

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2022

Present: Chair Jay Cowles, Vice Chair Roger Moe, and Trustees Ahmitara Alwal, Ashlyn Anderson, Alex Cirillo, Dawn Erlandson, Bob Hoffman, Jerry Janezich, April Nishimura, Rudy Rodriguez, George Soule, Louise Sundin, Cheryl Tefer, Michael Vekich, Samson Williams, and Chancellor Devinder Malhotra.

Chair's Report

Chair Jay Cowles called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm. He welcomed all trustees, presenters, participants and the audience statewide. He explained that Governor Walz's executive order 20-01 State of Minnesota peacetime emergency declaration remains in effect. For the foreseeable future meetings of the Board of Trustees will be conducted in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 13B.0.1 meetings by telephone or other electronic needs. He informed everyone that the meeting materials, and live audio stream of the proceeding are available from the Board of Trustees website:

<https://www.minnstate.edu/board/index.html>.

Representatives of the bargaining units and student associations were requested to submit their written testimony in advance of the meeting. He will recognize that the written testimony has been received later in the meeting. Written testimony was to be sent to inge.chapin@minnstate.edu in the board office.

Chair Cowles conducted a roll call of the trustees who were participating by telephone. They are: Ahmitara Alwal, Ashlyn Anderson, Alex Cirillo, Dawn Erlandson, Bob Hoffman, Jerry Janezich, April Nishimura, Rudy Rodriguez, George Soule, Louise Sundin, Cheryl Tefer, Michael Vekich, Roger Moe, and Samson Williams.

Chair Cowles called on Chancellor Malhotra for his report.

Chancellor's Report, Devinder Malhotra

Chair Cowles, Vice Chair Moe, and members of the board.

Last month, I shared with the board the events and decisions that impacted the first 20 days as our students, faculty, staff, and leadership responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, with thanks to Senior Vice Chancellor Anderson, Vice Chancellor Maki, and Associate Vice Chancellor, trustees were given another update that truly demonstrates the resiliency of the Minnesota State community.

I would like to first comment on the amazing work that has been done by faculty and staff. As we heard earlier, over 95% of the courses offered this semester were transitioned to an online format, ensuring our students had the opportunity to complete the spring semester.

However, I want to speak directly to the 5% of our students who will still need some face-to-face instruction to complete their spring courses. Please know that I, your presidents, and your faculty are committed to ensuring your successful completion of the semester. Trustees, these courses like the ones we discussed earlier are exactly the students who you have met on during your campus visits. These are also the same students who will be working in critical areas such as healthcare and public safety. Our colleges and universities pride themselves on being the social engine for some of the students who will work in critical areas such as healthcare and public safety, Minnesota's economy and we remain focused and committed to all of our students' success.

The Future of Higher Education

Seven weeks ago, we weren't sure what spring semester would look like and how we would get our students across the finish line. There was great uncertainty but we came together, embodying the very spirit that makes higher education unique – we came together as a community of learners. It is that very same spirit that will guide us into the future and we blew the myth that higher education cannot adapt and change quickly.

The question across all institutions of higher education: public-private, technical and liberal arts programs - *is what will we look like going into the future?*

- Will we see an increase in the delivery of online programs?
- What will “learning” look like in the future?
- What new technologies will rise from this crisis to become foundations in the way we educate?

These are the very questions that this board has examined and has been the focus of our conversations.

COVID-19 has forced, in many ways, the acceleration of the work that that this board has prioritized and that has been the focus of our colleges and universities. Our ability to be nimble and innovative has been showcased time and time again over the past few weeks.

Albert Einstein said, “in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

We all can agree that the last two months have been extremely difficult for all involved both personally and professionally. But how we as an organization, as Minnesota State, chooses to respond to the future is our opportunity.

- It is the opportunity to learn from how we responded – both the good and the bad.
- Is it the opportunity to expand the collaborations that have grown out of this adversity.
- It is the opportunity to remind ourselves of the resilient nature and spirit of our students, faculty, and staff.

It is important that we remember that it is not just the 350,000 students across the state that are counting on us to seize the opportunity, or our 16,000 faculty and staff, but the 47 communities in which our colleges and universities reside.

