

Inter Faculty Organization Campus Climate Report: Executive Summary

Introduction

The Inter Faculty Organization (IFO) is the collective bargaining representative for approximately 4,000 university faculty at the seven state universities (Bemidji, Mankato, Metropolitan State, Moorhead, St. Cloud, Southwest State, and Winona) in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. In keeping with the IFO commitment to identifying and ending the unequal treatment of women, minorities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) faculty, the IFO engaged in a study spanning two years.

The purpose of the study was to examine the environment, or climate, within which faculty work on the MnSCU university campuses as well as within IFO union structures. A total of 1133 faculty responded to a survey and 75 faculty participated in focus groups held on the seven campuses. To accomplish its objectives, the central foci of the study were to identify what, if any, forms of inequality exist for women, faculty of color, and GLBT faculty, and to examine whether systemic and interactional patterns on university campuses and in the faculty union evidence an open and responsive work environment or a “chilly climate.”

The results of the IFO-sponsored study clearly indicate that the current environment within which faculty work needs improvement at multiple levels. To bring about this end, three recommendations with specific strategies are proposed. The IFO requests that university faculty, staff and administrators and MnSCU staff work together to accomplish these necessary changes.

Recommendations and Strategies

Recommendation 1: Changes in both mission and organization structure are necessary to embody diversity in MnSCU. The Inter Faculty Organization also needs to be aware how well it is representing all faculty and be ready to implement structural changes essential to enhance diversity.

Survey and focus group data support the need for this change, and standpoint (i.e., whether one is a person of color, female, or GLBT-identified) is crucial to this understanding. In general, 48 percent of faculty survey participants describe their work environments in positive terms, 37 percent in negative terms, and 15 percent in neutral terms for their colleagues who are female, from another country, faculty of color, or GLBT. The perceptions of faculty of color differ from the general view, however, as 56 percent describe their work environment as either somewhat or very negative. The extent to which negativity is perceived also varies across campuses from a high of 54 percent at St. Cloud to a low of 24 percent at Winona. The general perception by over half of the faculty survey respondents is that all faculty are treated fairly and equitably. However, female, transsexual, intersexual, GLBT faculty, faculty of color and international

faculty report a more negative climate for themselves and their colleagues in these key groups than do faculty who are not members. Focus group participants ask for diversity efforts on campuses that go beyond the “superficial” and the “cosmetic.” Together these findings indicate that work is necessary on university campuses and at the MnSCU system office to hear the voices of faculty from protected categories, and then to make deep, meaningful, and lasting structural changes that embody diversity.

Within the Inter Faculty Organization, faculty commend the IFO for implementing the focus group and survey studies as a means of gaining knowledge of general faculty realities and of differential perceptions by group. Yet, there are concerns. Faculty note that individuals filling local and statewide leadership roles are not representative of faculty as a whole, leaving open the question of what issues get raised and the breadth and depth at which they are discussed. While some matters may affect a single key group of faculty, many issues are more widespread, requiring fuller discussions and complex approaches.

Strategies for Accomplishing Recommendation 1:

A. At the MnSCU system level

- MnSCU should take a proactive role on legislation that affects diversity (e.g., The Dream Act) or their employees’ experiences (e.g., domestic partner benefits).
- Leadership within MnSCU should become more diverse and IFO representatives should serve on all key hiring committees.
- Just as salary equity studies have now been institutionalized, additional periodic studies should be done to identify whether there is differential treatment of faculty groups regarding retention, tenure, time toward tenure, and time in rank.

B. At the university level

- All key decisions should involve a diversity impact statement. Universities should be examining how decisions (e.g., budget, policy) will affect diversity on their campuses.
- Affirmative Action officers and Human Resource staff fulfill necessarily separate functions and should be filled by different employees. In addition, universities should ensure that people hold the necessary qualifications and receive training for these important positions.
- Search processes should be realistic in order to be effective. This process may require more funding to advertise broadly (nationally) and to interview finalists from both in-state and out-of-state.
- Universities should put more supportive structures in place with built-in accountability mechanisms to retain diverse faculty. Mentors, departments, and deans should be evaluated on their efforts in this regard. By institutionalizing these efforts, universities will signal a concern that goes beyond merely providing access for diverse faculty.

C. Within the IFO

- The Inter Faculty Organization and the local faculty associations should examine their own structures and processes to make sure that all faculty voices are heard and consistently represented as issues are raised and decisions are made.
- The IFO should continue to seek input from and address the needs of faculty in protected categories.
- The IFO should work toward increasing diverse representation among union leadership.
- The IFO should act as a strong and positive advocate on equity issues with MnSCU and Minnesota state legislators.
- The IFO should examine whether research space, access to resources, relative requirements for service, teaching assignments and schedules adhere to equity principles on the campuses.

