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by [Roderick Henry](#), IFO President

Dear Colleagues,

By now, many of you have seen the report that KSTP TV did on sabbaticals in the MnSCU system. From its introduction to its conclusion, it is obvious that the intent was to make sabbaticals seem irresponsibly expensive, a perk that is not needed in times of budgetary constraints. After interviewing a community college faculty member whose sabbatical appeared to do precisely what sabbaticals are supposed to do - enable one to return to the classroom current in their field and refreshed - the editor of the piece wrapped it with comments about "paid vacations", etc. In summary, the piece was a hatchet job. For a critique of the article from a source outside of the IFO, check [here](#).

This is not the first time that sabbaticals have been attacked - and it won't be the last. [Other universities in other states](#) have cut or eliminated sabbaticals as a quick fix for budgetary problems, a solution that runs against our contract and the traditional structure of an academic career.

Unfortunately, some of the concern about sabbaticals comes from some members of our Board of Trustees who question tenure, teaching workloads and other contractual rights that get lumped together under the phrase "barriers to management flexibility." "Management flexibility" manifests itself in a variety of ways in these tough economic times through improper use of adjunct and fixed-term appointments, poorly-planned online offerings, incentive pay plans, three-year degree proposals, tuition/fee schemes that impact our poorest students, furlough proposals, outsourcing, cost shifting, etc. What all of these have in common is that most are short-term fixes to long-term structural problems. They are not necessarily "something for nothing" but rather "something as cheaply as possible." It is easier for some to throw the latest management fad at problems that have been building for decades rather than face up to the fact that tax cuts of the past decade were too generous and that we are underfunded relative to our broad institutional missions.

We will continue to work for the long-term viability of our universities as universities, answer tough questions and promote our faculty's solutions to the problems we face in this turbulent environment.

### NOVEMBER 17 DEADLINE FOR 2010 OPEN ENROLLMENT REMINDER

by [Donna Blake](#), IFO Controller

Open Enrollment for 2010 started on November 4th and will continue through today, November 17th. Open enrollment materials can be found on the MMB website at <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/>, click on the open enrollment link on the home page. After Open Enrollment is over, employees will receive a confirmation page showing their elections. An employee will have until December 15th to notify MMB of any errors. This is not the time to change your elections, only system processing errors will be corrected. It is important to print out your elections during Open Enrollment so you can compare it to the confirmation page.

What is open this year?

- MN Advantage Health Plan (premiums and plan designs are staying the same, you can switch networks or clinics and add/drop family coverage, the only change is in cost level 4 where the coinsurance rate is dropping to 25% from 35%, check out your clinic in all three networks to see if it might be available in a lower cost level on a different network, do not drop dependents for a qualifying event during open enrollment, use the paper method so that they get offered COBRA).
- Dental (premiums are decreasing by 2%, you can switch dental clinics or add/drop dental coverage, please remember that any changes you make will be in effect for 2 years because dental is only open every other year, also Health Partners Dental is changing their name to Health Partners State of Minnesota Dental Plan).
- Optional Life Insurance (if you are already signed up for optional employee or spouse life insurance you will be able to increase your amount of coverage, there is a chart in the open enrollment materials on the MMB website that shows the amount you can increase it by based on your current salary).
- Long Term Disability (you can add LTD or increase your limits up to the maximum allowed, however preexisting conditions do apply to any change made and is based on the prior 12 months and will be in effect for 2 years, if you are on leave at the beginning of the year, these dates will apply to your official start date on the LTD insurance when you return from leave, premiums also decreased by 10% last January, which is why anyone with this coverage saw a decreased premium amount deducted from their paychecks starting July 2nd and also received a premium refund on their 7/31/09 paycheck).
- Pretax Plans (you have to enroll in these each year even if you have had them before, the new minimum election amounts are \$100 for the MDEA and DCEA and \$50 for the TEA).

The Health Assessment will be available again this year through Journeywell (<http://www.advantagehealthadvisors.com/>). It will take about 20 minutes to complete. If you complete it during the open enrollment period and agree to one phone call from a life coach, you will get a reduction of \$5.00 on your copay amount. Everybody is encouraged to print out the confirmation page as proof that they completed the health assessment. A health assessment prep sheet will be available on the MMB website for use prior to taking the health assessment.

Benny Cards will be used again this year. A Benny Card is good for five years, so don't throw them away even if you have used up your funds for the year. You can get replacement cards from Eide Bailey at a cost of \$10 for two cards. Any 2009 HRA funds leftover at the end of the year will carry forward to 2010. Also, your 2010 HRA funds and your MDEA pretax plan funds (if you signed up for this) will be loaded onto your Benny Card.

