



# The UPDATE

Newsletter for the  
faculty of the seven  
Minnesota state  
universities.

Fiscal Year 13- No. 12  
September 2013

Bemidji ♦ Mankato ♦ Metropolitan ♦ Moorhead ♦ Southwest ♦ St. Cloud ♦ Winona

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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# Faculty Speak Out on Issues in Higher Education

by Nancy Black, IFO President, [black@ifo.org](mailto:black@ifo.org)

Higher education has been the center of a good deal of national attention this month. Lower college and university enrollments Fall Semester 2013 have occurred across the United States, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* headline this week reads "Admissions Shortfalls Prompt Colleges to Revamp Strategies" (September 20, 2013). In our state, this trend is occurring for some universities in the Minnesota State College and University System (MnSCU), and we are hearing there will be budget deficits. More pessimistic news is that the Minnesota community and technical colleges are being hit particularly

hard, which may affect university enrollments in the next few years. In addition, this month President Obama has been touring colleges and universities touting his position to hold institutions accountable through graduation outcomes and other metrics for the dramatically rising tuition. For a succinct review of reactions to Obama's proposed plan, please read, "What's Missing from Obama's Higher Ed Plan" by Professor Jeff Kolnick (Southwest Minnesota State University).

The deafening media roar on massive open online courses ("MOOCs") of the past academic year is steadily lessening as its dubious value as an effective

teaching and learning tool becomes better known. Professor Matthew Filner (Metropolitan State University) points out the financial and, more importantly, the learning "cost" of such pedagogy to our students. His article "The High Cost of 'Free' College" was originally printed in *MinPost* (September 13, 2013), and explains the details of its inclusion in last year's higher education bill. Some faculty may find aspects of the bill surprising as well as informative.

Similar to the press of activities at the beginning of each school year on university campuses, the Inter Faculty Organization staff in St. Paul is deal-

ing with an avalanche of faculty questions and requests especially concerning contract language. We are always glad to assist faculty. I visited each university during late August and early September and enjoyed meeting with many of you. Russ Stanton, Director of Government Relations, has been offering retirement workshops for both new faculty and those faculty contemplating retirement within the next three years. Attendance has been especially heavy for faculty considering retirement, and he has expanded his visiting schedule to accommodate faculty requests.

In last month's *Update*, I brought to your attention the draft report, "Charting the Future," and urged you to let us hear from you. We have received many constructive comments, and we thank you for your thoughtful responses. Professor Darrell Downs' (Winona State University) views on this draft appeared in *MinnPost-Community Voices* (September 23, 2013), and *MinnPost* has given us permission to reproduce his article, "MnSCU's Reform Efforts Omit Key Priorities." We will be discussing comments on the draft report at this week's IFO Board of Directors' meeting. Chancellor Steven Rosenstone will also attend for a listening session at that same meeting. I am

very pleased to inform you that the deadline for its next presentation to the MnSCU Board of Directors has been delayed from October to November permitting additional time for comments and revisions.

Bargaining for the 2013-2015 Master Agreement between MnSCU and the IFO is well underway. According to Brent Jeffers, Chief Negotiator, the two sides met again last weekend, have exchanged opening proposals, and are making progress. We are fortunate to have an experienced Chief Negotiator and Negotiating Team working for us.

**Faculty should double – check their pay stubs every pay period for errors and omissions .**

I cannot omit commenting on the very unfortunate and complex snafu regarding pay to Metropolitan State University faculty and apparently some other employees. It has been a very painful time for many Metro faculty who either were underpaid or received no pay check at all during the last two pay periods. A few faculty were overpaid, but, of course, they will be required to remit the overpayment back to the state. If there was

any silver lining to this situation, it was the immediate attention by the chancellor and vice chancellor of Human Resources, Mark Carlson, to address this egregious situation and ensure that it never happens again. I wish to especially thank Vice Chancellor Carlson and his staff for their tremendous response to help faculty.

