**WHAT DOES THE NEW MINNESOTA STATE (MnSCU) “LONG-TERM**

**FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORT” (LTFS) SAY ABOUT FACULTY?** *(11 Oct. 2016)*

**Summary of Letter Below:** LTFS is a 29-page report by mostly System Office administrators who say that Minnesota State is financially in deep trouble and describe how to fix it. In particular, the report calls for faculty to be organized to “move seamlessly from campus to campus,” starting in the metro area. Only two faculty members were on the reporting committee of twenty-four, and both faculty strongly objected to this part of the report. In addition, the report gives little or no power to faculty to critique the report, change it, or change its implementation. In general, the report calls for making Minnesota State into a more “enterprise” capitalist business. However, this and other financial assumptions underlying the report may be overstated or incorrect. As a result, in my opinion as a thirty-year faculty member in Minnesota State, our faculty unions are right to be deeply concerned about LTFS.

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Dear Colleagues,

I thought I might offer my own analysis of the language and politics that affect faculty in the recent “LTFS Report.” I examined the report before hearing the unions’ arguments about it, and in my opinion, our state faculty unions are very right to be deeply concerned.

**What is LTFS?** It is a broad and deep set of recommendations in 29 pages to change how we do financial business in Minnesota State (formerly known as MnSCU). A workgroup of 24 mostly administrators made its final report in June 2016, which the co-chairs are to present to the Minnesota State Board of Trustees sometime in fall 2016. The report is at <https://drive.google.com/a/cuchicago.edu/file/d/0B2lvAwLftDGXWUlxbUt6X25mY1E/view?pref=2&pli=1>.

**What does it say about faculty?** In the June 2016 “LTFS Report” (“Report of the Workgroup on Long-Term Financial Sustainability”), the “RECOMMENDATIONS” chapter has a half-page section titled “Adopt More Creative and Flexible Labor Practices” (pp. 17-18). This section says, “The chancellor, working with the Metro Alliance, **should organize faculty along two new full-time and part-time units, enabling individual members to move seamlessly from campus to campus”** [my emphasis]…and should “[p]ilot this initiative in the metropolitan area, where it makes the most immediate sense geographically” (p. 18).

**What is an example?** It means organizing faculty to teach in two or more schools. Non-FTU faculty are especially vulnerable, but so are FTU faculty. Here’s an example of how multi-campus assignments might work. To save money, administrators at two schools within, say, fifty miles of each other could cancel a science class with fewer than 75% of seats filled at one school, and then require the instructor to teach that same class at another school where its fill rate might have been similar—but will have more students in it because it is now offered at only one of the two schools. By doing this with multiple classes, administrators at the two schools might then be able to get rid of one, two or even more science faculty at the two schools—and the remaining science faculty would need to drive back and forth between the two schools. In addition, there would be less need for adjuncts at either school. In this one-size-fits-all reorganization, students might also be forced to travel to two schools (and have a car) or use online courses at two or more schools.

**What is the System Office’s justification for this?** In the chapter titled “RECOMMENDATIONS,” Section “4. Adopt More Creative and Flexible Labor Practices,” says, “With approximately 70 percent of the system’s costs invested in personnel, [the system] must find ways [of] being more flexible where administration, curriculum, teaching and learning are concerned” (pp. 17-18). Note how “more flexible” likely is defined, here: not by how faculty understand “flexibility,” but rather by how administrators want “flexibility” in organizing faculty, and also by “flexibly” cutting back on courses and faculty at each school. Essentially, this call for change is anti-union not only, perhaps, in its content about reorganization, but also—especially—in its lack of language about asking faculty members—the experts—to help make decisions about jobs, department offerings, and faculty support of students. The *only* mention of positive faculty input comes indirectly in the report’s “Conclusion” (p. 20). There, it is in just one, single phrase at the very end. It says that the “chancellor…will then seek additional consultation with stakeholder groups….”

**Several aspects of this report are noteworthy for faculty:**

1. **The report is a call for making Minnesota State more of an “enterprise” business** (pp. 3 & 15). The “Recommendations” in the “EXECUTIVE SUMMARY” (p. 3) call, among other elements, for the Board and administrators to (italics are the report’s):  
    (a) “*[a]ct as an enterprise*”   
    (b) “*[c]onsolidate*”   
    (c) “*[b]uild more creative and flexible labor practices*”  
    (d) “*accommodate new academic and administrative organizational structures*” [Note that   
    the word “*academic*” comes before “*administrative*”.]

What is an “enterprise” business? Online, “enterprise” has several definitions, among them Merriam-Webster’s and Oxford’s. The word may mean, simply, a business, especially one larger and/or complex; the term also suggests risk, difficulty, and daring. “Enterprise” and “entrepreneurial” come from the same root.