At each and every one of our campuses, we are positioned to continue to be the partner of choice and to be partners to lead our communities, our regions, and the state into the future.

As Vice Chancellor Maki shared, COVID-19 has impacted our budgets in all areas. The actions taken over the past two months, along with the predictability of the length of the COVID-19 crisis, has put extreme financial pressures on our colleges, universities, and the system office, and has created greater uncertainty in planning for Fiscal Year 2021.

The total direct impact of additional expenses and lost revenue due to COVID-19 for the remainder of FY2020 range from \$35 million to \$40 million. The deficit in the three budget scenarios for FY2021 range up to \$194 million. Our programmatic and financial sustainability will need to continue to have our heightened focus to ensure that our students have access to an extraordinary education.

We are incredibly fortunate to have unwavering partners at the state and federal level. Their partnership and leadership is vitally important as we continue to navigate through the crisis and get our workforce and economy back on track.

But we must begin to take necessary steps now.

Therefore, I am sharing with you what I have shared with, Chair Cowles, Vice Chair Moe and Leadership Council last week:

- **For FY2021, I will take a voluntary salary reduction of 10 percent, and**
- **For FY2020, all administrators pay will be frozen.**

These decisions relating to administrators pay was not made lightly. We have incredible talent and leaders across the system who have and will continue to do great work.

However, given the emergent financial situations both at the individual campus level and at the system level, warrants us to make some difficult decisions to respond to the

challenges ahead. Also, completion of the Spring semester is not our complete response to COVID-19 it is just the beginning. Our path forward will include many challenges and opportunities. Winston Churchill said “we are at the end of the beginning but not the beginning of the end”

The challenge that is in front of us is to not hold onto what was or has been or return to a status quo, but to learn from this change and recognize and embrace what can be and to position ourselves to lead into the opportunity and come out stronger and more effective as a system and a network of 37 colleges and universities.

Chair’s Comments

It’s evident to me that everyone has really come together within the Minnesota State system and is working together in any way needed to ensure each student’s successful completion of the semester, which I know was one of your top priorities, along with ensuring everyone’s health and safety.

I think Chancellor Malhotra’s decision regarding his Fiscal Year 21 pay cut, as well as the decision regarding no increases for administrators at all the colleges, universities, and at the system office is prudent. I also want to speak to the sacrifices that students have had to make during this COVID-19 experience. Some are experiencing classes in ways they didn’t expect, and they’re showing great resiliency and persistence.

I also want to echo Chancellor Malhotra’s point that the 5% of the spring semester courses, particularly in career and technical education areas still need some face-to-face to complete. Please know, that the board remains committed to ensuring that these students can successfully complete their coursework. And, I know many are saddened at missing spring events like sports seasons, plays, concerts, skills competitions, and of course, spring commencement.

Today was the day that we were to celebrate the Board of Trustees Awards for Excellence. It is one of my favorite days of the year– we get to meet so many extraordinary faculty and hear about the passion they put into their work for the benefit of students. Although we can’t hold the typical celebration luncheon, I’d like to offer warm congratulations to this year’s Educators of the Year, of which there are seven:

- Jessie Breyer-Peterson of Century College,
- Cindy Kaus, of Metropolitan State University,
- Miriam Kero of Hibbing Community College,
- Ruthanne Crapo Kim of Minneapolis College,
- Paul Nieman of St. Cloud State University,
- Janet Tilstra of St. Cloud State University, and
- Stephanie Zarse of Normandale Community College

The board also honors one service faculty each year with the Excellence in University Service Award, and this year's award winner is Marcia Anderson, who serves as the Student-Directed Learning Director at Metropolitan State University.

Congratulations to all of this year's honorees – I know I speak on behalf of all the trustees when I say we are so sorry we are not able to meet every one of you today in person but please know you are deeply appreciated.

I have one final piece of business that I'd like to take care of before I conclude my remarks. It strikes me, and the rest of the board, that within the last 6 – 7 weeks many obstacles have been removed within the Minnesota State system. The unity this work has brought, the partnership, and the single-minded focus on health, safety, and the success of students is nothing short of inspiring.