We have also become aware that all our universities have inadequate descriptions of compensation on the faculty pay stubs because the gross amount is reported in a lump sum without regard to referencing anything other than the base or "retro" pay. It is not possible to ascertain if specific duties have been compensated (or not as the case may be). We have brought this to the vice chancellor's attention, and he will be working with Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) to see how changes can be instituted.

Minnesota State University faculty do not enter academia for the money—but we do need to eat, pay our mortgages and pay our children's college costs. So as not to leave you on a negative note, I invite you to read Professor Monte Bute's *St. Paul Pioneer Press* article, "The Firmament Works in Mysterious Ways." It should make you smile.

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## Introducing Tom Hergert by Nancy Black, President, [black@ifo.org](mailto:black@ifo.org)

I am pleased to introduce Tom Hergert, a new IFO Academic Affairs Coordinator. On the faculty in InforMedia Services at St. Cloud State University since 2001, he served as SCSU Faculty Association president in 2010-2011, and previously was grievance chair. From 2011 to 2013 he was a Dean of Learning & Technology Resources at Northern Virginia Community College, returning to Minnesota in August. He received his MA and Ph.D. at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia.

His research and teaching interests are in instructional design and tech-

nology, faculty development, visual literacy, and media production.

In his current role Tom will serve on the Student Affairs Council, Academic Affairs Council, Academic and Student Support Technology Committee, Policy Council and Transfer Oversight Committee. We think that may keep him busy.

Tom's proficiency lies in the use of technology in higher education, in particular, issues involving the incorporation of technology by faculty in their teaching environments. Tom is recognized on a regional and national

level for his expertise on this increasingly valuable topic.

Please join me in welcoming Tom Hergert back to the IFO!



## UPCOMING EVENT

## Benjamin Ginsberg, Author of "Fall of the Faculty"

Michael Pfau, University Education Association (UEA) President, invites you to a public lecture, sponsored by the University Education Association, along with the UMD Dept. of History and Education Minnesota. Noted Johns Hopkins Political Scientist, and author of *The Fall of the Faculty*, Benjamin Ginsberg will speak. Ginsberg's book tells the tale of the many challenges facing all of us as we seek to fulfill our education and research missions in trying political and financial times. Ginsberg will be speaking the evening of Thursday September 26 in the Marshal Performing Arts Center at the University of Minnesota - Duluth at 7:00 p.m.

The next day, Friday September 27<sup>th</sup>, UEA following Ginsberg's talk about the challenges facing faculty, there will be a series of workshops and seminar entitled "After

the Fall: Restoring the Faculty and Preserving Higher Education." These sessions, focusing on issues of faculty governance, legislative action, issues of tuition and access, the challenges facing contingent faculty, and others, are free to faculty and students. For a \$10 fee, attendants are also encouraged to stay for lunch, otherwise there is no cost. Finally, Ginsberg will be present for a roundtable discussion of the many opportunities to restore our institutions of higher education.

Please feel free to share this opportunity with fellow faculty and students. The Thursday night lecture is free and open to the public, and registration for conference sessions is free for those registering at <http://events.SignUp4.com/FalloftheFaculty>

I am sharing with you four articles recently published by MnSCU faculty members: Darrell Downs (Winona State University), Matt Filner (Metropolitan State University), Jeff Kolnick (Southwest State University) and Monte Bute (Metropolitan State University). Each one addresses an issue of importance to higher education. I thank them for taking the time to challenge the *status quo*. If you would like to share an interesting perspective please email me at [black@ifo.org](mailto:black@ifo.org). Let's keep the conversation going! — Nancy Black, President

ORIGINALLY PRINTED IN "MINNPOST - COMMUNITY VOICES" ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2013

## *MnSCU's Reform Efforts Omit Key Priorities* by Darrell Downs, [ddowns@winona.edu](mailto:ddowns@winona.edu)

There's an adage that says: If your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Since the [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities](#) (MnSCU) system was created in the mid-1990s, far too much in higher education is met by the "hammer" of centralization. MnSCU's recent plan titled "[Charting the Future](#)" is a case in point.

