

AN OPEN LETTER TO MnSCU COLLEAGUES

Prospering in a Time of Change: Positioning Higher Education in Minnesota for a Preferred Future

Public higher education is at a critical crossroad. Never before has higher education been more important to the success of our state and country. And . . . never before have the challenges to and opportunities for higher education been more dependent on innovation and adaptability.

Today's learning environment demands – and will reward – an approach to education that delivers learning that meets the new expectations and needs of learners, stakeholders and the competitive marketplace.

The following realities guide our proposed language changes to the contract:

1. There is limited growth in state resources for higher education and greater competition for those resources.
2. There is unprecedented competition for students. Our future is a more, not less, competitive environment for students, resources, and innovative solutions to challenges.
3. The best way to serve the people and communities of Minnesota is to ensure the sustainability and viability of our colleges and the system.

Those of us in the two-year institutions have demonstrated our ability to embrace change. We have undergone dramatic change in our curriculum and delivery methods, the likes of which were unimaginable ten years ago. Distance education is one example of the kinds of change of which we are capable, a change made in partnership with the MSCF. We believe that continued, future-focused collaboration is the only way to ensure that our students and communities can access and acquire the highest level of skills needed to thrive in the 21st century. Our colleges are not well positioned to meet these challenges if they are restricted by employment contracts that were designed for conditions in the 1980s and 1990s.

We remain committed to collective bargaining, compromise, and continued collaboration. We are equally committed to maintaining competitive compensation for our outstanding faculty. At the same time, we will align contract language with emerging operational realities confronting our colleges.

These realities provide the foundation for our proposed language changes and rationale (see below) for the settlement proposals offered to MSCF on January 23, 2008. Details about both settlement offers (Package A and Package B) can be found under the Negotiations Update on the MnSCU Labor Relations website: http://www.hr.mnscu.edu/labor_relations/updates_teams_schedules.html

The proposals described below are from Package B.

Topic	MnSCU Proposal	Why is the change needed?
Student Advising	Colleges may establish a system for student advising. Administration shall consult with FSGC prior to implementing a new student advising system.	This proposal is designed to increase student access to faculty, improving student retention and engagement. It will improve program viability by increasing student contact and engagement.

Topic	MnSCU Proposal	Why is the change needed?
Office Hours	<p>Technical faculty shall post and maintain 3 office hours per week.</p>	<p>This proposal ensures that faculty will be available in a predictable, student-friendly manner. It ensures respect for student privacy and confidentiality. Faculty will also regularly be available to other college faculty and staff, which enhances collaboration. One-to-one access builds on the intrinsic value faculty bring to the student experience. This is not a request for extra hours of work.</p>
Layoff / Course Claiming	<p>Modify Part-Time Claiming provisions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limit maximum number of claimable credits to 21 credits per semester; - College notifies faculty member of claimable assignments 40 business days before the start of the semester. - Faculty member claims within 15 business days - If fewer than 21 credits are available, any new offerings are claimable, and the College must notify the claimant of the new assignments as per current practice. - Cancelled assignments shall not count toward the maximum number of claimable credits. - Claimed assignments at other than a faculty member's home campus may be exchanged for assignments at the faculty member's home campus if the home campus assignment(s) are available before the start of the semester. 	<p>The proposal on Part-Time Claiming seeks to balance the institution's need to timely fill vacancies (and serve students) with the faculty member's need to obtain gainful employment. The 21-Credit Limit addresses an unmanageable claiming process and eliminates limitless claiming.</p>

Topic	MnSCU Proposal	Why is the change needed?
Retention Review for Faculty who claim positions in a new credential field	Laid-off faculty who claim or reserve a position in a new credential field shall be subject to a retention-review period of up to 2 academic years (similar to probation). Presidents may waive all or a portion of this review period.	This proposal is important to ensure qualified, effective faculty. It is limited to faculty who claim in a new credential field. Retention decisions are best handled at the local level, where students are directly affected.
Class Preparations	Delete requirement that each class prep counts as a separate prep each semester it is taught within an academic year.	This proposal has implications for student access, especially at small and out-state colleges. This change will permit colleges to offer additional course sections and specialized, low-enrollment classes without suffering a financial penalty. Institutions report that students are transferring out of MnSCU because we cannot offer higher level classes. This is partly attributable to the financial penalties associated with the limits on class preparations. This change will result in more course offerings and more full-time employment opportunities for faculty.
Summer Rotation	The parties have a tentative agreement to include probationary faculty in summer rotation.	
Phased Retirement	Reduce the maximum length of the initial agreement from 10 to 3 years. May be extended by mutual agreement up to 10 years.	The current maximum presents a significant potential to affect programs adversely. The proposal is designed to ensure program viability and adequate staffing by qualified faculty.
Hiring Practices/ Phased Retirement	Part-time faculty who replace faculty on phased retirement should not be counted in the hiring practices calculation.	The current contract language mandates FTE reductions for faculty who choose phased retirement. This frequently necessitates hiring part-time faculty, who are then “counted against” the college’s full-time FTE in the hiring practices

Topic	MnSCU Proposal	Why is the change needed?
		calculation. This proposal will alleviate that problem.
Sabbaticals	<p>The parties have reached tentative agreement as follows:</p> <p>Sabbatical Compensation: Effective for new hires on or after July 1, 2008, flat 80% for full-year sabbaticals for all new hires (first time appointment to an unlimited position; includes TFT conversions and former TPT/Adjunct and Customized Training faculty who are newly appointed to an unlimited position). Compensation for single semester sabbaticals remains unchanged.</p>	
Adjunct / TPT faculty	<p>Change the threshold for TPT to 7 credits per semester.</p> <p>Change compensation (currently \$525 to \$1200 per credit) to up to \$2000 per credit.</p>	This proposal raises the credit limit and the rate of pay up to \$2,000. This is a reasonable balance.
<p>Mutual Agreement Provisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reasonable Credit Equivalence, - Independent Study - Small Class / Combined Waiver 	<p>Modify three provisions in the Agreement to permit faculty and administration to agree to credit-load and compensation variations without seeking permission from MSCF representatives. MSCF representatives will still receive written notification of all such agreements. Current language requires permission from the MSCF representatives.</p>	<p>This proposal represents an important step toward adaptability and collaboration at the local level. With respect to the small class/combined class waiver proposal, this change is a significant step toward ensuring financial viability of small programs and new/emerging programs. This is a way to preserve jobs for our faculty, to keep programs viable and serve students.</p>