

# Inter Faculty Organization

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

## *Faculty Update Newsletter*

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### NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by [Nancy Black](#), IFO President

#### Welcome Back

A warm welcome to the new faculty who are joining the state universities this fall! We look forward to your participation in the Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), which is the official representative of the 3,300 full and part-time faculty members at Minnesota's state universities. We want and need your involvement—this is your organization. To learn more about the IFO, click [here](#).

I would also like to welcome back the returning faculty members. I hope you had an enjoyable summer and are ready for the challenges of a new academic year. I thank you all for your support and service.

#### Summer Developments

The IFO has been busy over the summer, and there have been many new developments since the end of the last academic year.

#### Higher Ed Bill Passes

In late May the legislature finished its work and adjourned on time. Despite the veto of the first higher education bill by Governor Pawlenty, and the threatened veto of the second higher education bill, the legislature managed to pass a very good bill for higher education funding. The bill provided a \$151 million funding increase for the MnSCU system—a 12.6 percent increase over last biennium. The money was provided to the MnSCU Board of Trustees as a lump sum, to cover inflation, technology improvements, and initiatives to promote access to underserved populations. For a more detailed description of the higher education bill, click [here](#).

#### MnSCU Sets FY 2008 Budget

In June, the MnSCU Board of Trustees set the MnSCU system budget for fiscal year 2008 (which started July 1, 2007). Tuition at state universities will increase an average of 4.2 percent. Overall tuition for MnSCU's 32 institutions will rise 3.6 percent just under the maximum allowed by the legislature. It was extremely disappointing to see how MnSCU divided-up the legislative appropriation. Even though the legislative appropriation to MnSCU for this fiscal year increased 10.7 percent, MnSCU's basic allocations to the colleges and universities (the money controlled at the campus level) increased only 3.3 percent. Meanwhile, the system-wide set-asides (the money controlled centrally) increased 136 percent!

Most of this system-wide money will be pumped into system-wide technology initiatives. MnSCU is spending \$62 million on new technology systems, adding 55 new system level positions even though the original House bill appropriated only \$30 million for technology initiatives, and the Senate bill appropriated only \$10 million. This ignoring of legislative intent has caused serious concern among some key legislators, and we won't be surprised if the legislature restricts MnSCU's spending flexibility next session. Faculty are painfully aware that resources are sorely needed to support our fragile technological infrastructure. This past year students and faculty have been frustrated by technological inadequacies in a range of services from registration, to D2L course delivery, and even to e-mail services on our state university campuses. Our concerns lie with new technology initiatives, such as "Second Life," and the proposed offering of MnOnline courses to students exclusively in Viet Nam that do not seem well thought out or to fit the mission of our institutions. Such innovations may be exciting, but the fact is money spent on technology is money that is then not available for faculty

salaries and to improve program budgets at the campus level. More disconcerting about the enormous amount of money (\$62 million) is that we have received only general information about how it will be spent aside from 55 technology positions despite repeated requests for information. For a copy of the budget approved by the MnSCU trustees, click [here](#).

### Negotiations Update

Negotiations between MnSCU and the IFO are now in full swing. We are trying something new this round called interest-based collective bargaining, which is an effort to get beyond confrontation and find creative solutions that respond to the interests of both the union and the employer. So far the talks have been progressing and cordial, but we are still a very long way from a settlement. Please read the [article](#) by Chief Negotiator Rod Henry.

The IFO did however make significant progress on Delegate Assembly goals regarding the timing and compensation of sabbaticals for junior faculty. Based on the Delegate Assembly directive to change the compensation schedule for full academic year sabbaticals, we reached a tentative agreement to compensate all full academic year sabbaticals at 80 percent of base pay. We also advanced Delegate Assembly goals for earlier sabbaticals and priority in the granting of sabbaticals for faculty who have not yet received one. The tentative agreement provides that newly tenured faculty will be granted a sabbatical in the year following the award of tenure, and sabbaticals will be granted first to faculty who have not yet received a sabbatical when more than 25 percent of the faculty in a department request a sabbatical. These changes in the sabbatical language are tentative and subject to the parties' successful negotiation of a complete agreement.

The biggest issue this round of bargaining is compensation competitiveness. Back in the mid-1980s Minnesota state universities ranked near the 80th percentile in terms of faculty salary competitiveness. That meant that the universities were able to pick from among the best faculty in the nation when filling positions. You know only too well that over the years state university faculty salaries have slipped considerably. Our latest analysis of AAUP salary data indicate that state university faculty salaries are below average at all ranks. In terms of total compensation, the state universities are below both the average and the median (50th percentile) for all ranks—near the 40th percentile for the Associate and Instructor ranks. We need to turn this around. We don't want to be hiring from a pool of applicants that is half picked over by better paying institutions. In the past, there was often little money to bargain for, but this biennium the legislature appropriated a 12.6 percent increase in funding to MnSCU. *If not now, then when will we see a reverse in the slide in salary competitiveness?* For more information on state university salary competitiveness, click [here](#).