Recently, the MnSCU system office invited approximately 0.073 percent (a grand total of three) of the state's university faculty to explore the topic of higher-education reform. Beyond being unrepresentative, this process was sequestered for months until the embargoed report was aired in the summer of 2013. It was only then that faculty, students, families, and taxpayers learned that this wide-ranging reform had somehow omitted "affordability" and "quality" among its priorities. In doing so, it is clear that, short of any response, a more centrally managed, corporate, anti-union,

and unaffordable "hammer" for higher education is on the horizon. I'm in my 22nd year as a state university professor. I've seen students struggling with college costs and working far too much in part-time jobs to reach their potential. What should be an exciting time of personal growth can become a time of debilitating stress and depression due to the prospect of repaying huge student loans. The shame is on all of us for doing so little, as funding per student in Minnesota has dropped 21 percent since 2006. But it's even worse that our brightest and well-meaning experts in reform are producing an even more ham-handed retreat by giving the MnSCU system office even more control over the state university campuses. This is exactly the wrong remedy if we truly want our students to thrive on their campuses, move up the career ladder, and become more effective citizens.

Contrary to the MnSCU plan, there is no basis for centralizing the state's academic programs. Innovative re-

search and teaching do not thrive under the yoke of statewide directives and top-down controls. If that were true, any number of dictatorial regimes would be ruling the world today.

### **Bureaucratic tethers**

I am also a parent of a state university student. Isn't it reasonable for all parents to expect that if their children work hard enough, they should be given a chance to excel at a state university capable of carving out a distinctive mission and academic programs without unnecessary and costly bureaucratic tethers? Centralization at this level didn't work in the former Soviet Union and it won't work in Minnesota.

Contrary to the MnSCU plan, there is also no urgency for a centralized education strategy, on-line learning portals, or customized training for private companies. Technology is essential in education today, but it is neither inexpensive nor does it al-

ways produce a high-quality education. Furthermore, the centralization of technology-led (rather than content-led) education risks creating a system that is even more dependent upon, and controlled by, businesses with political clout in St. Paul and yet not providing accessible and affordable residential campuses.

Why would any parents want their children to attend a state university that is rewarded by a system office for promoting customized work-force training – which is already served well by the technical colleges – rather than a university that is rewarded by sustaining strong liberal-arts and science programs that provide a vibrant social and civically engaged educational experience, and an even more financially rewarding future? Also contrary to the MnSCU plan, there is

no reason for union busting in higher education. There may be some devotees of merging – destroying – public unions among the anonymous drafters of the MnSCU report, but simply having an opinion is not a rationale, nor is it an excuse for attacking public educators, staff, and maintenance workers on our campuses.

And as a parent and a professor, I would prefer that all students should be able to study at a state university where working conditions are protected by clear, fair, non-merged, and non-muddled bargaining agreements. Wouldn't that help us attract and retain the best instructors and staff possible?

**A redeeming element**

The one redeeming element of the MnSCU plan is its priority for

“access.” Indeed, we should all be working on ways to make higher education more accessible, but unless we make sure that the access is both affordable and excellent, all the access in the world is not going to matter. Some of our state legislators have discovered this crucial nexus between access, affordability and excellence, and we should do the same.

It's too bad that priority was missed by MnSCU's plan. Maybe the shadow of centralization was just too large to see the other tools in the toolbox.

*Darrell Downs, Ph.D., is president of the Winona State University Faculty Association and a professor in the Political Science Department.*

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*The High Cost of 'Free' College* by Matthew F. Filner, [matthew.filner@metrostate.edu](mailto:matthew.filner@metrostate.edu)

Over the past year, there has been an explosion of interest in so-called “massive open online courses” or MOOCs, for short. These courses promise to open college education to a much wider audience, teaching tens of thousands of students at a time. Usually taught by a famous professor from a prestigious university, these courses have spawned interest across the country and led to the creation of several for-profit companies, including Coursera. Like a straight-line wind, interest in MOOCs has been overwhelming in many policy circles. Higher-education policymakers such as Larry Pogemiller (Minnesota com-

missioner of higher education) and state Sen. Terri Bonoff are so enamored with MOOCs that they inserted support for MOOCs into the final omnibus higher education bill, which is now law, last legislative session.