For this reason, I would like to offer a **RESOLUTION HONORING ALL FACULTY, STAFF, AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS AT THE 30 COLLEGES, 7 UNIVERSITIES, AND THE SYSTEM OFFICE OF MINNESOTA STATE**

WHEREAS, Minnesota State leadership, staff, faculty, and students have been challenged in providing a path for students to continue their educational journey.

WHEREAS, on March 12, 2020 faculty, staff, and system and campus leadership began developing academic continuity plans for the spring semester so our students could successfully complete the term.

WHEREAS, faculty, staff, and Minnesota State leadership have worked tirelessly together to help one another learn online platforms, share ideas, and build new disciplinary networks.

WHEREAS, staff, faculty, and Minnesota State leadership have discovered new and creative ways to continue to deliver support and critical services to our 350,000 students.

WHEREAS, faculty, staff and Minnesota State leadership demonstrated their passion for students, their creativity, ingenuity, and commitment to delivering vibrant, relevant, and extraordinary education by moving 20,000 classes from face-to-face instruction to alternative modes of delivery, resulting in 95.6% of classes poised to complete the spring 2020 semester.

WHEREAS, Chancellor Malhotra, along with college and university presidents, in partnership with their leadership teams, have led their campuses through unprecedented change as the COVID-19 crisis evolved.

WHEREAS, the leadership of AFSCME, IFO, MAPE, MMA, MSCF, and MSUAASF, LeadMN, and Students United have been critical partners to support our students, faculty, and staff.

WHEREAS, all of the members of Minnesota State team fully recognize the challenges that lie ahead for our students and the communities we serve.

WHEREAS, the Minnesota State community will continue to be a resilient bunch as they continue to respond to the challenges ahead.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE MINNESOTA STATE BOARD OF TRUSTEES on this day, April 22, 2020, commend the exceptional work and offer full support to the faculty, staff, and leadership teams at the 30 colleges, 7 universities, and the system office of Minnesota State, whose innovation, creativity, resilience, and passion for the success of all learners will impact our approach to providing extraordinary education to all Minnesotans.

The resolution was moved by Chair Cowles, seconded by Trustee Anderson and adopted unanimously on a *roll call vote*.

Consent Agenda

Chair Cowles asked if anyone wanted to remove an item from the Consent Agenda, as shown below. No items were removed.

Following a motion by Trustee Hoffman and a second by Trustee Rodriguez a roll call vote was conducted and passed unanimously.

1. **Minutes of the Committee of the Whole, March 18, 2020 (pp 1-11)**
2. **Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, March 18, 2020 (pp. 12-19)**
3. **2020-2022 Capital Program Guidelines (pp. 9-12 of the Facilities Committee' meeting materials and pp. 11-14 of the Finance Committee's meeting materials)**
4. **Contract Exceeding \$1 Million:**
 - a. **Nursing Assessment Software Agreement, Minnesota State University, Mankato (pp.5-7 of the Finance Committee's meeting materials)**
 - b. **Exclusive Beverage Contract, Winona State University (pp. 8-10 of the Finance Committee's meeting materials)**
5. **Approval of Mission Statement: Riverland Community College (pp 20-24 of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee's meeting materials)**

Board Policy Decisions

Trustee Vekich moved approval of the board policy decisions. Trustee Cirillo seconded the motion and the policy amendments were adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.

1. **Proposed Amendment to Policy 2.6 Intercollegiate Athletics (pp. 5-8 of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee's meeting materials)**
2. **Proposed Amendment to Policy 3.26 Intellectual Property (pp. 9-19 of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee's meeting materials)**

Board Standing Committee Reports

Committee of the Whole, Jay Cowles, Chair

Chair Cowles gave a brief report on the committee of the Whole meeting on the Minnesota state response to the covid-19 crisis.

Chancellor Malhotra provided a brief overview, followed by Senior Vice Chancellor Ron Anderson who reported on the complexity and extraordinary accomplishment of transitioning so many of our courses into remote learning formats. There is a 95.6% achievement rate, which is limited to only the technical and lab-based coursework classes.