Recommendation 2: MnSCU, state universities, and the IFO need to work more diligently to build an environment out of which positive collegial relationships can flourish.

Incivility and differential treatment are fairly common experiences for faculty. A significant number of female, minority, and GLBT faculty perceive their work environments with other faculty and administrators as uncivil. The most commonly reported forms of incivility faculty experience are those classified as “minor” (e.g., indifference, manipulation of information or other people, dismissing viewpoints, ignoring contributions, withholding support or resources, excluding individuals, and micromanaging).

While fewer in number, faculty also report more severe forms of incivility often identified as bullying or mobbing. Behaviors included as a part of this term are promoting discomfort, using pressure or intimidation, harassing, abusing, frightening, implying incompetence, implying that actions are contrary to organizational objectives, and making uninvited and/or unwanted sexual advances. Faculty, academic administrators, and department chairpersons are the three most common sources of these uncivil behaviors.

Findings also indicate that female faculty, GLBT faculty, faculty of color, and faculty from some religious backgrounds experience differential treatment (e.g., senior positions held, availability of mentoring and resources, and division of programmatic administrative and teaching duties).

The presence of both minor and severe incivility indicates that current system-wide and university policies and procedures are inadequate to address these concerns or to protect the victims of these conflicts. Simply creating new policies and practices may not be adequate as certain factors present in organizational cultures such as a symbolic diversity ethic, a “profit” orientation, a focus on silencing opposition and troubling issues, an emphasis on individualism, and a belief in hard work and its associated stress as good may unintentionally foster incivility (Davenport et al. 2005). Some of these issues, as well as other contributing factors, are present

at the state universities. Over three-fourths of faculty state their administrators lose sight of valuable educational goals in pursuit of a balanced budget. More than one-half note a lack of openness to constructive criticism. Finally, about one-half find administrators ineffective at maintaining open communication channels, at creating cooperative and supportive environments, and at encouraging or empowering faculty.

Strategies for Accomplishing Recommendation 2:

A. At the MnSCU system level

- Policy revisions are needed to more adequately protect the victims of bullying and/or mobbing. MnSCU has a 1.B.1 policy in place to address discrimination and harassment that is “sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student’s or employee’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges” but it does not go far enough to cover all forms of incivility and does not adequately protect victims of bullying and mobbing.

B. At the university level

- Training is necessary so that faculty, administrators and staff can recognize bullying and mobbing.
- Bullying and mobbing should be defined in policy, and procedures should be put in place to address occurrences and hold people accountable for these behaviors.
- Diversity trainings (e.g., anti-racism, GLBT) put on by respected experts should be mandatory for faculty, administrators, and staff. For faculty this can be seen as service to community.

C. Within the IFO

- Local union leaders should work more diligently at building a context out of which positive collegial relationships and the union can flourish. Toward that end, more work needs to be done locally at soliciting ideas from faculty and obtaining their feedback, and making decisions transparent. Building alliances across faculty groups, mentoring faculty into the union, and holding social events and recognitions for faculty accomplishments also are necessary.
- Local union leaders may need additional and more varied training on some issues, such as understanding what bullying and mobbing are and how to eliminate their occurrence.

Recommendation 3: The IFO needs to educate MnSCU staff and Board of Trustees, university administrators, and its own members on the role and value of the faculty union.

Campus climate depends, in part, on a shared understanding of unions and the role of the Inter Faculty Organization in advocating on behalf of faculty issues and concerns. Faculty question the extent to which the Board of Trustees, the MnSCU system office, and university administrators value the contributions of Inter Faculty Organization and its members in advancing their educational missions. In addition, some faculty express confusion about the union's role and structure.

Strategies for Accomplishing Recommendation 3:

A. At the MnSCU system level

- MnSCU Board of Trustees members should receive information so that they can understand the role of the Inter Faculty Organization and the local faculty associations in helping to accomplish the educational missions of the state universities and in helping to maintain a positive campus climate.

B. At the university level

- Administrators should more adequately value the hard work involved in representing faculty interests. Governance and service work are valuable and can consume much of the limited time faculty have outside of fulfilling their traditional teaching, advising and scholarship roles.

C. Within the IFO

- The IFO should provide education about what unionism is and about the role of the union in the state university system.
- Local associations should work more diligently to introduce new faculty members into the union and the opportunities for participation that it provides.
- Local union leaders should use more nuanced approaches with university administrators. Oppositional strategies are fine when appropriate, but additional strategies, including collaboration are sometimes required.

Collaboration is required to change work climates. This complex task requires the determined and coordinated efforts of faculty, the union, university administrations and MnSCU officials. The rewards for faculty employees, as well as for the students they teach, the universities at which they work, and the MnSCU system will make these efforts worthwhile.