Before we commit our taxpayer dollars to this latest fad in higher education, we should contrast the rhetoric of MOOCs with the reality of effective teaching and learning. I contend that, if MOOCs sound too good to be true, it's because they are. They are potentially far more expensive than traditional college courses, and far less effective in teaching the knowledge and

critical-thinking skills that we expect from a college education.

**Defining 'tuition-free'**

In the higher education bill, MOOCs are labeled as “tuition-free educational courses” (SF 1236; line 30.31). The language defining “tuition-free” is telling. According to the bill, tuition-free means that “required fees and other required charges paid by the student for the course do not exceed two percent of the most recent average undergraduate tuition” [according to] the U.S. Department of Education (lines 30.34-31.5). Because the current “average undergraduate tuition” is

\$22,000, for-profit companies may charge up to \$440 per course in the form of fees.

While that may not seem very much for a semester-long course, the bill did not define what a “course” is. These MOOCs could include hourly, daily, or weekly short-courses, and a full semester might require numerous “courses.” The law therefore allows these fees to add up to thousands of dollars per course.

Even if we had a clear definition of a “course,” we might wonder whether a \$440 MOOC was worth the cost. This leads us to explore what, exactly, a student might “learn” from taking one of these courses. A MOOC is essentially an on-line lecture series given by a famous scholar. Like any lecture, the “student” is passive, expected to learn by listening. While I enjoy a good lecture as much as anyone, and I have spent many hours of my life listening to lectures, it is clear that lectures are ineffective in teaching critical think-

ing and for building key citizenship skills.

#### No give and take

The evidence is overwhelming that the best way to teach students the most vital higher order thinking skills is *not* through a passive lecture style. While many of us spent hours in college listening to a professor lecture at us, very few professors lecture for hours. In fact, most of us teach critical thinking skills in a dynamic and interactive conversation with our students and help them to develop their citizenship skills. The vital process of give and take that occurs in a dynamic classroom is entirely absent in a MOOC.

Of course, MOOCs advocates respond by claiming that this is a unique opportunity for students to learn from the great scholars of the world. Further, as Commissioner Pogemiller recently said, “if it’s good enough for Harvard, it should be good enough for

us.” The problem with this way of thinking is it entices students to think that they way to learn is passively from an “expert,” rather than engaging critically with the material and learning how to think for themselves — both essential citizenship skills.

The cost of so-called “free” courses, therefore, is enormous. If we ask students to leave their thinking at the door, they might be entertained during their MOOC show. They might even learn something. Nevertheless, the cost of this learning will be a significant investment in time and money that undermines the values of higher education — skills such as reading, writing, and critical thinking that are essential to professional and civic success. Minnesota would be well served to “say no” to MOOCs while there is still time.

*Matthew Filner, PhD, is a political science professor and chair of the Social Science Department at Metropolitan State University.*

ORIGINALLY PRINTED IN “HINDSIGHT 20/20, THE MINNESOTA 20/20 BLOG” ON SEPTEMBER 4, 2013

## *What’s Missing from Obama’s Higher Ed Plan* by Jeff Kolnick, [kolnick@smsu.edu](mailto:kolnick@smsu.edu)

President Obama has just completed a bus trip highlighting the challenges of skyrocketing tuition at our colleges and universities and talking about a new plan tying public higher education funding to outcomes. Notably, the president did not come to Minnesota where the progressive 2013 legislative session rolled back the cuts to higher education and provided sufficient support to our state colleges and universities, which included a

two-year tuition freeze.