Vice Chancellor Bill Maki provided an overview of the CARES federal funding that provides funds to higher education systems like Minnesota State. The board packet includes a list of how those dollars flow to the different Minnesota State institutions

Associate Vice Chancellor Brian Yolitz reported on the extraordinary changes and adaptations of our physical spaces in adapting them to accommodate social distancing and limiting access. Vice Chancellor Yolitz pointed out the system's enterprise risk management process had identified the potential of a risk of this kind even though it had a low probability. It was recognized to have a high impact and we did have many of the key procedures and preparations in place as we began to deal with this response.

Facilities Committee, Jerry Janezich, Chair

Committee Chair Janezich reported that the 2020-2022 Capital Program Guidelines were approved on the Consent Agenda. The committee had a brief discussion on how the Capital Program might look like in the future

Finance Committee, Roger Moe, Chair

Committee Chair Moe reported that the contracts for the Nursing Assessment Software Agreement at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the Exclusive Beverage Contract for Winona State University were approved on the Consent Agenda. The committee also heard a very sobering financial presentation from Vice Chancellor Maki who laid out a number of scenarios. It is very difficult to guess at this stage in the game where we are going to be financially so a number of options were laid out that we eventually could confront. I believe that we all should understand that we are facing a very difficult financial time ahead of us and fortunately we have great people that will help guide us through it. Also some very limited discussion about sequencing the financial decisions that we have to make and possibly pushing that out into the calendar year a little bit to give us even better projections of what might

happen based upon this COVID-19 pandemic and as well as what will come out of the legislative session and as well as the federal actions.

Academic and Student Affairs Committee, Alex Cirillo, Chair

Committee Chair Cirillo reported on Riverland Community College's mission and vision statement that was approved on the Consent Agenda. The committee also had two policy amendments that were approved earlier. One was a policy on Intercollegiate activities and the other was on intellectual property. The intellectual property coordinator language was removed because we no longer use coordination for intellectual property and added language on a system legal counsel's view of contracts, which is also involved intellectual property specifically.

Student Associations

Written testimony was provided by President Oballa Oballa, LeadMN. It is attached to these minutes. There was no testimony from Students United.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Bargaining Units

Written testimony was provided by President Brent Jeffers, Inter Faculty Organization, President Matt Williams, Minnesota State College Faculty, and President Tracy Rahim, Minnesota State University Association of Administrative and Service Faculty. Their testimony is attached to these minutes.

Trustee Reports

Trustee Rodriguez commented that he appreciates the communication from the chancellor. It is very well thought out and compassionate.

Trustee Tefer wanted to remind everyone to take a moment to reflect on the uncovering of equity disparities, economic and racial, across the United States. She commended the chancellor, presidents, and her board colleagues. Trustee Tefer added that we are on the right side of this historical event, and we are so well positioned to do the things that we want to do.

Trustee Janezich explained that things have been done very well, and he wanted to go on record saying that he thinks it unfair to ask the chancellor to do more and think it's okay for him to cut his pay by 10% . Trustee Janezich added that the chancellor should be rewarded for his hard work and success. The board has spent a lot of time over the last few years trying to give the chancellor position the value it deserves.

Chancellor Malhotra explained that it was his decision and it was taken after some reflection. He wanted to underscore we need to make sure that that we model what we are asking across the system to do the hard work and show solidarity with our faculty staff and students who are also going through some difficult times.

Trustee Williams thanked the board office and the entire system office on the consistent communication from the entire staff. He appreciated the information flow and being kept in the loop. He also commended the support of the board on behalf of the students.

Chair Cowles commended the trustees on the discussions and questions they asked during the committee meetings.

The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees is on June 17. The board will elect a chair and a vice chair. The Nominating Committee, Trustees Nishimura, Rodriguez, and Soule (chair), will forward its recommendations on or about May 17.

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is the Executive Committee on May 6, 2020. The next committee and board meeting will be May 19-20, 2020.

