

# Inter Faculty Organization

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

## Faculty Update

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### PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

by [Nancy J. Black](#), President

Dear Colleagues:

I've just returned to St. Paul after visiting with faculty on our seven state university campuses. The enthusiasm, expertise, and very hard work going on by state university faculty are truly impressive. It is energizing to bring your ideas, concerns, and support back to the Inter Faculty staff in St. Paul, the IFO Board of Directors and to share them among the state universities.

I particularly enjoyed talking to the many new faculty who have joined our ranks, and I want to invite you to join and participate in the IFO. This is your union—you elect the leadership, you determine the union's goals. We want to make this an organization that serves your interests.

This is a busy time of year for the IFO. Serious negotiations on the IFO/MnSCU collective bargaining contract have begun. On September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> the negotiating teams for IFO and MnSCU met and exchanged economic proposals. While the two sides are still far apart of some issues, such as faculty workload and incentive pay, progress was made. The two sides will meet again on September 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, and I expect further progress will be made. [See the report](#) of our Chief Negotiator, Rod Henry.

October 1<sup>st</sup> is the last day for giving notice for many retirement benefits available to members under the IFO/MnSCU contract. These benefits include the early separation incentive, the final year two-step increase, phased retirement and the annuitant employment program. Russ Stanton, our retirement specialist, is holding workshops on each of the campuses during the month of September to help faculty understand the benefits they are entitled to, and what they must do to access these benefits. I urge members who are contemplating retirement to [attend one of these workshops or schedule an individual meeting](#) with Russ.

The health and dental benefits for faculty have been negotiated, and I am pleased to report that for the 2006 calendar year there will be no increase in health care premiums. This is welcome news after the

bitter struggles we had over health care during the last round of negotiations. While dental premiums will slightly increase, so will coverages for many procedures. See [Wil Harri's article](#) for more information. Wil served on the coalition bargaining team for that negotiated on the health care plan, and he is IFO's ombudsman for members who have issues concerning health coverage.

At the system level, many fast moving initiatives are taking place this year, among them the Centers of Excellence mandated by the legislature, the development of applied doctoral degrees, and possible pilot projects in course redesign proposed by the MnSCU Center for Teaching and Learning. There are many opportunities to serve on local and state-wide committees and task forces. Please contact your local [Faculty Association President](#) for further information.

It is with a good deal of sadness that I share with you the passing of two individuals who both have had a profound effect on the Inter Faculty Organization over the years. Professor Alex Yard of Winona State University, who served as Faculty Association President for two terms as well as made numerous contributions at the state-level, passed away this summer. We extend our sincere sympathy to his family and his many colleagues. Winona Faculty Association President Mary Kesler's [obituary](#) in this Update is a loving tribute to this rare individual.

John Shabatura, Chief Labor Negotiator at the Office of Chancellor, lost his valiant battle with cancer in July. Members of the Inter Faculty Organization attended his celebration of life on August 23 to offer our condolences to his family and his colleagues. He had a strong sense of justice and fairness, and was always available to listen. While I only knew John a short time, I came to know him as a gentleman, and as a gentle man.

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## HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS WILL NOT RISE IN 2006

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by [Wil Harri](#), IFO Office Administrator

The Health Coalition, of which the IFO is part, was successful in maintaining existing health insurance coverages, copays and maximum out-of-pocket payments for 2006 with no increase in premium cost. Dental premiums will increase by \$5 a month in exchange for an increase from 50% coverage to 60% coverage for restorative services.

The Health Coalition also agreed to encourage its members to participate in an optional health assessment (completed online during the insurance open enrollment period which is November 3<sup>rd</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>) in exchange for a \$5 reduction in each office visit co-pay. The unions were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of these surveys which should take less than a half hour to complete online.

If you had health insurance coverage last spring, \$569 was set aside for you in a special account called a Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) account which may be used to reimburse you for medical, dental and eyewear incurred by you. This account is separate from the voluntary Medical/Dental Expense or Flexible Spending Account (FSA) which can also be used to reimburse you for out-of-pocket medical expenses. The FSA dollars to be deducted from your paychecks for the following calendar year are set by you during the open enrollment period. Reimbursements are first made from the FSA account until it is exhausted and then from the HRA account. The reimbursement form for both the FSA and HRA accounts may be obtained from <http://www.eidebailly.com/>.

Using the FSA permits you to pay medical expenses on a pre-tax basis rather than payment with after-tax earnings. The principal disadvantage of the FSA is that at calendar year-end any unused balance is forfeited and does not carry forward to the new year. In contrast, any money remaining in the HRA at calendar year-end does carry over and remains available for reimbursement of incurred medical expenses.