It’s too bad he did not come to Minnesota to highlight this accomplishment. His own fact sheet, put out in advance of his tour, claims that for the “three-quarters of college students [that] attend a community college or public university,... declining state funding has been the biggest reason for rising tuition at public institutions.”

Imagine if President Obama had come to Minnesota and toured our campuses with the governor, legislative leaders and top state education policymakers to discuss Minnesota’s higher education policies. Minnesota could have been a shining beacon of how to turn the corner on high tuition.

Instead, President Obama has embarked on a policy fraught with problems. There have already been a series of well-considered responses from

college faculty, the people who actually do the teaching. The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education warns that: “tying funding to graduation rates” as President Obama suggests, “has the potential for negative unintended consequences—to protect their ‘ratings,’ colleges could simply decrease standards or screen out less prepared applicants, as we have seen some K-12 schools do when faced with similar incentives.”

Rudy Fichtenbaum, President of the American Association of University Professors is concerned about the application of a failed testing regime to higher education. He writes, “The president’s plan will do for higher education what No Child Left Behind has done for K-12 education. It will lead to more testing and to

dumbing down the curriculum by a majority of faculty who no longer have the protection of tenure and therefore will be forced to teach students simply to take tests. But we all know that teaching someone how to take a test is different than giving them a high quality education.”

The New Faculty Majority has this to say: “If the president wants to hold colleges accountable, then he should demand that they disclose the numbers and working conditions of the majority of the faculty, and acknowledge the significant research that shows that faculty working conditions are among the most critical factors affecting student success.”

Professor of English Martin Kich wisely suggests that “if you want to

control the costs in higher education, you might start by mandating some cap on the percentage of an institution’s budget that can be spent on administration and some minimum that must be spent on instruction.” Such a basic rule for budgeting makes sense.

President Obama is right to focus on higher education. But he would be better served by talking to progressive Minnesota leaders than deep pocketed philanthropists. Hopefully, the president took just as much time talking to and learning from faculty and students as he did with administrators.

*Jeff Kolnick, PhD, is a professor of history at Southwest Minnesota University and a Hindsight Community Fellow.*

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## *The Firmament Works in Mysterious Ways* by Monte Bute, [monte.bute@metrostate.edu](mailto:monte.bute@metrostate.edu)

My university is in the midst of a public meltdown. We have been hammered with six negative news stories in the Pioneer Press in seven days (go to [twincities.com](http://twincities.com) and type in Metropolitan State University).

As a union leader, I feel like my life has been nothing but crisis management 24/7 for the past week. Anger and tears are barely contained; I’m running on fumes. I awake exhausted and disheartened.

Then one morning this week a student email showed up in my inbox — and that was just the smelling salts I needed. The firmament works in mys-

terious ways, serendipitously presenting us with critical junctures that we ignore at our own peril.

The student was seeking answers to some leading questions she had posed that would have enabled her to avoid doing a daunting three-page essay the old fashioned way: With her own intellectual firepower. I stood my ground.

“Sorry, I do not answer these types of questions. The whole point of the assignment is for you to engage in higher-order thinking. This is not a course where the teacher implicitly provides the answer, and then the student goes

home and writes the paper. That is not how I teach. In this course, students struggle all week to figure out a puzzle, and then we solve it together during the next class meeting.”

That interaction (and those that will follow throughout the semester) is why, well past the age of retirement, I still get up every morning, passionately ready for work. Even in the midst of this calamity, let me not forget why I practice this calling that I so love, at a university that I so cherish.

I later headed off for breakfast with a former student of mine of whom I am very proud, and pleased that she still

enjoys our improvisational conversations about authors, living and dead.

When I told her of my earlier email exchange, she laughed aloud and said that she had tried the exact same thing with me and didn't get away with it either. She then amazed me by quoting chapter and verse of remarks I had made in her class all those years ago. Sometimes tough love does pay dividends.

