

# the GREEN SHEET



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## Toward a Culture of Academic Expectation

by Greg Mulcahy, MSCF President



In my recent letter to faculty, I mentioned the MSCF Academic Affairs Committee will meet on October 20, 2011, to begin a statewide faculty discussion of academic mat-

ters. For too long, academic issues have been defined by bureaucrats, theorists, and/or outside experts with no experience of our real work with real students in real classrooms. At times, this has led to ill-considered initiatives pursued with little or no serious planning or evaluation. Too often, these efforts were characterized as "innovations."

MnSCU will be taking an aggressive look at how it does things under the leadership and at the instigation of its new Chancellor, Dr. Steven Rosenstone. Recently, he outlined some of his ideas for the MnSCU Board of Trustees. While we may not agree with all of Dr. Rosenstone's ideas, we welcome the conversation. There is no issue or idea in public higher education MSCF is unwilling or unable to discuss.

And we think it is about time for a real conversation, both internally and with MnSCU, about what we offer, how

we offer it, and how we communicate our story to the students, the legislature, and the taxpayers of Minnesota.

One of the first questions MSCF will engage is about the role and scope of developmental education. Nationally, there are some rumblings about new computer-based models for developmental. These are often coupled with modular delivery and the assertion most students need only complete selected (or self-selected) modules, *not an entire course*, to be college ready. I can tell you as someone who has

long a student who repeatedly fails developmental courses should be allowed to repeat them. The question, at its heart, is an ethical one: if the student shows no ability or desire to succeed, how long should a public system continue to take his money? Or is it merely an individual consumer choice, as are much in vogue these days?

We are also interested in whether MSCF should promulgate statewide standards of academic honesty and student conduct. We continue to have problems in these areas, and in some

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.....

taught a lot of developmental English that this has not been my experience. That's not to say we won't look at these models or have the discussion. We will. But we will be critical in our thinking and skeptical of overblown claims.

Another issue in developmental has been brought to me by faculty around the state. It is the question of how

cases the administrative responses to those problems have led to grievances.

At the other end of the spectrum, MSCF needs to look at honors programs in the two-year colleges, and we need to ask ourselves whether they are being used effectively or should be expanded and strengthened. Should the two-year colleges offer, in effect,

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# Put Your Foot Down

by Damon Kapke  
MSCF Liberal Arts Vice President



During my sophomore year of high school, my friend Carl and I bought a beat up tandem cruiser and spent many hours

in my basement customizing it. We attached a spiked faring to the front; hung signs with the name of our bicycle gang, Satan's Pedals, in dripping blood; and fashioned an elaborate mini-parachute system mounted to the back rack that incorporated a bungee cord launching system. When the makeover was complete, we decided to test the parachute on the largest hill in the area. The hill dropped four long blocks and intersected with a busy street.

With Carl in the front seat and me in the back, we pedaled hard and crouched into a tuck for better aerodynamics. About a third of the way down, Carl signaled for me to release the parachute. I dutifully unhooked the bungee cord and let it snap back; however, the parachute, rather than filling with air, dropped straight down, wrapped around the back wheel, and knocked the rear sprocket off the back hub, rendering us without brakes.

I contemplated taking a dive roll like I had seen in so many movies but de-

ecided to stay on the bike and drag my feet. To my astonishment, Carl never even put his feet down. At one point, he turned around and said, I kid you not, "The worst has finally happened."

Thirty years later, I find myself in the MnSCU system speeding toward an intersection of bad political policies and even worse consequences. Eight years of no new taxes pledges have led to a series of massive cuts to the MnSCU system. As a result, students pay more and more of the cost of their education with less and less tax-payer support. Larger dept loads put students at greater risk of having ordinary life events derail their educations. At the same time, faculty members contribute more than ever, in part subsidizing the MnSCU system through flat or reduced pay and increased productivity in the form of ever larger class sizes. This simply cannot continue without a crash of the higher education system in Minnesota.

The crash is easy to predict and, if we stay the course, the worst will indeed happen.

Despite this, through the last eight years, those in charge of MnSCU have remained largely silent about the effects of flat tax revenue on higher education. Where was the public awareness campaign to help Minnesotans understand the critical role two-year colleges play in economic develop-

ment? Where was the campaign to help Minnesotans understand what their tax support of higher education was getting them and what they would lose by cutting funding? Where was that narrative from MnSCU? Did it never occur to them?