A special edition of the IFO Update will be released prior to the November open enrollment period which deals only with insurance choices and especially the interplay between the FSA and HRA in your financial planning. It should be noted, the HRA is unique to faculty members in the IFO bargaining unit. Hence,

little if any material will be available from or published by the State Department of Employee Relations Insurance Division.

## IMPORTANT RETIREMENT NOTIFICATION DATES APPROACHING

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

The IFO/MnSCU collective bargaining agreement contains numerous retirement related benefits that require notification of the intent to retire by October 1<sup>st</sup> (for retirements effective before the next academic year) in order to receive the benefits. Among these benefits are the final year two step promotion, the early separation incentive (up to a year of salary and a year of health care), the phased retirement program and the annuitant employment program.

During September, the IFO is sponsoring retirement workshops on each of the campuses to familiarize faculty members who are nearing retirement age with the many benefits available to them under the contract and state retirement programs and to teach them how to maximize their benefits under the programs. The workshops cover not only the benefits mentioned above, but also cover severance pay, post-retirement health care, annuitization options, and tax sheltering options. The workshops are free to all faculty members who are interested.

Workshops have already been held at Mankato and Moorhead. Future workshops will be held as follows:

Winona/Rochester—September 13 and 14

St. Cloud—September 19, 21, 22, and 23

Bemidji—September 20

Southwest—September 26

Metro—September 28

Additional workshops will be added if needed.

The general workshops are one hour in length. In addition, I will meet for one half hour each with individual faculty members regarding their particular retirement questions and concerns. To find out the times of workshops on your campus, or to schedule a half hour individual appointment, contact your [local faculty association president](#) or faculty association office.

A [summary of retirement related benefits](#) available to faculty can also be found on the IFO web page.

## NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

by [Rod Henry](#), Lead Negotiator, Bemidji State University

The IFO Team and the MnSCU negotiators had their first meetings on September 9 and 10. This followed a summer in which limited progress was made due to the state shutdown. This time economic proposals were exchanged, and it appears that we have started to make some progress. A number of topics have been discussed in addition to the usual matters of salary and health benefits such as incentive awards (MnSCU proposal) and teaching workload reductions (IFO proposal). Other matters have been put into the negotiations and will be discussed further at our next meetings on September 16 and 17. Progress has been made towards resolving some issues in how the contract is costed - a necessary step for determining and implementing a final agreement.

## ALEX YARD, A FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

by [Mary Kesler](#), Winona State University Faculty Association President

Alex Yard (aka “Bud” or “Spike”) participated in the IFO in many ways, but a summary of positions and dates doesn’t do him justice. Rather, this brief article will try to capture something about who Alex was. He loved teaching; students are just now finding out, as they return for fall classes, about his



death in August. We know that he engaged students with his sense of humor and his passion for history, and they in turn responded to his challenge. Alex specialized in American labor history and East Asian history, and one of the activities he enjoyed immensely was leading trips to Asia, including Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam and China. A native of St. Louis, Missouri, he also had a passion for the Mississippi River and was part of a group of faculty starting a River Studies Center.

He had been at Winona State University since 1986, serving as Faculty President two terms, chair of the History Department several years, and Government Relations Committee on both the local and state level. There are undoubtedly many other things he did, but he loved politics and was chair of the Winona County DFL at the time of his death. Alex was frequently involved in some kind of political activity on behalf of the IFO and Winona State University, whether it was the annual IFO Lobby Days or participating with other WSU faculty in campaigning for legislators all over the state. Those of us involved in such activities loved to have Alex there, as his sense of humor and quirky comments made anything we did an experience. Being a labor union historian, he was especially interested in “putting the L back in DFL,” as faculty member Darrell Downs puts it. Alex knew all about the minimum wage fight earlier in our country’s history and was committed to economic justice and educational opportunities for everyone. Some of you will remember our 1998 strike vote; Alex spearheaded the publicity and campus strategy for that.

He is survived by his spouse, Vicki English, and his son Chris, who is a student at the University of Minnesota – Morris. Some of the mementoes Alex left behind were his white unlaced tennis shoes, which he wore even to graduation; his “Visitor” button that he loved wearing to GRC meetings and other events to give people a laugh; an ugly department tie he kept in his office when he was chair and could slap on for “formal” occasions; a collection of Three Stooges paraphernalia; a new “history center” he wanted built in Minne, which he brought up frequently at Meet and Confer; and a History Association bowling shirt (he didn’t bowl).

Obviously, he had a sense of humor that his students and colleagues enjoyed but didn’t always understand. He was my vice president back in the 1990’s, and it took a while for me to know when he was joking and when he was serious. Here is one of his legacies to all of us, according to Darrell Downs, “there are some who have been scratching their heads for years trying to figure out his jokes ...but for those of us who knew and understood Alex, I know that we’ll be laughing for years to come over something that he would have said if he’d been here to see it.” We have only begun to discover how much we will miss Alex.

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### CONTACT US

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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](#).