### Health Premiums Will Increase

A coalition of state employee unions met with the state this summer and negotiated a new health plan for state employees for the next two years. While the bargaining significantly reduced the cost increase from the projected 12 percent per year to 6.7 percent and 10 percent for the next two years, deductibles and co-payments will go up next year. The IFO Board will vote on accepting the new health package in September. For a link to the proposed health care changes for next year, click [here](#).

### New Roth TSA Available

Starting in July, MnSCU began offering a Roth version of Tax Sheltered Annuity (also known as a 403(b) plan). Under the Roth TSA, faculty members can contribute up to \$15,500 (\$20,500 if you are over age 50) in after-tax wages to their Roth TSA account. Interest earned on employee contributions will never be taxed if IRS rules are followed. For more information on the Roth TSA, click [here](#).

### Delegate Assembly

Please mark your calendars for the biennial Delegate Assembly on Friday, March 28, and Saturday, March 29 at the Roseville Radisson. Please contact your [Faculty Association President](#) if you are interested in being a delegate. We will be electing a new IFO president this spring, and I know some of you are considering throwing your hat in the ring. A nominations committee will be appointed by the IFO Board at its first meeting September 13-14.

### New Staffing

The IFO Board of Directors has split the Academic Affairs Coordinator position - Professor Louise Mengelkoch from Bemidji and Professor Catherine Summa from Winona will be providing leadership on many important academic issues this year. I want to especially recognize Professor John Palmer of St. Cloud State University for all his service, and thank him for stepping into the role of Action Chair this year. My sincere thanks to all who serve their colleagues through the IFO.

## NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

by [Rod Henry](#), IFO Chief Negotiator

The IFO and MnSCU teams met several times in June. This time we are attempting to use a process called interest-based collective bargaining, which attempts to change the normal bargaining process and, in my opinion, allows for more creative solutions to problems or opportunities that both sides face. This process may or may not be used throughout the entire round of bargaining, but has worked to date. It is initially slower than the traditional process, and thus it is hard to estimate how far along we are.

There are a number of issues that we are dealing with and attempting to resolve. These all derive from either Delegate Assembly resolutions or IFO Board recommendations.

Compensation competitiveness – and the emphasis is on base salaries – is an ongoing problem. The continuing slide in our salaries relative to institutions we compete with in hiring is a long-term problem, and solutions like temporary bonuses or incentives do not deal with the real issue. Salary equity, salary compression, and career steps are also part of this equation. Health care costs due, in my opinion, to a failed national health care system put added pressure on salaries, as larger amounts go to ever-dwindling benefits...and creates the need to try to put something into retirement to deal with the gaps in the safety net. Workload – for either on-campus or distance delivery – is also an unresolved issue, with the ever-increasing number of committees and 24/7 contact demands from students just part of the picture. Calendar issues – summer and similar sessions have contract language that sunsets and need to be revisited.

The big wild cards in this round are the overall state and MnSCU budget situation and the importance MnSCU attaches to having its university faculty situated in an environment that will allow for long-term quality. As I write this it is unclear as to which solution the State of Minnesota will use to fix the immediate crisis caused by the collapse of the I-35W bridge and the effect of this on state institutions like MnSCU. Similarly, my reading of the MnSCU Board is that many of them are still unaware of our contract or how we actually work. For example, it appears that the belief is out there that all faculty are eligible to receive certain separation incentives even though these have been discontinued since July 1996.

## 2007 LEGISLATURE PASSES BIG FUNDING INCREASE FOR MnSCU

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

When the academic year concluded last May, the legislature was in the midst of a budget battle with Governor Tim Pawlenty. The Governor had just vetoed the first higher education bill passed by the legislature because he said it spent too much money in future years, and it didn't provide enough money for his favorite proposal called ACHIEVE. The Governor's ACHIEVE proposal would have provided higher education scholarships to students who took college credits while in high school.

In the final days of the session, the legislature passed a second higher education funding bill. It provided less money for financial aid than the first bill, but it actually increased funding for MnSCU by \$1 million. After much wrangling over details, the Governor finally signed the second higher education bill. It was one of the last budget bills signed into law. The Governor vetoed two minor line items in the Office of Higher Education (OHE), but the MnSCU appropriation was not affected by the vetoes.