In other words, as I interpret them, the report’s statements are evidence of the wish at the Minnesota State System Office to use a more “daring” and competitive business model implementing many cost-saving practices—and this new model has been decided upon—and will be implemented—from the top down. Overall, the report implies that faculty and staff are worker bees on an assembly line making widgets (in this case, making rubber-stamped students) in more cost-effective ways.

1. **Only two faculty and two students were members of this workgroup** (pp. 26-7). The other 20 included primarily people from Minnesota State’s System Office and presidents and vice-presidents from the system. Half of these 20—or more—are financial administrators or deal with the application of finance as a major part of their jobs. In other words, the workgroup was organized as one might in an enterprise business committee, with stakeholders—faculty, staff, students, and employees barely represented. The ideas of “shar[ing] (p. 3) and collaboration (p. 7) are implied throughout the report. However, they seem to mean collaboration among administrative units (schools), and cooperation by faculty with administrative decisions.
2. **Only two faculty were members of this LTFS workgroup, and both were strongly opposed to reorganizing faculty** (“appendix A,” p. 21). Both said they “strongly opposed…the recommendation to organize new faculty units in the metro area.… The two also said that such reorganizing “would adversely affect student-faculty relationships without producing academic or financial benefits.” In addition, the “recommendations related to consolidating the delivery of core functions were met with skepticism and concern [by several] about reducing student access to services. Differences in local circumstances were cited as a reason to move cautiously.”  
    One might add to these objections that reorganization of faculty would disrupt cooperative efforts among faculty not only within their disciplines but also across them. Reorganization also would disrupt each campus as a cooperative culture within its geographical area.
3. The RECOMMENDATIONS (p. 15) also say we should “align online offerings with the…system-wide online strategy” (1.3). Given the previous System Office announcement to want all courses of a specific type have the same description and content across all schools, this section of the report seems to suggest that there would be one statewide-only set of online courses.
4. Curiously, the very short chapter “GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE WORKGROUP” states, in one of its bullet points, “The workgroup’s recommendations must recognize and respect faculty roles in curriculum development, teaching and curriculum management.” Left out of these are roles in maintaining reasonable work conditions (such as not being assigned multiple geographical locations and multiple course preps), and in teaching and supporting students well in one school.
5. The “EXECUTIVE SUMMARY” (p. 2) is the only place in the entire report where the word “our” or “ourselves” seems to reference true faculty sharing while making these “enterprise” business financial decisions. However, unfortunately, after reading the entire report, one is strongly inclined to believe that “ourselves” really just means that System Office, college, and university administrators are the only “ourselves” making financial decisions.

**The financial answers LTFS suggests also are, in themselves, worth questioning.** First, are the dire predictions of future loss of funding accurate? Have all the experts—including faculty—been consulted? At Inver Hills College, for example, the number of students graduating from its three major feeder high schools is expected to level off and then start rising in a few years, suggesting that more emphasis on marketing might be one better solution.

Second, re finances, the “EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (p. 2) asks, “Are there alternative models for how we should organize?…” Then it assumes the daring/competitive capitalist “enterprise” model is best. Is this what most faculty experts within Minnesota State say? What about trying a cooperative business model, especially in a state that has given birth to or strongly supported so many cooperatives? What if we use elements of the many nonprofit, non-competitive models of business in Minnesota—credit unions, nonprofit medical and social service organizations, and so many more? Why not examine the small-town model—now being reawakened in Minnesota cities, as well—of banks (and other businesses) working to be significant financial and even moral service institutions in their communities? And why can’t we simply examine other public educational systems nationwide that are highly successful without being primarily competitive enterprise businesses?

A third reason to question the financial assumptions of LTFS lies in the report’s analysis itself, as it seems to emphasize the financial need for success as marked by earning a four-year degree (p. 11). Why can’t the report more correctly assume financial success for some students who want just two-year degrees or shorter certificate programs—especially when there is such a strong need, according to recent state demographic studies, for more two-year and certificate students in Minnesota?

Fourth, concerning finances, Minnesota State has many excellent, regionally and nationally known faculty members who are experts on finance and marketing. Why haven’t they been not just consulted but brought into the decision making and implementing processes, along with our expert union leaders?

All four of these reasons suggest that the report may be based on false financial assumptions.

**In conclusion, for all of the reasons in this letter,** I believe we should work as hard as we can to gain faculty input to examine and change the LTFS report. Not only does the report go against what many faculty and student service people would suggest, but it also appears to be encouraging administrators to seek dramatic changes in faculty union contracts. I believe we should support our Minnesota State faculty unions in addressing LTFS and its potentially dangerous outcomes.

Yours sincerely,

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