Chair Cowles thanked the Trustees adding that this is a hard time for everybody.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM



Chair Cowles
Minnesota State Board of Trustees Minnesota State System Office
30 7th Street East, Suite 350,
St. Paul, MN 55101-7804

April 21, 2020

Chair Cowles and members of the Minnesota State Board of Trustees,

We hear words like unprecedented, surreal, discombobulated to describe how we are collectively feeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The truth is that no words can truly describe the sorrow one feels from not having your immigrant parents, who sacrificed so much for you to be here, from being able to witness you walk across the graduation stage. Or the pain of a student that works so hard to stretch their paycheck every month to pay for food and housing, to now find out that they have been laid off from their job.

To me, these stories are not surreal because I understand the experiences of our students as someone that has faced similar challenges. Sixteen years ago I fled my home of Gambella, Ethiopia because of genocide committed against my family and community. The fear of not knowing what tomorrow will bring can be paralyzing for some. I saw that fear in people's eyes in the refugee camp in Kenya.

It is that same fear that may engulf Minnesota State as we sit on the precipice of a new reality in higher education that the status quo is unsustainable. Unfortunately students have been living on the edge of a precipice for quite some time, it has taken a global pandemic to truly expose the faults in how higher education works in Minnesota - that college costs too much, that the opportunity gap appears as entrenched in higher education as the bricks that hold the buildings together, that students basic needs must be met alongside their academic needs.

On March 27th, LeadMN sent out a survey to all of our students to see how they were doing, and to hear about the struggles that they are facing. Over 5000 students responded. Here is what they told us:

41%

Are Experiencing
Higher Levels of
Anxiety, Depression,
or Stress.

31%

Have Been Laid Off
or Had Their Hours
Significantly
Reduced.

13%

Are Considering
Dropping Their
Spring Semester
Course(s).



I can tell you that Minnesota State community and technical college students are struggling. As we have been saying for over two years, students were already struggling with basic needs like food insecurity, housing insecurity, homelessness, transportation, childcare expenses, and healthcare expenses. COVID-19 has only put many thousands more students in crisis. Since our survey went out LeadMN staff have individually contacted 630 students to follow up with them and connect them with the resources they need.

The Chancellor, College Presidents and Senior Administrators Should Take a Pay Cut

Due to the fact that our current situation is like no other we have experienced, we cannot predict that an economic downturn will bring about the traditional boosts to enrollment that higher education so often assumes will happen during recessions, and we cannot carry on with business as usual. Already we are seeing Minnesota FAFSA fillings down 28% compared to last year. If this does not set off alarm bells for all of you, it should. We do not know what the fall semester will bring, but we must not wait and gamble that enrollment will increase. Minnesota State needs to take action now to protect its staff, faculty, and programs that work every day to make sure students can cross the degree finish line.

Governor Walz has announced a ten percent salary cut for himself and all of his commissioners. and other higher education leaders across the state at both public and private institutions are taking proactive steps and setting an example that Minnesota State should follow, by considering a 10% reduction in salary for upper administration.

Minnesota State needs to do everything possible to protect the services, staff, and faculty who work directly with our students. Food shelves, academic advisors, counselors, tutors, these are just some of the services and positions that ensure students have the support they need, and they will likely be some of the first to take the brunt of budget cuts if no action is taken to protect campus budgets. While this may sound drastic, the cost of doing something may be far less than the cost of doing nothing.

Most of all we can't keep doing the same things and expecting different results. There is an inertia in higher education that the Board of Trustees must overcome if students are to succeed in this new environment. While in the past it is easy to just put a new tagline out there and hope that things change, that just won't work anymore. Students don't need to see 38 ways to do things, we need strategies that work. The last several months of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that leaders must provide an honest assessment and coordinate a central response to take on the colossal challenges. This must also be the strategy of higher education leaders if we are going to address the barriers that real college students face in Minnesota.

CARES Act Emergency Grants

The federal government has provided \$29 million in Emergency Grant funds to students attending a Minnesota State community and technical college. This money is desperately needed by students to address the immediate needs that they face as a results of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our survey found that one in three students are struggling with the loss of income from job layoff.