Thankfully, with a new chancellor come new opportunities. Chancellor Rosenstone has signaled that he will put his foot down and stand up for higher education in Minnesota. In a speech to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce on August 16, 2011, he explained the contradiction in our tax policies given the financial crisis we are in: "The cuts in state funding have driven up tuition – now our largest revenue stream – threatening access to higher education for students of modest financial means. Yet, the need for a substantially better-educated workforce has increased." After offering examples of the many contributions made by two-year colleges in Minnesota, he stated, "Simply put: Higher education is not the problem. Higher education is the solution to Minnesota's economic vitality and the vitality of regional economies across the state. We are the key to reinvigorating Minnesota's economy."

I am hopeful that we will continue to see MnSCU join MSCF in talking about the value of higher education, and the need to fund it collectively to benefit everyone in Minnesota.



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# Every Faculty Member Has Something to Lose

By Tom Eland – Minneapolis CTC

Zack Sullivan – Inver Hills CC

Gregg Wright – Rochester CTC and MSCF Secretary

Every member of MSCF has something to lose or gain in the 2012 election. Among those losses could be the right to collectively bargain, wages, health care coverage, and the rights and privileges afforded to each of us in the MSCF contract. For the past several years we have suffered from deep cuts to higher education. Those cuts have now gone far beyond the level that Minnesota needs to maintain a strong and vibrant higher education system. The strength of MnSCU depends on funding, and that depends on votes in the Legislature.

Faculty members have everything to gain in the 2012 election. Those gains could include an education-friendly legislature, which includes representatives and senators who value higher education and its contribution to the state economy. Those gains could include sufficient and sustainable funding that recognizes reasonable wages and benefits that keep up

with the cost of living and which will attract and retain an excellent faculty.

The 2012 election is critical for higher education and for us. Because of this, MSCF is initiating a Political Action Network. Every campus will have a Legislative Liaison that will work at the local campus level to inform faculty of political activities, disseminate information about elections and recruit faculty to actively work to elect education friendly candidates regardless of party affiliation. The liaison will follow a structure set out by the Legislative Steering Committee, which operates under the direction of the MSCF Executive Committee.

One of the outstanding products of Minnesota has been its higher education graduates. Unfortunately, this tradition has been placed into peril within the last eight years. Our well-being, and that of Minnesota, depends upon returning education-friendly legislators

to St. Paul. The only way that this can be done is through an active political action network that supports and works for education-friendly candidates, regardless of party affiliation. The Legislative Liaisons will receive training and valuable information at MSCF's retreat over the "MEA" break and again at a Political Conference sponsored by Education Minnesota in November.

Faculty can look for Legislative Liaisons reporting at campus union meetings. The Legislative Steering Committee's goal is that every campus will have an active and effective legislative agenda. Faculty can ask their campus faculty president about joining with the efforts of the Legislative Liaison to help get this important work done at the campus level.

Working together we can turn the 2012 elections into a gain for higher education, for Minnesota, and for faculty.

*Working together we can turn the 2012 elections into a gain for higher education, for Minnesota, and for faculty.*



# Announcing the MSCF Journal

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** Starting this semester, MSCF will have an electronic journal for members by members. Called the *MSCF Journal* or *MSCFJ*, it will feature articles by faculty showcasing faculty scholarship, pedagogy/best practices, and opinions concerning higher education. The plan is to start with one publication per semester using a streamlined review process and grow both the frequency and complexity of the operation as warranted.

**TIMELINE:** The deadline for submissions will be November 7th with an expected publication date of November 25th.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO DO:** The *MSCFJ* will be password protected so you will need to join to view issues as they are published and to submit articles for publication. To join, go to <http://mscfjournal.msconfdb.org>, select REGISTER from the top menu, and choose MSCF JOURNAL. You will then be presented with a number of fields to fill in, but you are only required to complete the ones that are starred. At the bottom of the page, you will select your role. If you only wish to view issues once they are published, choose READER. If you know you want to submit an article at some point, also choose AUTHOR. If you are willing to assist with selecting articles for publication, also choose REVIEWER. You can return to update your profile and roles at a later time if you wish.

**RESOURCES:** The *MSCFJ* is built using Open Journal Systems (OJS) software developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). There are a number of interesting tutorials for using the Open Journal Systems software, including the registration process and article submission process. These videos can be viewed at <http://pkp.sfu.ca/tutorials>.

I recently sent the above email to the campuses announcing the creation of the *MSCF Journal*, an electronic journal for faculty by faculty.

Some faculty members are probably wondering what they could write that would fit into these categories and how they could build effective articles. To begin that discussion, one which I hope continues on your local campus, I offer the following observations.

First, every discipline has issues worth discussing with a wider audience. For example, what is the optimal level of hybrid and alternative fuel technologies in an automotive program? Should developmental education be limited to one or one and a half years? What is the value of humanities courses in the 21st century? Should history courses be writing intensive? What are the new trends in integrated manufacturing?

