

# MSCF Minute



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## Emerging Leaders College, Session 4

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The first three sessions of the Emerging Leaders College (ELC) has taught me an immense amount about the history of MSCF and how our contract has evolved over the years, and given me a much deeper understanding of an appreciation for the tireless work of the MSCF bargaining teams, Officers, Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and staff, all of whom helped shape – and continue to uphold – our robust contract. The fourth session of the ELC took place on March 30 and focused on the upcoming Delegate Assembly, Reimagining Minnesota State, the function of the MSCF Government Liaison position, and the importance of strengthening local chapters, encouraging greater participation, and preparing for an uncertain future.

The Delegate Assembly discussion centered on Amendment #3, “Chapter Structure”, which would add to the current positions one Member Community Leader for every 10 chapter members who would “serve as the primary MSCF contact for their assigned members”. The hope is that this would result in lighter workloads for chapter presidents and grievance reps, greater member engagement, and an organizational structure that would enable us to strike if the need should arise in the future. This amendment proved somewhat controversial on some campuses, primarily because some refused to consider it unless it included precise compensation details. Subsidized release was also discussed; it is not widely used as a form of compensation by other unions and may put us at risk, so the question is whether we should discontinue this practice or continue. Another concern regarding this proposed one-to-ten model is where non-members fit in. Should they be included in the groups of 10? As a result of the Janus decision and elimination of fair-share dues, non-members pay nothing, yet we are required to represent them. The discussion kept circling back to how much the structure of each individual chapter should be dictated by MSCF and how much should be left up to local chapters.

Turning to Reimagining Minnesota State, the details, ultimate goals, and plans for moving forward remain vague and amorphous. According to Matt Williams, MSCF Vice President, the Board of Trustees thinks, based primarily on financial data, that the Minnesota State system is broken and although not explicitly stated, the appropriate fix is to institute a model in which courses are divided up into smaller competency units from which

students may pick and choose to meet their perceived needs and those of their current or future employers. Numerous flaws with this approach, if it is indeed where we are headed, were discussed.

Mark Grant, the current MSCF Government Liaison, explained what his position involves and the importance of political engagement as demonstrated by the results of the last election. Many bills come up that involve mental health, textbooks, PSEO/concurrent enrollment, and other issues that greatly affect what happens in our classrooms. He also explained the dispersal of education appropriations to Minnesota State, the University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota State Grant Program. As tuition increases, the State Grant Program appropriation increases; however, if the state would simply apply the money directly to the colleges and universities reducing the tuition burden, fewer state grants would be needed.

Kevin Lindstrom, MSCF President, discussed the problems with the current salary schedule and possible ways to repair it, none without myriad complications. However, since we do not get step increases every year, and since under the existing salary schedule some new hires end up on a higher step than faculty who started before them, it will need to be revisited at some point.

Considering all the changes we are undergoing and those we will likely face in the future with continued budget shortfalls and attempted implementation of Reimagining Minnesota State, it is absolutely crucial that we strengthen member engagement and commitment. The negotiating power of any union rests in its ability to organize, mobilize, and, if necessary, strike.

### Differential Tuition

To be honest, there is a lot not to love about the Senate Higher Education omnibus bill, but right now, I want to focus on one section – Sec 37. It consists of a single sentence and reads:

*“The tuition for an online course must not exceed the tuition for a comparable on-campus classroom course.”*

This line of legislation would eliminate differential tuition for online courses. Differential

tuition – the practice of charging more than the college’s standard rate or tuition for select courses – has been around for a long time - in many programs and courses. And since the introduction and growth of online offerings, differential tuition has been applied to online offerings on most of our campuses to varying degrees. Currently, according to Minnesota State, the elimination of differential tuition for online courses would amount to a 65 million dollar cut over the next biennium.

Some may argue we find ourselves in this situation as a direct result of a disinvestment in state higher education and the subsequent overreliance on tuition. However, regardless of your take, one thing is true; the House has the largest appropriation to MinnState which includes 149 million in campus support – and a tuition freeze. That’s the high water mark, so we know, regardless of what the final appropriation is, a 65 million cut to that will have real consequences for our campuses and faculty.

Despite efforts, this language made it into the Senate’s final Higher Education bill and so the urgency in communicating the negative effects of this provision has increased. Campus presidents have been informed of Section 37 and have been asked to reach out to their Republican Senators. This would be an excellent opportunity for faculty/administration cooperation. Faculty and administration meeting with Senators together sends a strong message of concern and solidarity. So we are asking that MSCF leadership on campus reach out to administration on this issue and offer assistance in meeting with Senators. We leave the specific message up to each campus, but the overarching message of the damage this cut will do to our campuses must be communicated. I am here to help in any way I can, so please don’t hesitate to reach out.

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