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Faculty Update

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Nancy Black, IFO President

Dear Colleagues:

While campuses are on their well-deserved spring break this month, higher education policy and legislative issues are swirling around us. A recent publication, "Minnesota Measures: 2007 Report on Higher Education Performance" (a 52 pg. PDF file), issued by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education has elicited a good deal of discussion concerning higher education performance measures. Organized around five laudable goals, the purpose of this report is to keep Minnesota on the cutting edge in higher education by taking the "lead on accountability." As academicians, we clamor for data, but are also cognizant that research design influences both what we investigate as well as the manner in which we do it. The measure of solid research is that it yields reliable and meaningful results.

We applaud Governor Pawlenty and the Office of Higher Education for setting ambitious goals as a framework to measure higher education success, but there is a giant disconnect between these goals and the funding allocated to achieve them. It takes more than just goal setting and measuring performance to get ahead and be competitive; it takes adequate funding and quality people. When President John F. Kennedy set a goal to be on the moon by the end of the 1960s, the United States didn't get there by just setting the goals. This country did it by investing in the dream and hiring the most talented, educated, and skilled people who could make it happen. In contrast, the Pawlenty administration often acts as if all that's needed is to set the goals. The sad fact is that since the Governor took office, state appropriations have actually gone down for MnSCU institutions. In 2002, when the Governor ran for office, the state appropriation to MnSCU was $601 million. Over the last four years, despite 12 percent inflation and an enrollment growth of more than 8,000 students, state funding to MnSCU declined--it was only $600 million in 2006.

In 2002, *Governing Magazine* ranked Minnesota 20th among the 50 states in terms of per-capita funding for higher education; in 2006 we had slipped to 30th, behind Alabama and Mississippi. Sadly, Minnesota is no longer the "Education State." Minnesota can, and should, do better. Our future depends on doing so.

Perhaps the Governor and the Office of Higher Education are not using the appropriate criteria for measurement. Since this governor and administration took over, student tuition at state universities went up 54 percent. How can such devastating tuition increases promote access? At the same time, faculty salaries are becoming less competitive. According to the AAUP, faculty pay levels at Minnesota State Universities have fallen from almost the 80th percentile in the mid-1980s to the 60th percentile four years ago, and now we have tumbled to between the 40th and 50th percentile. Last year, more than one in five faculty searches failed to hire a candidate. How can we attempt to promote quality by hiring only the best and brightest when the applicant pool is picked over by better-paying institutions? How can we expect to retain our faculty when salaries continue to slide?

Ambitious goals are laudable, but we should be measuring the MnSCU Trustees and Governor Pawlenty's performance in funding higher education; and it is pretty dismal. Governor Pawlenty talks the talk, but he doesn't walk the walk for public higher education.

SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION BILL PASSES OUT OF COMMITTEE

by Russ Stanton, IFO Director of Government Relations

On March 13th the Senate Higher Education Committee passed its version of the Omnibus Higher Education Appropriations Bill. The bill appropriates $3.1 billion for higher education for the next two years. The appropriation to MnSCU institutions was $1,340,438,000. This represents an increase of $136,050,000, or a little over a 11.3% increase over base.

The bill allocates the $136 million of new money for MnSCU pretty much the way the IFO and students have been recommending—prioritizing inflation funding for current programs before line items, or “fenced” money for new initiatives. The committee recommended $104 million for inflation, $10 million for technology, $14 million to recruit and retain traditionally underrepresented students, and $8 million to provide in-state tuition rates for non-residents attending two-year institutions. The legislature did not appropriate money for MnSCU’s requests for management innovations, STEM, the health care initiative, or an additional center of excellence. The committee also did not fund the governor’s $25 million for a “performance bonus."

All of the $136 million appropriated in the Senate bill would be base (recurring) money. Earlier the governor had proposed $123 million for MnSCU, but $55 million of the governor’s proposal was “one-time” non-recurring money.

The Senate bill reallocates base funding that was provided to MnSCU last session (which MnSCU used for IPESL performance grants) and directs the money to be used for compensation to “recruit and retain quality faculty." This is what IFO wanted.