Second, discussions of best practices require quite a bit of context because no two programs are the same around the state. A fully developed article is an ideal way to share your experiences in a meaningful way.

Third, there are a number of resources on every campus that could be utilized to help faculty compose articles. Faculty from different disciplines could partner to develop ideas,

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edit, and proofread. This could even be part of a coordinated professional development program.

Finally, faculty will think of topics for articles and ways to use the *MSCF Journal* that I could not possibly anticipate. Do not feel limited by the suggestions I have offered so far. That is the beauty of this project: it will change to be whatever we want it to be.

If you would like to discuss your ideas for the *MSCF Journal*, please let me know. Thank you.

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## Toward a Culture of Academic Expectation

(continued from page 1)

developmental, regular courses, and enhanced honors sections? What would be the result of trying to draw more students on high academic aspirations as well as economic advantage?

MSCF must look at online curriculum. Dr. Rosenstone has floated the idea of offering one online version of some courses. This model is used by at least some of the for-profits, and faculty generally view it with justified

suspicion. However, this approach can have value if it's based in excellent design that emphasizes academic rigor. But it also raises difficult questions about academic freedom and what the student experience of higher education should be. Again, MSCF welcomes a critical discussion of this idea and the attendant issues.

These items will be the beginning of what I hope will be an ongoing discussion with faculty reasserting the pri-

macy of its role in all academic areas and a system focus on its essential mission of teaching and learning. We must always remember that for MSCF, academic issues are union issues. And really this is a discussion about expectations, our expectations of our students, and our students' expectations of us, our colleges, and MnSCU.

## Happenings at the September 16, 2011 Board of Directors meeting

### At-Large Members Elected

We'd like to introduce you to the newly elected At-Large Members of the Executive Committee:

- Kelly Befus, Anoka Ramsey – Coon Rapids
- Dave Matthews, MN West - South
- Dave O'Donnell, Vermilion CC
- Barbara Prince, Anoka Ramsey – Cambridge

### Motions Approved

Motion and second from the Executive Committee to approve the 2011-2012 committee appointments as submitted.



# No Fear Here

by Kevin Lindstrom,  
MSCF Technical Vice President

It was recently suggested that the future of MnSCU may include recorded lectures that students watch at home (*MnSCU Leader Offers New Vision*, Star Tribune, September 20, 2011). While details of the plan

were not provided, it was suggested that faculty fear of such plans is an obstacle to implementation and to other similar “fundamental change.” As faculty members, we shouldn’t be the least bit afraid of these conversations.

I believe I fit the definition of “life-long learner.” After earning my undergraduate and graduate degrees in a conventional way and at a conventional age, I’ve spent the past 20-plus years taking classes from a variety of disciplines, at a variety of institutions, taught by a variety of faculty. While I don’t remember every detail of every class, I clearly remember the best one.

Dr. Jeff Bineham teaches Communication Studies at St. Cloud State University. In the spring semester of 2004, I took his Critical Approaches to Public Communication course. Dr. Bineham’s lectures in this course often started with him writing a word or phrase or two on the board from the course material. What happened next was totally a function of, well, what happened next. Because he was a master of the material and confident in his ability to teach, he didn’t need to resort to a canned approach to teaching and learning. As a result, his lectures were engaging, demanding, and responsive to the students in the classroom. Students were expected to be prepared, to contribute, and

to help shape the direction of the lecture. The form of the lecture was shaped by the input and needs of the students. Given these dynamics, no two lectures could have possibly been exactly the same. The value of the lectures, especially from the students’ perspective, could not possibly have been captured and conveyed on video. Participating in these lectures was enlightening as a student and inspiring as a faculty member.

I understand that there are a variety of ways for faculty to effectively convey lecture material to students. In some cases, taped lectures may be part of the bigger picture. In other cases, like in the best class I’ve ever taken, a taped lecture would do nothing other than cheapen the content and delivery of the course. As a student and as a faculty member, I hope our primary goal is not simply to get by on the cheap. Instead, I hope our goal is to provide faculty with the freedom to decide how to best do their jobs, to support them in such efforts, and to fairly address those situations where improvement is needed and possible.

See, we aren’t afraid of these conversations. What we are afraid of is a cheapening of the teaching and learning interaction. Every student deserves to have a meaningful, engaged, interactive lecture experience like the one I had in Dr. Bineham’s class. As faculty, it’s our role to strongly advocate for the freedom to create these experiences and to point out when quality is threatened, even when our legitimate concern is mislabeled as a fear of the conversation. Rest assured, we’ll continue to actively engage in these conversations, without fear.

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