Beneficiary Management will be changing this year. The paper beneficiary designation forms will become obsolete and everyone must reenter their beneficiary information onto a secure website through MN Life. A letter will be mailed out in November with instructions on how to access the website. A second mailing will be done in January 2010 for those who don't respond to the first letter. For those who don't respond to either letter by March 2010, their beneficiary designation will be set to the default option of spouse or next of kin. However the employee can still log on after that and make changes to the default option.

Michelle's Law is a new federal ERISA amendment that allows eligible dependents who are full-time students to take up to 12 months of medical leave or a reduced course load with a certification from their doctor and still maintain their insurance eligibility. This applies to full-time students who are currently on an employee's insurance. There are three requirements that must be met: the leave must be medically necessary, it must be for a serious illness, and the illness would have otherwise caused the dependent to lose their insurance. The doctor

determines the start date of the leave. Administration items such as COBRA are still being worked out. Michelle was an actual daughter who ended up losing her life when she developed colon cancer and lost her insurance coverage because she was too sick to maintain her full-time student status.

Military Families will be affected by a change in Minnesota law. The changed law states that a person who is at least 19 years of age but who is under the age of 25 and who is not a full-time student must be permitted to enroll as a dependent of an eligible employee until age 25 if the person: (1) was a full-time student immediately prior to being ordered into active military service, as defined in section 190.05, subdivision 5b or 5c; (2) has been separated or discharged from active military service; and, (3) would be eligible to enroll as a dependent of an eligible employee, except that the person is not a full-time student.

## **IFO TAKES POSITION ON FEDERAL HEALTH CARE REFORM**

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

### **House Passes Reform**

On November 7th the US House of Representatives voted 220 to 215 to pass one of the most sweeping pieces of legislation in our nation's history, the America's Affordable Health Choices Act. Key features of the House bill would prevent insurance companies from denying coverage or raising rates because of preexisting conditions, eliminate caps on coverage, establish a public option to encourage competition to lower costs, create insurance "exchanges," and subsidize low income earners to improve access. A summary of the House bill can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#):

**Here is how members of Congress from Minnesota voted:**

Rep. Tim Waltz (D) (Represents Winona and Mankato)	YES
Rep. John Kline (R)	NO
Rep. Eric Paulson (R)	NO
Rep. Betty McCollum (D) (Represents Metro)	YES
Rep. Keith Ellison (D) (Represents Metro)	YES
Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R) (Represents St. Cloud)	NO
Rep. Collin Peterson (D) (Represents Bemidji, Moorhead, Southwest)	NO
Rep. James Oberstar (D)	YES

While the vote in the House was along party lines, Rep. Collin Peterson was part of a small group of "Blue Dog" Democrats that voted against the bill.

For contact information to write to your Representative, click [HERE](#).

### **Competing Proposals**

The US Senate is working on competing proposals, which most observers think should pass before the end of the year (it will likely be a close vote). The final bill will then be hammered out in a House/Senate conference committee, with significant input from the Obama administration.

Tracking these enormous, controversial, and ever-changing bills has been a challenge. [HERE](#) is a link to a Kaiser Family Foundation summary of the three major proposals before Congress.

### **IFO Positions**

At its meeting on October 30th, the IFO Board of Directors took several positions regarding the health care reforms before Congress:

- The Board voted to support overall healthcare reform to provide coverage to all Americans, and took the position that that support is of higher priority than individual objections the IFO might have to particular items within the reform packages.
- The Board voted specifically to support a “public option” to encourage competition and bring down costs.
- The Board took a position in favor of the House proposal to partially finance health care access through a surtax on individuals earning more than \$280,000 and families earning more than \$350,000. The Board opposed the Senate Finance Committee’s proposal to partially fund the legislation through a 40% excise tax on employer provided health care benefits exceeding \$8,000 for single coverage, and \$21,000 for family coverage. The employer provided benefits under the IFO Contract are currently well below these tax thresholds, but they could exceed the thresholds if health care costs grew significantly faster than the Consumer Price Index in years to come.
- Proposals before Congress would cap the amount that could be contributed to Flexible Spending Accounts (such as the Medical Dental Expense Account available to IFO members) at \$2500 per year. Congress seems to want to tighten up on FSA’s because the tax break under FSAs is greater for high income individuals than for low income individuals, and because the “use it or lose it” feature of FSA’s causes participants to both under save for medical expenses and spend money foolishly at the end of the year rather than forfeit unused balances. Congress seems to favor Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRA’s) (Like the \$800/year HRA in the IFO Contract) because HRA’s treat employees more equally, and because the balance at the end of the year rolls forward for use in the following year. The health reform bills do not cap HRA contributions. Capping FSAs helps pay for the health care reforms. IFO supports the FSA cap as a method for paying for health care improvements.
- The IFO Board voted to oppose proposals to end reimbursement for non-prescription drugs under HRA and FSA plans. Board members express concern that such a change may encourage consumers to seek more expensive prescription drugs.
- The House bill contains a provision that allows HRA reimbursements for medical expenses incurred by members of a household that are not spouses (domestic partners). The IFO Board voted to support this provision.
- Finally, the Board voted to oppose legislation that would tax either contributions to, or withdrawals from, the Minnesota Health Care Savings Plan (HCSP). The HCSP is a tax free health care savings plan to cover postretirement health care expenses, such as deductibles, co-pays, Medi-Gap premiums, Medicare premiums, dental and vision expenses. The HCSP is the first of its kind in the nation, and Michigan is the only other state to have such a plan. We have been unable to find anything in the bills before Congress that would affect the plan—but we want to make sure there are no taxes or limitations placed upon the plan.

