The University Senate
FACULTY · STUDENT · P&A · CIVIL SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC)
October 23, 2025
Minutes of the Meeting

These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents. The University Senate Office utilized notes taken during the meeting, video recording and transcript of the meeting, and AI to assist in summarizing substantive parts of the meeting transcript to compose these minutes. Minutes are reviewed by the committee before posting.

[**In these minutes:** Safety Updates; Conversation with President Cunningham; MN Paid Leave and Associated Policies; Departure Incentive Option and Termination Agreement Policies; Conversation with Provost Ritter]

PRESENT: Perry Leo (chair), Jean Abraham, Mark Bee, Rob Blair, Matt Bodie, Mark Borrello, Jerry Cohen, Shawn Curley, Jennifer Goodnough, Timothy Johnson (vice chair), Ron Krebs, Jess Larson, Venkatram Mereddy, Kelsey Metzger, Julie Olson, Sonali Pahwa, David Redish, Jayanthi Sasisekaran, Subree Subramanian, Eric Van Wyk

ABSENT: None.

REGRETS: David Brown, Tony Fussy, Niloufar Hadidi

OTHERS ATTENDING: Gregg Goldman, executive vice president, Finance and Operations; Captain Ashlee Lange and Captain Jason Printz, University of Minnesota Police Department (UMPD); Janelle Broesch, assistant vice president and assistant chief operating officer, Office of the Executive Vice President for Finance and Operations; President Rebecca Cunningham; Brianna Menning, assistant chief of staff, Office of the President; Mary Rohman Kuhl, senior director, Total Rewards; Jaime Elder, Benefit Consultant, Total Compensation; and Katie Kolodge, Health and Wellbeing Consultant, Total Rewards, Office of Human Resources; Ole Gram, associate vice provost, Faculty Affairs; Executive Vice President and Provost Gretchen Ritter; Heather Dorr, director, Faculty Affairs, Medical School; Jaclyn Adair, senate associate, and Laurie Cooper Stoll, director, University Senate Office

1. Safety Updates

Professor Perry Leo, chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed Gregg Goldman, executive vice president, Finance and Operations and Captains Ashlee Lange and Jason Printz of the University of Minnesota Police Department (UMPD). Upon request from the presenters, a motion to go into executive session was made and seconded. The committee voted unanimously to go approve that motion.

Topics discussed while in executive session were Topics discussed were as follows:

- Protocols when reports are filed including threats against faculty/staff/students
- The role of the Campus Safety Committee vs the Strategic Safety Advisory Committee

Leo thanked the guests for the updates, and they departed.

2. Conversation with President Cunningham

Next, Leo welcomed President Rebecca Cunningham, who provided the following updates:

- **Strategic Roadmap**: Cunningham opened the discussion with high-level updates on the start of the academic year and the recently announced strategic roadmap. The roadmap was presented to the Board of Regents (BOR) and would return to the BOR for final approval in the coming weeks. Cunningham expressed excitement for how units, schools, and campuses would utilize the roadmap as an active component of their planning.
- **Branding:** Cunningham said that the "Driven to Discover" brand, which is 20 years old, is being refreshed to a broader brand that encompasses more of the University's work. The marketing and communications teams are conducting focus groups and testing, with a goal of having a new brand pulled together by spring.

In response to a query from Subree Subramanian, Cunningham addressed the status of the discussions between Fairview and the Medical School. By way of background, she explained that the current 30-year contract with Fairview ends at the close of 2026, noting that the initial contract involved the University giving Fairview ownership and operation of the hospital buildings on the East and West Banks, and the Children's Hospital, at a very low cost. An offer to buy the buildings back was rejected by Fairview last year. An "all-Minnesota Health proposal" for a larger health system merger that would have included Essentia was discussed for six months with the Attorney General's office. Active negotiations are still occurring with Essentia and other health systems. A conclusion with Fairview has not yet been reached.

Cunningham outlined **four necessary components** for a successful deal:

- **Mission Support:** The deal must ensure a thriving Medical School.
- **Academic Support/Funding:** The deal must include academic support in the range of $200 million to $400 million, aligning with peer academic medical centers. Fairview had increased this to $60 million four years ago but is now looking to radically decrease it.

- **Facilities Maintenance:** Fairview failed to maintain the four buildings it took over, resulting in approximately $500 million in deferred maintenance, which must be addressed.
- **Governance:** In order to ensure that our students receive the best medical education, the University and the Board of Regents must have a voice in the governance of the new entity.

Cunningham also addressed the status of the University of Minnesota Physicians (UMP), noting that it is a separate 503(c) company that does not represent the Medical School faculty, and is negotiating with Fairview independently regarding practice and revenue. The University is working to ensure that UMP's negotiations do not affect the Medical School's future.

