

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES STUDY SESSION**  
**JULY 20, 2011**

**Trustees Present:** Chair Scott Thiss, Brett Anderson, Duane Benson, Cheryl Dickson, Jacob Englund, Clarence Hightower, Philip Krinkie, Alfredo Oliveira, Dan McElroy, David Paskach, Thomas Renier, Christine Rice, Louise Sundin and James Van Houten

**Trustees Absent:** Michael Vekich

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**Introduction**

Chair Scott Thiss convened the study session at 10:30 a.m., in the Board Room at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 30 Seventh St., E., St. Paul, Minnesota. There were two items on the agenda: the Connecting with Campus Initiative and a Self-Study.

**Review Connecting with Campus Initiative**

The *Connecting with Campus Initiative*, trustees' written summaries of the visits, and the results of a survey of the presidents on the value of the visits were distributed. Trustee Cheryl Dickson, Chair, Advancement Committee, led the discussion. Of the twenty-five presidents that completed the survey, fifteen had hosted campus visits. All fifteen presidents responded that the trustees' visits were of value as it gives them an opportunity to connect with a trustee on many levels ranging from program offerings to available services and community engagement. The presidents also offered suggestion, such as: more lead time in planning the visit; knowing of the trustee's particular interest, such as in programs or facilities; and limiting the number of trustee visits at a campus.

Trustees uniformly agreed on the value of the visits citing the one-on-one with a president for his or her perspective and to gain a better understanding of each college or university. They were in favor of continuing the visits in FY2012. Some trustees were interested in interacting with students, other members wanted time with the faculty or bargaining unit representatives, a tour of the facilities, and an opportunity to meet with people in the community. Recognizing that trustees' interests vary widely, the agenda for the visits can be tailored to meet expectations.

Chair Thiss proposed that the goal for the coming year would be to "touch them all," meaning a trustee visit to each college and university. The initiative will be left in the Advancement Committee, but the visits should be scheduled through the Board Office. Trustee Dickson will work with staff to update the guidelines for the visits and to create a list of the campuses that have not been visited.

**Self-Study – How Did We Do?**

Chair Thiss introduced the topic by asking the Trustees to evaluate how they think the committees and Board performed over the past year. He invited the Vice Chancellors and the other committee staff to join in the conversation.

Interim Vice Chancellor Scott Olson explained that there are three types of work that the staff does for the board: 1) standing reports required by policy; 2) committee goals; and 3) follow-up to a question or inquiry at committee meetings. This last one can stretch staff capacity depending on other workload demands. Chair Thiss suggested better communication between the committee staff and the committee chairs. Trustee Dickson proposed that all requests from Trustees for additional information be coordinated through the committee or board chair.

Another suggestion was for the trustees to have a refresher on the information that is available on the Dashboard. Some of the information requested might be easily found on the Accountability Dashboard. Vice Chancellor Laura King announced that she is working with her staff to re-engineer their workload. Noting reductions in the Office of the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor Lori Lamb expressed concern about increased workloads and employee morale. Responding to a question on how the Board may help, Vice Chancellor King suggested that a shared understanding of the work goals would help. For example, she thought that the committee goals were good. Trustee Clarence Hightower remarked that the Board is always better when it operates at a high level of policy governance. Trustee Renier noted that the operating style when he first joined the Board was that everyone worked for the Board, and they provided whatever information was requested. Executive Director Whitney Harris spoke of the importance of the committee chair to be clear on all requests to staff for additional information, as the demands on a small division may require significant additional work. General Counsel Gail Olson spoke about being in compliance with Minnesota's Open Meeting Law. Trustee James Van Houten recommended being prepared for the meetings by reading the materials in advance. Trustee Philip Krinkie commented that one area where the Board falls short is in marketing the system. Trustee Louise Sundin agreed and added that if the Board wants others to care about ideas and innovations, then the Board needs to lead and model the way.

Chair Thiss summarized the discussion. Communication between vice chancellors/staff and committee chairs needs to be clear when committees assign work. Committee assignments take a great deal of time and may redirect resources to less productive uses. Vice chancellors/staff should be empowered to let committee chairs know if work project assignments may create a conflict. Trustees should use the Accountability Dashboard and its ability to drill down when asking questions. Vice chancellors/staff will work with committee chairs to re-engineer processes to develop, write, edit and copy written or electronic materials for board use. The entire process of Board report preparation and presentation will be discussed. Meeting preparation can be time consuming; a brief staff report to committee members may be sufficient. Committees that do not have a full and meaningful agenda should consider not having a meeting. Committee goal setting was viewed widely as positive by trustees and staff. This process created a shared understanding of the work plan. Goals will be established after the "discussion day" with the new Chancellor in September. Committee chairs need to help committees focus on policy and governance issues. Trustees and committee chairs should continue to be accessible to vice chancellors/staff. The Open Meeting Law is taken seriously by the Board of Trustees in the opinion of General Counsel Olson. The Board is committed to conducting meetings and conversations in the open as required.

The study-session ended at 11:40 a.m.

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Ingeborg K. Chapin  
Secretary to the Board