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Chair Jay Cowles  
Minnesota State Board of Trustees  
30 East 7th Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
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Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra;

Our immediate attention is on completing the fall semester and getting students to the finish line. The current outbreak of COVID cases and the large hospitalizations in Minnesota are reasons for alarming concern. Faculty are taking the necessary precautions to deliver their courses while ensuring campus safety. Due to the public health concern and the high number of cases that prevent students from attending classes in person, many courses that were face-to-face or hybrid have converted to online or remote delivery. These precautions and other protections will continue after the Thanksgiving break and through the end of the semester.

As our attention turns to the spring semester, it seems ill-advised to approach planning similar to our methods this fall; the circumstances surrounding COVID are raging out of control and trending worse. The approach attempted this fall by Minnesota and the country has failed and health professionals are predicting we will continue to fail if we do not dramatically change our behaviors. Higher education is not excluded from the contributing factors that have led to the spread of the virus. More aggressive and proactive guidance from the System Office seems warranted.

The ongoing and increased stressors related to COVID-19 has created a pandemic fatigue that is adversely affecting our work and relationships to a point where mental health issues are requiring attention and care. The IFO is in the process of conducting a survey of faculty related to stress and mental health. In addition, we will be hosting zoom drop-in sessions with mental health services. We have shared our concern and strategies with Chancellor Malhotra and Senior Vice Chancellor Anderson who have acknowledged the need and they have welcomed the conversation. We look forward to continued partnership and collaboration to help address the needs of faculty, staff, and students during these trying times.

In conclusion, I commend Vice Chancellor Maki and his team for the work done on the legislative budget request. We appreciated the evolving nature of the budget proposal and the opportunity afforded us to provide input. Although the proposed budget doesn't address all the needs of our campuses, we respect the budgetary constraints of the State and believe the proposed budget is responsible and prioritizes key initiatives vital to student access and success. In the coming weeks, our Board will learn more about the proposal and decide an official position, but thus far the feedback from our membership has been positive. We also want to thank the Chancellor for his focus on equity and affordability as part of the budget request. We remain committed to the Equity 2030 initiative and will continue our engagement in the hard work this goal will require to achieve. Lastly, I strongly encourage the Trustees to use their extensive relationships around the Capitol to make the case for this budget request. It is imperative that we coordinate the stakeholder efforts with those of the Board of Trustees to maximize the effectiveness of our legislative efforts. I look forward to seeing you all in the Zoom halls of the Capitol this session.

Respectfully submitted,

Brent Jeffers  
President  
Inter Faculty Organization