While it was a hard birth, the second higher education bill provided a big boost in funding for MnSCU institutions. The IFO's major goal for the session was a funding increase for MnSCU. State appropriations pay for over half of the cost of running MnSCU institutions—including faculty salaries. **MnSCU's appropriation jumped from \$602,914,000 in FY 2007 (this year) to \$666,883,000 in FY 2008, to \$689,297,000 in FY 2009. Measured another way, the appropriation for MnSCU this biennium is a \$151,792,000 (12.6%) increase from the base at the start of this biennium.**

This is by far the largest increase in funding that the MnSCU system has received from the legislature in many years. The bill says the state "expects" MnSCU to limit tuition increases to no more than 4% per year. The funding increase, along with expected tuition is enough to fund MnSCU's inflation request (3.25% per year) plus a substantial portion of MnSCU's requests for technology improvements and initiatives to improve access for traditionally underserved students. The bill did not fund any other initiatives put forth by MnSCU, such as the initiatives for "management innovations", STEM, an additional Center of Excellence, or the Allied Health Program. The bill said that if MnSCU wants to pursue these initiatives it will have to fund them through reallocations from within the system. The funding provided to MnSCU was almost all in a lump sum, giving MnSCU the flexibility to determine how much is spent on each specific item.

### The Legislature Deserves Much Thanks

The legislature deserves much praise for their efforts on behalf of higher education funding this session. The Governor started off the session proposing \$123 million in new funding for the MnSCU system—and \$55 million of that was "one-time" funding that did not continue into the next biennium. He proposed no money for inflation, and \$25 million of his proposal was for a one-time "performance bonus." The legislature listened to the systems, students and faculty, and focused their funding on maintaining and improving the core infrastructure of MnSCU. The House passed a bill providing \$168 million in new funding for MnSCU. The Senate passed two bills that together would have provided \$187 million for MnSCU. In an attempt to appease the Governor, they compromised in conference committee to a \$150.7 million increase for MnSCU.

As stated above, the Governor vetoed this first higher education bill anyway, forcing the DFL higher education chairs to make some further tough compromises on both policy matters (such as the Dream Act, ACHIEVE, and performance funding) and funding to get the Governor to support a second bill. The DFL majorities had little choice but to compromise; there aren't enough DFLers in either the House or Senate to vote to over-ride a veto. However, through patience and persistence, the higher education chairs were able to put together a good bill that the Governor ultimately signed. The appropriation for the MnSCU system in the final bill was not only \$28 million above what the Governor originally proposed—almost all of the money is "recurring" or "base" funding, rather than "one-time" funding.

The Higher Education chairs, Senator Sandy Pappas and Representative Tom Rukavina, deserve our thanks. Their hard work and legislative skill turned what might have been a mediocre session into a very good session—at least from a funding perspective.

## ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

by [Louise Mengelkoch](#), IFO Academic Affairs Coordinator

Two events this summer focused on a fast-growing trend in higher education that has been impacting IFO membership directly and intensely for several years. On June 14, MnSCU held its 4th Annual Summer Online Conference, and on July 8-11, almost 200 Minnesotans (and 250 more national and international attendees) came to a conference in Duluth called “Fusion” focusing on D2L users. The IFO has requested that in the future Gary Langer, MnSCU Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Innovations, schedule the next Annual Online conference when faculty are on contract.

Both events were attended primarily by non-faculty who manage the technology for the content providers. Many of these non-faculty appear to be also teaching courses as adjunct faculty. The faculty in attendance, for the most part, were experienced users.

In neither venue was there opportunity to deal with some basic issues that will only grow in urgency as the popularity of this “Wild West” area of higher education continues to grow. Despite the cautionary tales, such as the University of Phoenix course completion rate of 16 percent (presented to the MnSCU Board of Trustees by our IFO President at their July meeting), the prevailing wisdom seems to be that all MnSCU universities “must” get fully on board with online learning or we’ll be “left behind.” Perhaps student-centered issues have largely been ignored because of the relatively low number of faculty in attendance.

Louise Mengelkoch, M.A., M.L.S., one of the new IFO Academic Affairs Coordinators, is a journalism professor and chair of the Mass Communication Department at Bemidji State University, where she has taught for 20 years. She has published both journalistic and academic work in a variety of venues. In past years, she has served as a member of the IFO faculty senate on her campus, including secretary. She was the recipient of an IFO award for outstanding contribution to the status of women IFO in 2002. She currently serves as grievance officer for the BSU campus. Her ongoing activities include BSU's study-abroad programs and serving as a faculty leader for the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars for more than ten years.

## CONTACT US

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