Cunningham reassured members that the state and governor care deeply, as the University is the only public medical school in the state and trains 70% of Minnesota's physicians. The transition between contracts will be managed smoothly with the help of all parties, including the attorney general and the legislature.

Cunningham concluded this section by noting that the negotiations revealed fundamentally different missions: Fairview desires to be an excellent community health center, while the University's mission is to be a great academic medical center. Both are commendable missions, but they differ in some ways.

David Redish raised a concern about the government shutdown and related federal funding issues. Cunningham confirmed that the University is currently managing its funds and that research is continuing, with people being paid. She stated that the University is currently flat on NIH distribution compared to the previous year, rather than the expected 10-15% increase, but continues to successfully write and receive grants. She said that the University's federal relations team is actively engaged on this and other issues.

Jerry Cohen raised a concern that the word “plant” was missing from the master plan for the St. Paul campus, and that plant biology at the University is under threat. He noted the decline in the national ranking of the plant biology graduate program.

Cunningham responded that the roadmap is University-wide and that setting individual department and school priorities is the responsibility of each college. She advised Cohen to work with College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) leadership during its priority-setting and roadmap planning process, as she believes plants are relevant to the University roadmap.

Matt Bodie asked about the University's philosophy regarding graduate programs following Harvard's recent cutbacks. Cunningham expressed that thought leaders are generally concerned about the future generation of scientists and their training. While there have been minor, localized decreases in slots based on program budgets, she stated that the University's philosophy is to do what it can to protect the next generation of scientists and junior faculty. Cunningham also noted that during times of economic uncertainty, people sometimes return to graduate school.

In the interest of time, Leo thanked Cunningham for the updates, and she departed.

3. Policies Related to MN Paid Leave

Leo then welcomed Mary Rohman Kuhl, senior director, Total Rewards and Jaime Elder, Benefit Consultant, Total Compensation from the Office of Human Resources (OHR), who were present to discuss Minnesota Paid Leave and resulting changes to University policies and current leave practices. Minnesota Paid Leave goes into effect on January 1, 2026.

Minnesota Paid Leave Program Overview

Rohman Kuhl summarized the new state-mandated program, which would be administered by the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and cover nearly all Minnesota employees. The program allows employees to take paid leave for two primary categories of reasons:

- **Serious Health Condition:** Up to 12 weeks of paid time for the employee's own serious health condition.
- **Care of Others:** Up to an additional 12 weeks for care, including bonding, family care, safety, or a qualifying exigency leave (for military duty preparation).

An employee may take a maximum of 20 weeks of paid leave in a benefit year, combined across both categories. The benefit year is a 12-month period unique to each person based on when their leave begins.

The leave provides partial wage replacement, similar to unemployment insurance, where the percentage of salary covered is higher for lower-wage earners.

Eligibility and Graduate Student Concerns

A faculty member raised a historical concern regarding graduate students being deemed ineligible for FMLA due to their official employment percentage being set just below the required threshold.

Elder confirmed that graduate students are eligible for Minnesota Paid Leave, provided they work more than 50% of the time in the state of Minnesota and earn a minimum wage amount (approximately $3,900 annually).

University Design Decisions

Rohman Kuhl and Elder presented several design decisions made by the University regarding the implementation of the new program:

Program Administration (MetLife)

The University decided to run its own program through MetLife, a third-party administrator, rather than through the state of Minnesota.

- **Rationale:** Running the program through the state would involve employees stopping their University paycheck, filing a claim with the state, and waiting for a partial wage check, followed by a separate, potentially delayed, top-off check from the University. This complicated process would cause confusion, make benefit deductions difficult (requiring direct billing to employees), and exclude retirement contributions.
- **MetLife Process:** By using MetLife, the University would create a single, integrated location for all leave management, as MetLife already handles short-term disability, long-term disability, and academic medical leave. MetLife will calculate the state-mandated payment, send the figure to the University in

real-time, and the University will issue a single check—inclusive of top-off, benefit deductions, and contributions—on the employee's normal payday, resulting in a much better experience.

- **Cost Savings:** The University negotiated a premium rate of 0.75% of earnings through MetLife, lower than the state's initial rate of 0.88% (and projected future rate of 0.96% to 1.0%). The MetLife rate is guaranteed for three years.

Premium Split (50-50)

The University decided to split the premium cost 50-50 with employees, which the presenters stated is the universal practice among Minnesota employers and Big Ten institutions in states with similar programs. Instead of the maximum 0.44%, employees will be charged 0.375% of earnings due to the savings negotiated with MetLife. This is a mandated tax/premium taken from every paycheck, regardless of benefit use.

The question of the program's long-term vision was raised, given the three-year guaranteed rate and past experiences with long-term contracts. Rohman Kuhl affirmed that all vendor contracts are continuously reviewed and renegotiated. The move to MetLife from Unum was, in fact, due to faculty dissatisfaction with the previous vendor.