IFO will be communicating its positions to members of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation as the health care bills take shape in the weeks to come.

### REPRESENTATIVE RUKAVINA MEETS WITH THE IFO BOARD

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

Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia), who is Chair of the House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee and a candidate for Governor in 2010, met with the IFO Board of Directors on October 30th to discuss a variety of issues related to higher education. Rukavina has also visited most of the state university campuses in recent weeks.

Rukavina said he was saddened by the cuts to higher education budgets and Governor Pawlenty’s \$50 million unallotment to MnSCU institutions. He said the state historically funded 2/3 of the cost of instruction at public institutions, but now the state is funding less than half of the cost. The cause



of the budget cuts to higher education can be traced back to large cuts in tax rates in 1999 and 2000, which have left the state short of revenue in all but the best of economic times. Rukavina said the state needs to raise more revenue to improve the funding of higher education.

Rukavina was critical of the growth in the MnSCU central office and said the performance bonuses given to MnSCU top executives were not a good move, particularly at a time when employee unions had stepped up to take a pay freeze to address the state's revenue shortfall. He pointed to provisions he included in the 2009 Higher Education Bill that limited expenditures by MnSCU on the Office of the Chancellor and on central office technology initiatives. He said the bill also directs MnSCU to protect direct instruction when developing budget plans.

Rukavina is a progressive populist from the Iron Range. He is a strong supporter of higher education funding; during his first term as Chair of the House Higher Education Committee he increased funding for the MnSCU institutions by about 11.7% over the previous biennium. He is a strong supporter of organized labor. In addition, he was one of the authors on House legislation to provide equal health care benefits for state employees in domestic partnerships as for married couples.

When asked about sabbaticals, Rukavina said he had been contacted by KSTP on the subject and had told them that it was a negotiated benefit and he respected the collective bargaining process.

During the coming year the IFO Board will be inviting candidates from both political parties to meet with them and discuss higher education issues. The meetings are designed to both inform the candidates on IFO's positions on issues and to inform faculty on the positions of the candidates.

### DELEGATE ASSEMBLY REMINDER APRIL 9-10, 2010

by [Cindy Finch](#), IFO Membership Coordinator

The Inter Faculty Organization Delegate Assembly will be held on April 9-10, 2010, at the Roseville Radisson (same location as 2006 & 2008). According to [Chapter XI](#) of the IFO Operating Procedures the following table outlines the number of delegates allotted to each campus:

Campus	Campus Appointments			Board Members	TOTAL DELEGATES
	FA President Member Appointments	1 per 15 Members	Subtotal Member Delegates		
Bemidji	5	12 (174)	17	3	20
Mankato	5	34 (512)	39	4	43
Metro	5	15 (225)	20	2	22
Moorhead	5	19 (285)	24	3	27
St. Cloud	5	36 (545)	41	4	45
Southwest	5	9 (138)	14	2	16
Winona	5	23 (349)	28	3	31
<b>*TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>148 (2,228)</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>204</b>

\*Total numbers current as of 10/2/09 and are subject to change before the registration deadline.

If you are interested in becoming a Delegate for your campus, please fill out this [form](#) and send it to your [faculty association](#). Each faculty association will have their own deadline for registration; please check with your faculty association for more details. The tentative agenda can be found on the [form](#).

To propose a new resolution you will need to fill out this [form](#) and send it to your [faculty association](#). Each faculty association has their own deadline for submitting new resolutions. Please check with your Faculty Association for more details.

### CONTACT US

Inter Faculty Organization, our 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 send us an email by clicking [HERE](#).