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Chair Jay Cowles
Minnesota State Board of Trustees
30 East 7th Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
January 27, 2021

Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra;

At the September 2020 Board of Trustees Retreat I shared some priorities of the IFO for this current academic year. In those priorities, I highlighted two initiatives that are very important to the IFO, Equity 2030 and the need for a Racial Issues Graduation Requirement (RIGR) at each of our seven universities. We strongly believe the outcomes related these initiatives will help define who we are as a system of higher education. We also recognize that both these initiatives are intimately related, and both are necessary to address structural racism in our institutions. In September, I described the killing of George Floyd as illuminating a hollow in our social consciousness related race and ethnicity. The January 6th sedition and subsequent insurrection on the U.S. Capital clearly displayed an evil and hateful mob also deeply rooted in racism and white supremacy. The IFO continues to ask ourselves, what is our role and what can we do to be part of the solution? As a system of higher education and as a faculty union, we are either guided by societal influences or we influence society but either way, we always reflect what is relevant in society. An obvious and appropriate response at this moment in our history is a curricular response.

I am pleased to report our faculty have made progress on the RIGR response. All six of our universities that currently do not have a course (nor curriculum) specifically dedicated to race and ethnicity have actively engaged in conversations and curricular processes to add a RIGR requirement (Metropolitan State University is currently the only institution in MinnState that has a RIGR requirement). Campuses are at different stages, but I am encouraged by the progress and the difficult conversations that are happening and that are desperately needed. It should not be overlooked, however, there will be resistance, there will be some that underestimate the value of a course focused on racism, and the discomfort of many white decision makers (people of power) have towards racial injustice may become obstacles to overcome. Moreover, the faculty and others at the forefront advancing equity and inclusion work, are vulnerable and they are at risk, and yet, they proceed courageously.

The IFO directly connects our initiative to embed a RIGR requirement for every student that earns a Baccalaureate degree in MinnState to the Chancellor's Equity 2030 initiative. We all recognize the equity gaps exists in our institutions and it is undeniable that racism is a profound factor in the equitable underperformance of our System, our institutions, our academic programs. We have embarrassing and shameful equity gaps as a system, but nonetheless, we have students from marginalized communities that persevere despite increased obstacles, despite the racism that exists. So, the likelihood is high, that an institution could close its equity gaps in academic performance and not eradicate racism from the campus. Education is absolutely part of the solution and the faculty know and understand curriculum; therefore, the IFO is committed to support RIGR requirements and we offer the adoption of such a requirement as part of our meaningful contributions Equity 2030. We are at an inflection point related to racism and our opportunity as educators to do something. Our collective support for RIGR and Equity 2030 goes a long way to define us as a System.

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We are encouraged by the investment offered in Gov. Walz's proposed budget. As the 2021 legislative session is unfolding, the IFO has already begun our work partnering with the Trustees and the System Office to secure the highest possible appropriation to support our students. We support the System's budget priorities because it provides the needed support for our campuses and our students. We are working hard to build legislative and public support.

Respectfully submitted,

Brent Jeffers
President
Inter Faculty Organization