Rohman Kuhl added that the University is also mindful of potential legislative changes and is keeping its existing parental leave and other policies in place, running them concurrently.

FMLA

The federal FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act), which provides 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected time, will run concurrently with Minnesota Paid Leave.

- The University decided to change its tracking method for FMLA, moving from a fiscal year to a rolling 12-month benefit period unique to each person, effective January 1, 2026. This aligns the FMLA period with the Minnesota Paid Leave benefit year.
- All employees will receive a brand-new 12-week fresh bank of FMLA time on January 1, 2026, regardless of prior use.

Parental Leave

The University's existing six weeks of parental leave will run concurrently with Minnesota Paid Leave as a supplement.

- Many employers are discontinuing their parental leave, but the University opted to keep its policy in place.
- The University's parental leave provides 100% of normal bi-weekly pay, which will be achieved by topping off the partial wage payment received through Minnesota Paid Leave.

Paid Medical Leave

Academic medical leave and disability benefits for faculty and P&A employees will also run concurrently with Minnesota Paid Leave.

- The University decided to split the academic medical leave policy into two—one for medical self and one for family—to improve clarity and navigation.
- The first 10 days of academic paid medical leave can now be used for a broader set of leave reasons.

Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST)

The state law regarding ESST, which went into effect on January 1, 2024, was updated in July, clarifying that all time banks usable for sick time must be available for ESST reasons.

- This rule meant that the University's existing sick banks for civil service/labor-represented employees and the first 10 days of academic medical leave already met or exceeded ESST requirements.
- The University will be renaming sick banks to indicate they are also usable for safe time reasons.
- Effective January 1, 2026, the University will stop accruing time in the separate ESST banks for all non-union, benefit-eligible employees.
- These employees will have one year (until January 1, 2027) to use their existing separate ESST bank, after which any remaining time will be forfeited.

- The University emphasized that employees will have more time for ESST purposes than before, as existing sick banks and academic disability time will be expanded to cover ESST reasons, such as when a child's school is closed.
- Employees without a traditional sick bank or academic medical leave (e.g., temporary, casual, student workers, professionals in training) will continue to accrue ESST.

Rohman Kuhl and Elder then invited questions from members. Mark Bee asked whether the new leave regime would create a difference in access to benefits, eligibility, or payments based on whether a faculty member's nine-month contract was paid out over nine months versus 12 months. Elder stated that for Minnesota Paid Leave, a faculty member's pay distribution method will not affect their eligibility. She clarified that for existing policies, however, the status quo would continue: if an employee is not scheduled to receive pay during certain months (regardless of whether their nine-month salary is stretched over 12 months), they would typically not receive medical leave pay during those months. However, they acknowledged that the policies may not be sufficiently clear on whether benefits are tied to the time working or the time being paid. They welcomed this specific feedback for clarification during the policy review period.

4. Departure Incentive Option and Termination Agreement Policies

Elder departed, and Ole Gram, associate vice provost, Faculty and Academic Affairs, joined Rohman Kuhl to talk about new proposed policies Departure Incentive Option and Termination Agreement. Rohman Kuhl explained that these policies outline two voluntary programs designed to address budgetary challenges and overstaffing in some colleges, while offering a mutually beneficial departure incentive to faculty, particularly those considering retirement or other departures. Both programs offer identical financial benefits but are intended for different circumstances.

Terminal Agreement

The Terminal Agreement program has been offered in the past (last in 2016) to facilitate change within units.

Feature	Description
Purpose	To offer a voluntary incentive for tenure resignation to address staffing needs and budgetary constraints, or for faculty already considering retirement/departure.
Eligibility	Tenured faculty only.
Condition	Requires a combination of age and years of service.
Exclusions	Cannot be currently participating in another retirement incentive (e.g., phased retirement). Not for contract or term faculty.
Offer	Can be initiated by college leadership or requested by faculty.
Targeting	Colleges/campuses will likely have a limited number of packages based on their budget. Offers may be prioritized for departments with the most financial constraint, declining course interest, or extra faculty in a specific area.
Approval	Twin Cities: Approved by the Provost. System Campuses: Approved by the Chancellors.
Incentive	Lump Sum Payment: 50% to 200% of salary (percentage determined by the college/campus).

	Healthcare Savings Plan (HSP) Lump Sum: Cash equivalent of two adults on the Twin Cities medical plan for two years. Currently $50,000, indexed to $55,000 after January 1.

Departure Incentive Option (DIO)

The Departure Incentive Option (DIO) is for a situation where programmatic change is needed, as articulated in the tenure policy (e.g., discontinuation of a major program or department). The package is designed to lessen the pain of a transition that would otherwise involve involuntary transfers or re-training.