To help students out, there needs to be a more coordinated approach to supporting students across the system. The guidance provides too little direction to campuses to ensure that the money goes to directly benefit the students that are in the most need. We are concerned that some campuses plan to use this money to



mitigate planned tuition increases in the fall rather than provide support to the emergency needs of students now. Some campuses appear to only provide support to full-time students, thus punishing part-time students that are likely to be as harmed by the impact of COVID-19. We ask that the board provide true oversight of the distribution of this emergency grant to mitigate the risks. With so much latitude in the program, it is ripe for problems.

In conclusion, COVID-19 has exposed many of the inequities that plague higher education in Minnesota. To return to that normal would be a disservice to the students that have been struggling under a broken system that leaves students with too much debt and too many without the degree to help them pay that debt back. The incremental change that the Board of Trustees has been willing to accept will create a higher education system that will not only be morally bankrupt, but also financially bankrupt as more students give up on their dreams.

Sincerely,

Oballa Oballa
President
LeadMN – College Students Connecting for Change



Dear Trustees,

I would like to begin by thanking the Chancellor and the System Office staff for their efforts to communicate and coordinate during this global health crises. We are thankful for their quick action to develop opportunities for bargaining units to receive updates, ask questions, and most importantly provide input and feedback as we all collaborated to figure out how to best work through the impacts of COVID-19.

Second, I want to take this time to publicly thank our professors, coaches, librarians, and counselors. In the face of extreme uncertainty, State university faculty immediately stepped up to meet the needs of our students. Although many of the changes that have been made to curricular delivery or work assignments are challenging and uncomfortable, faculty have been focused on ensuring students can continue toward their goals while minimizing the disruptions. This was a monumental task, in an extremely short period of time, and I am exceptionally proud of our members and also the efforts of administrators, staff, and students.

As you likely know, earlier last week the MSU-Moorhead administration announced the termination of more than 30 tenured, probationary, fixed-term, and adjunct faculty across 18 disciplines. These are alarming numbers in the Moorhead proposal to layoff an unprecedented number of faculty and close 10 programs. These cuts will have an adverse effect on students. The IFO will continue -- as we always have done -- to work tirelessly on behalf of our students. MSUM has been and will always be a place to get a high-quality education because of our faculty and staff. We will work with President Blackhurst to reverse as many of the announced layoffs as possible before they go into effect. These layoffs will fundamentally weaken MSU Moorhead's capability to serve students and their community. I am extremely confident in the faculty at Moorhead to know what is best for Moorhead and I am sincerely proud of our faculty on our western border.

The IFO is also concerned with the impact on faculty diversity in the proposed cuts. We also see the removal of race/gender/sexuality equity and social justice curriculum and related programs as concerning in the light of Equity 2030. The IFO remains committed to challenging systemic oppression and empowering faculty from historically marginalized groups. Faculty are the fundamental agents of change at our universities and in our communities. We see the presence of significant racial and cultural diversity among faculty and in our curriculum as an essential component in effectively serving students of color, low income students, and first-generation college students. The faculty of our State universities are passionately committed to meeting the higher education needs of every resident of Minnesota. Faculty must be empowered to foster learning communities that respect the inherent worth and dignity of all students, faculty, and staff

based on values of justice, inclusion, and equity. The IFO will remain committed to and actively lead the Equity 2030 initiative.

All of our universities are facing difficult economic and enrollment challenges, and some are on the precipice of a severe crisis. I am sure that without action, retrenchment and drastic budget cuts will be the deepest and most damaging we have seen over the last twenty-years.

The IFO is interested in developing solutions. I pledge to the Trustees that I will use my position to urge our faculty leaders to work toward developing campus action plans and strategies focused on the recruitment, retention, graduation of students. Embedded in this effort will be the goals of Equity 2030 and a focus on the state's changing demographics. We can no longer wait for campus administrations to fix our declining enrollments. Faculty have always played a critical role in the recruitment and retention of students and this role has never been more important than it is now. We cannot let this pandemic exacerbate our state-wide enrollment crisis, which compounds our campus budget crises. Retaining our current students and securing the incoming class for the fall, 2020, will be essential for our students' aspirations and vital to the long-term health of our institutions and this System.