The Senate bill will now go to the Senate Finance Committee and then the Senate Floor. I do not anticipate any major changes until the bill gets to conference committee sometime after Easter. Next week the House Higher Education Committee will be assembling its version of the higher education bill.

Senators have been making it clear they would like to provide more money for items like education and higher education, but they don’t have enough money to do so without raising some additional taxes.

Here are the e-mail addresses and web links to the members of the Senate Higher Education Committee. Please send them a brief note thanking them for their hard work on the bill and for being responsive to faculty concerns. Also, encourage them to raise taxes and support more money for education and higher education. It is better to raise taxes on adults than tuition on young people.

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Sen. Tarryl Clark (click on name for comment form - no email available)

DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS BILL IS ON THE MOVE

by Russ Stanton, IFO Director of Government Relations

In the last week, S.F. 1369, a bill to provide same sex domestic partners the same benefits as married employees, passed two Senate committees on a party line vote (Democrats for/Republicans against). OutFront Minnesota is leading the effort on this bill. IFO and AFSCME testified for the bill. The State Department of Employee Relations and the Minnesota Family Council testified against the bill. MnSCU did not testify on the bill.

Given the present support levels for the bill, and the fact that at least a few Republicans are likely to support it, this bill has a good chance of passing the legislature. However, it appears as though Governor Pawlenty will veto it. Nevertheless, pushing the bill has value—there is always the possibility a compromise will be worked out.

IFO had negotiated domestic partner benefits for its members in 2002, only to have them removed in 2003 when the Republican-controlled House refused to ratify the entire contract unless the benefits were removed. This bill is a less risky way of trying to get domestic partner benefits because it does not put our whole contract at risk of being rejected.

ALTERNATIVE TEACHER LICENSURE BILL DEFEATED IN SENATE

by Russ Stanton, IFO Director of Government Relations

On March 7th the Senate Education Committee heard S.F. 603—a bill that would allow an alternative path to teacher licensure without going through a postsecondary institution teacher preparation program. Under the bill, a teaching candidate would be licensed if they took nine credits of pre-induction education and 200 clock hours of instruction during their first year of supervised teaching. This bill has been before the legislature numerous times in the last several years, and each time we have been able to defeat the bill, sometimes by very narrow margins. This year the Department of Education, the School Boards Association, and the Board of Teaching testified for the bill. Education Minnesota and IFO testified against the bill. The bill was defeated. While there may be attempts to revive the issue in the House, this issue appears to be dead for this session.

IFO PENSION BILLS INTRODUCED

by Russ Stanton, IFO Director of Government Relations

Rep. Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Minneapolis), a senior member of the Pension Commission, has introduced three retirement related bills at the request of the IFO. The bills are co-authored by campus legislators including Rep. Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji), Rep. Larry Haws (DFL-St. Cloud), Rep. Marty Seifert (R-

Marshall), and Rep. Gene Pelowski (DFL-Winona).

- H.F. 1953 would allow faculty members who started in the IRAP program to voluntarily switch to TRA coverage once they are tenured. If they made the switch, they could buy back TRA coverage for their pre-tenure years at full actuarial value, using their IRAP savings to make the purchase.
- H.F. 1954 would require MnSCU to make available the opportunity for faculty to purchase Roth Tax Sheltered Annuities (also known as Roth 403(b) annuities) by January 1, 2008.
- A third bill, which hasn't been assigned a number yet, would use interest from abandoned accounts in the IRAP and Supplemental Retirement plans to offset the $20 per year administrative fees charged to faculty participants in the plan. Abandoned accounts occurred because some faculty members moved away, leaving behind money in their accounts, and did not provide any contact information. After diligent efforts to locate the member, including trying to track them by their Social Security number, the funds would be put in a special fund to restore benefits in case a lost member does turn up. Interest from the fund would be used to offset the administrative costs of the plan. TRA, MSRS and PERA handle lost participant funds in a similar way.

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 address is 165 Western Avenue North, Suite 8, Saint Paul, MN 55102, or you can reach us by phone at 800/325-9644 or 651/227-8442. You can send us an email by clicking here.