Crisis be damned, first things first. As Tom Waits put it,

*Got to get behind the Mule  
in the morning and plow*

*Got to get behind the Mule  
in the morning and plow.*

*Monte Bute teaches sociology at Metropolitan State University and is the action coordinator for the IFO*

## SALARY REVIEW



# Salary Review Update

by Pat Arseneault, Director of Grievance and Equity, [arsen@ifo.org](mailto:arsen@ifo.org)

**O**ur collective bargaining agreement with MnSCU provides for the annual review of the initial salaries of new hires, and a review of faculty salaries at the time of promotion and the award of a terminal degree. A joint union and employer committee called the Salary Review Committee or “SRC” conducts the annual salary reviews in order to ensure equitable placement on the salary schedule. In addition, the SRC is responsible for conducting a comprehensive review of faculty salaries. This can be a very time intensive process and can take several years to complete a review.

The SRC is in the process of completing annual reviews of new hires and terminal degree completions since the last comprehensive study conducted in 2006 and is verifying the data used in each annual review. Last year, we completed our review of the data for newly-hired faculty through FY08. We are continuing that process this fall, beginning with faculty who were hired in FY09. In order to ensure complete and accurate data, faculty who were first hired in a fixed term or probationary position for the 2008-09 academic year are being provided with a letter

containing the data that was used by the SRC in its review of FY09 new hires. **The data letter containing salary information at the time of hire has been or soon will be sent from your Human Resources office by email and/or through campus mail to those faculty first hired in FY09. The letter includes information on how to notify the committee of errors in your data.** Faculty receiving data letters are requested to notify us of errors no later than October 31, 2013.

The SRC will be meeting in November to reconsider our review of initial salary placement for faculty hired in FY09 who notify us of data errors, and to continue annual reviews for new terminal degrees and promoted faculty.

If you have a question as to whether you are included in the 2008–2009 new hire review, please consult [the list of faculty new hires for FY09](#) on the IFO website, under the “Salary and Equity Issues” link. Please contact [Pat Arseneault](#) if you believe you were omitted erroneously from the list of newly-hired faculty for the 2008-09 academic year.

You may contact your campus representative on the IFO’s [Salary Equity Committee](#) if you have questions on the salary review process.

## MEMBERSHIP

# FY14 IFO Member Dues and Fairshare Fees

By Donna Blake, IFO Controller, [blake@ifo.org](mailto:blake@ifo.org)

FY14 IFO member dues and fairshare fees payroll deductions were started for most faculty on their 9/20/13 paycheck. If you didn't have a union deduction taken from this paycheck, you should see one start in the next few paychecks. If not, please contact me at [blake@ifo.org](mailto:blake@ifo.org).

The FY14 member dues and fair share fees rates that were approved by the board can be found on our membership webpage at [www.ifo.org/membership-information](http://www.ifo.org/membership-information). Most full-time and part-time faculty will have 16 payments deducted, and adjunct and community faculty will have 3 payments deducted. If you have any questions about when your deductions will start

or stop, or what amount will be deducted, please contact me at [blake@ifo.org](mailto:blake@ifo.org).

### IFO MEMBER ID CARDS

All faculty who have joined the union should have received an IFO member ID card at some point in the past few years. If you did not receive a member ID card, please let me know. New members who have recently joined should allow 1-2 weeks processing time for their new member ID card to arrive. If you have had a name change and would like a new member ID card, or have misplaced your original member ID card and would like a replacement card, please contact me at [blake@ifo.org](mailto:blake@ifo.org).

# JOIN TODAY

To join the union, you can sign up instantly by using the convenient online membership application found on the membership webpage [www.ifo.org/membership-information](http://www.ifo.org/membership-information) or by clicking on the "Join IFO" link at the top of the home page [www.ifo.org](http://www.ifo.org). To check on the status of your membership, contact Donna Blake at [blake@ifo.org](mailto:blake@ifo.org).

## CONTACT US

The IFO Faculty Update is published and distributed by the [Inter Faculty Organization](http://www.ifo.org). If you need to contact the Inter Faculty Organization, our mailing address is 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 also send us an email by clicking [HERE](#).