Our faculty understand the perilous position our campuses and communities are facing. We will work with the Trustees, the System Office, and our campus administrators to confront these issues. There are tough times ahead, and our faculty ask that you help lead by providing thoughtful guidance based on the priorities and needs of our students, faculty, staff, and the communities we serve. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brent

Testimony from Matt Williams, President, Minnesota State College Faculty

Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra,

It has been nearly 6 weeks since our world was upended. In that time, students, faculty, staff, and administrators have had to move at the speed of a pandemic to shift everything they once knew into a different reality.

We appreciate the gratitude shared with faculty for the extraordinary work that has happened to keep Minnesota safe. We also appreciate the hard work and leadership of the system office, with the partnership of bargaining units and students, to manage a crisis for which there is no playbook.

As we all know, we are still at the beginning of this pandemic. What has happened in the short term to keep people safe is now transitioning to consideration of what is next.

It is undeniable that students and faculty have engaged in collaboration and partnership with the system so far. However, going forward, this level of collaboration and partnership with students and faculty must be dramatically increased.

For our part, the MSCF has and will continue to put solutions on the table regarding how we move forward together.

We have been willing and eager from day one to capture the extraordinary modifications to our work through solutions-orientated written agreements. A commitment to written agreements isn't just a matter of labor relations, it is a matter of trust and partnership; it is the cornerstone of true shared governance in academic institutions.

However, we have now had 10 meetings with our counterparts in labor relations to discuss these ideas, solutions, and potential agreements. I am sad to say we have yet to put any of these solutions and agreements in writing.

I want to be clear: I do not believe this is the fault of the hard-working professionals in labor relations at the system office—we remain grateful for their commitment to meeting with us.

Rather, I believe this is a consequence of separating and isolating the decision-makers from the conversations. This situation existed before the pandemic, but changing this dynamic will be critical for moving forward together. We have an incredible window of opportunity here to find a better way.

I want to conclude by sharing some thoughts I have on what may come next. What these past six weeks have demonstrated is that a lack of "innovation" and an alleged resistance to "change" were never the actual problems.

We have just witnessed a dramatic willingness and ability for faculty to move at incredible speed to adapt to a crisis. And yet, the limitations of online learning are more evident than ever.

Digital access remains a severe issue, but even that is a broader issue of access exacerbated by the precarious economic situations many of our students are in.

To put it bluntly, we have engaged in an incredible amount of innovation and change, and yet many of our students still don't know where their next meal will come from or if they will be able to find safe shelter tonight.

This is the status quo of higher-education. In Minnesota, it is a status-quo that has seen state support decline 66% over two decades while tuition went up approximately 140%. At the same time, the starting salaries of faculty in the 2-year colleges have decreased 10-14% even after adjusting for inflation.

The student debt crisis sees no sign of abating, and the primary area of job growth since the great recession has been in the service sector, meaning hard working and successful students are graduating into an economy that gives them little hope of ever getting out of this debt.

The question we all must ask with great urgency is who this status quo is working for. I believe the only way forward is for public higher education to reclaim its status as a true public good.

To get there, we must start with where we want to end up. We must expand our commitment to Equity 2030 and demand a system of public higher education that ceases to justify inequities and instead actively eliminates them.

We must have a conversation about tuition—not just the level of tuition but *about the existence of tuition itself*. Conversations about free college in the political discourse are becoming more prevalent for good reason.

But we cannot achieve free at the expense of quality. We must also have serious and difficult conversations about funding levels from public sources. We have seen some institutions achieve success in reversing severe inequities. What made this possible? Genuine financial investment in direct instruction and student support, far above current averages, is key.

Difficult? Yes. But not impossible—some estimates put this level of funding at around a 1% increase in federal outlays. What matters more is the necessity. What this pandemic has revealed are the consequences of the status quo, and where we go next may be the difference between saving public higher education and witnessing its collapse.

Success will take vision on the magnitude of the New Deal, and is obviously more than what we can accomplish alone here in Minnesota. This, then, is the job of leadership. It will take all of us to dream big. It will take all of us, aligned in partnership, committed to something better than what we have now. We can succeed; indeed, we must.

Thank you.

