

# MSCF Minute



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## Gimmicks and Holes

*by Kevin Lindstrom, MSCF President*

The use of a gimmick is never the way to address a legitimate issue in higher education.

Further, a gimmick is not the solution to a problem caused by the failed use of a gimmick in the first place. In other words, you can't reasonably justify the use of a second gimmick by contending that you need to do so because the first gimmick didn't work. As I write this, I'm reminded of the "first rule of holes": when you're in a hole and want to get out, the first thing to do is stop digging.

The system has dug itself quite a hole when it comes to the credentialing of concurrent enrollment teachers. Now, they've got to decide whether they're going to stop digging or return to the type of gimmicks that created the hole in the first place.

As you've likely heard and seen, a recent edict from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) regarding credentialing has caused quite a stir in the concurrent enrollment community, especially with school administrators and legislators. The impact of this stir is quickly reaching our system.

What all those who are creating the stir have failed to acknowledge is that there is very little new here. Yes, the graduate credit threshold for liberal arts fields is moving from 16 to 18, but that's it. There's nothing else new, unless you count an indication from HLC that they're no longer going to tolerate gimmicks in this realm.

Here's the truth: a significant portion of the concurrent enrollment courses offered through MnSCU colleges are taught by a high school teacher who doesn't meet the current credentialing standard. Instead, those teachers have been deemed credentialed via an exception. Many of those who have been granted an exception have been declared to possess "special expertise" in the discipline they're teaching.

What, might you ask, is the basis for the declaration of "special expertise?" The answer lies in a gimmick. Staff in the system office charged with credentialing decisions have declared that a master's degree in education (which many secondary teachers have) constitutes

"special expertise" in any liberal arts discipline. While some might find this notion laughable, I assure you system personnel make this assertion with a straight face.

This might be a good time to point out that the system, via policy, controls credentialing. Yes, we have a voice in the policy process via the credentialing committee, meet and confer, and the policy council. In those venues and others, for some time now, we've been labeling the system's gimmick terribly problematic. In all those venues, our voiced concerns have been ignored. Now, the system is in a hole, shovel in hand.

Maybe the best way to get rid of the shovel is to admit to the failed use of a gimmick. Maybe those in the public who are currently being so vocal would benefit from considering the truth about how we got here. Maybe we can use this opportunity to address all the issues (there are many), not just credentialing, that exist in the concurrent enrollment realm. Maybe less time should be spent placing blame on HLC

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and more time should be spent looking in the mirror. Maybe all interested parties can learn from the mistakes of the past.

I realize that's a lot of "maybes." Amongst them is one certainty: if we turn to the use of another gimmick, the hole is only going to get deeper. It's time to stop digging and put down the shovel.

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