Testimony from President Tracy Rahim, Administrative and Service Faculty

Chair Cowles, Chancellor Malhotra, Trustees:

As we near the end of the Spring 2020 term in a manner no one ever thought would be possible with the entire system moving to online and alternative method courses in a two-three weeks, I would be remiss if I did not take an opportunity to share with you the incredibly creative and innovative ways our administrative and service faculty members have quickly stepped up and adapted to keep serving students, meeting their needs, and helping them achieve their educational and personal goals.

At Southwest Minnesota State University, ASF members in the Online Learning and Transfer Partnerships area have made video clips for apps and other technologies that students can use to help stay organized and be successful in an online format. They are supplementing the support that faculty are receiving for various technologies and making companion support pieces for the students. In addition, they have stepped up to share their email and cell phone contact information with all students who use the Office of Disability Services and serve as additional resources to assist those students by calming their fears and anxieties of moving to online classes and using unfamiliar technologies.

At Bemidji State University, the Admissions and Advising Success Center staffs teamed up to provide new students with a great way to get through their normal incoming student registration process without being on campus and risking exposure. They created a web questionnaire that allowed the new students to enter their personal information; details about the type of fall schedule they wanted; and questions about specific supports they may need such as financial aid, housing, athletics, TRIO/Student Support Services, etc. The Admissions staff received the information and passed it along to the Advising Success Center staff who aligned it with the appropriate academic department and faculty advisor who then created an ideal class schedule for the student. It has been a great partnership between ASF and IFO faculty.

At St. Cloud State University, ASF Members who work for the University Foundation have shifted operations to emergency student support. Knowing the needs on food insecurity and how vulnerable many of their students are to financial emergencies and their job losses during this pandemic, they have been energizing fundraising for their food pantry and student emergency funds. In the last month, they've raised nearly \$40,000 from 284 donors for the Husky Food Pantry and another \$20,000 from 143 donors for the Student Financial Emergency Fund. Since the Husky Food Pantry was created in January, it has served more than 300 students and distributed more than 4000 pounds of food to students in need.

At Minnesota State University Moorhead, ASF Members in the Admissions Office successfully executed a virtual Admitted Student Day—their largest visit event of the year—with only 8 days to turn it around. In the end, 50 high school seniors enjoyed a virtual visit complete with an admissions presentation, campus tour, student life component, and a Q&A with current students. In addition, the Academic Support Center has been providing tips for being successful online and also provided online advising techniques to faculty advisors. The Women's Center Director has been doing live readings and offering Safe Zone trainings through Zoom. And members in the Early Education Center continue to interact with children and offer time for them to be together as well as offering opportunities for student workers to interact and play games with the children via Zoom.

At Minnesota State University, Mankato, the Student Activities department has been hosting virtual bingo, trivia, #MavChallenge contests, and “Baking with Brandon” videos each week. Several ASF members are working together to triple the amount of emergency grant offerings for enrolled students to help address wage loss and other impacts of COVID 19. And many ASF members across the university volunteered for a Student Success Outreach campaign by calling all enrolled students to ensure they were prepared for the transition to online classes after the semester resumed.

Finally, at Winona State University, ASF members in the Athletic Training area are helping their post-surgical athletes rehabilitate via Zoom meetings by watching them perform their exercises and discussing next steps to get them back on the field or court. Many of these athletes are not able to go to physical therapy in their hometowns since it is not considered an essential service, so this continued coverage is crucial for their physical health. And the Tutoring Services area was able to remotely train more than 50 tutors and supplemental instruction leaders on online platforms and best practices in less than a week. They also reached out to academic departments who were unsure how to keep their student workers employed and offered to train them as tutors. They were able to successfully launch online tutoring even before classes resumed, and their live supplemental instruction Zoom sessions for anatomy and physiology have had more than 50 participants, indicating that students are staying engaged and appreciate having this resource available.

As you can see, the administrative and service faculty have been very busy shifting their work to online and alternative formats as well, with the majority of them teleworking. I am so proud to be among a legion of faculty members who have risen to the challenge to find new ways to serve students and help ensure they have the best experience possible. It hasn't all be easy and certainly not fun, but the commitment and dedication to quality service is what keeps us going each and every day.

Thank you!
Tracy Rahim
State ASF President