Feature	**Description**
Purpose	To offer a voluntary incentive to faculty in departments facing a necessary programmatic change to reduce the negative impact of the transition.
Eligibility	Tenured faculty only, in specific overstaffed departments or those facing programmatic change.
Condition	No combination of age or service required.
Exclusions	Cannot be currently participating in another retirement incentive (e.g., phased retirement). Not for contract or term faculty.
Selection	Colleges designate a limited number of offers by department (e.g., 3 seats in one department, 6 in another). If applications exceed the

	number of seats, the offers go to the faculty with the longest tenure (by rank and years of service).
Approval	All DIOs (Twin Cities and System Campuses) must be approved by the EVP, Provost and the EVP of Finance and Operations due to the seriousness of the underlying situation.
Incentive	Identical to Terminal Agreement: Lump Sum Payment (50%-200% of salary) + HSP Lump Sum ($50,000 / $55,000).

Questions and Concerns

- **Future Employment Limits with DIO:** A question was raised about whether it was appropriate for the DIO to have a restriction on future University employment, similar to the Terminal Agreement, since relatively junior faculty could take the DIO and later wish to return, should conditions change. Rohman Kuhl acknowledged this as excellent feedback, noting that the restriction should, at minimum, require that the faculty member's departure period is commensurate with the payment received (e.g., a two-year salary payout requires at least a two-year absence), but that the project team will give this further consideration..
- **DIO Scope:** It was clarified that the DIO is tied to the narrow and circumscribed definition of programmatic change in the tenure policy (e.g., discontinuation of an entire department), not just declining student credit hours or popularity of a major.
- **Impact on FTEs (Terminal Agreement):** Julie Olson asked if the Terminal Agreement would automatically cause the college to lose the faculty line (FTE). Gram said that the budget process decision on whether to maintain or eliminate the line is separate from the voluntary incentive program.
- **Optics and Morale:** Jennifer Goodnough commented regarding the optics and timing of launching these programs amidst other uncertainties. She cautioned

that announcing voluntary departure programs, even with good intentions, may create nervousness, potentially causing the University to lose valued faculty who get anxious and depart. The need for careful communication to mitigate negative impact on morale was strongly emphasized.

Rohman Kuhl and Gram thanked members for their time, and noted that consultation is ongoing. The goal is to make the programs available by the first part of December at the earliest.

5. Conversation with Provost Ritter

Leo welcomed Executive Vice President and Provost Gretchen Ritter, who shared several ongoing efforts:

- **Vice Provost for International Affairs Search:** A national search has been launched for a new Vice Provost for International Affairs.
- **Central Unit Budget Reviews:** Reviews of the budgets for central units have begun. No final decisions will be made until later in the spring when the overall budget picture is clearer.
- **Deans' Learning Sessions:** Initiating “deeper learning sessions” for deans on critical topics, including:
    - **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The chief AI officer of the University of Utah is scheduled to visit in December.
    - **Public Trust:** A session will be led by the provost on why public trust has eroded, its implications, and potential strategies for improvement.
- **Campus Visits:** The provost has begun visiting other campuses to gain a broader understanding of the University system.
- **Twin Cities Strategic Framework:** Invitations are being sent for working groups to adapt the new strategic framework to the specific goals of the Twin Cities campus.

The provost responded as follows to questions on the topics below:

Observations about the University

- The University is excellent, though could do better at communicating this excellence broadly. There is too much modesty, which directly affects visibility and rankings.
- The current president is well-suited for the time, being dynamic, mission-driven, and forward-looking.
- There are significant advantages to being located in Minnesota.
- The current faculty structure is very odd. Specific concerns include the annual review of contract faculty even after long tenures (e.g., 20 years) and the disparate use of the P&A category across different units. The provost feels it is important to address and clarify this structure, possibly by creating more appropriate, longer-term contracts and establishing better governance rights for teaching faculty.
- Political turmoil is leading to widespread anxiety among faculty, students, and staff.

Addressing Anxiety and Federal Issues

- **Government Shutdown:** The Provost believes the shutdown will not last forever but is concerned that the nature of current shutdowns is distinctly different and may be **longer** than in recent years, which could be damaging.
- **International Recruitment:** She is worried about federal actions making it **harder to recruit and support international students and faculty (incl**uding visa restrictions), impacting the University's leadership in many fields and the nation's economic growth.
- **Addressing Anxiety:** The Provost suggested that the University must:
    - Spend a lot of time talking to each other.
    - Avoid making promises about things that are uncertain.
    - Be particularly aware of and support the more vulnerable categories of the community (e.g., assistant professors, students on financial aid).

PhD Program Landscape

- The provost believes it is likely that there will be a nationwide shrinking of PhD programs, driven by a confluence of factors:

- Federal government uncertainty/funding.
- The changed landscape due to unionization on many campuses.
- The lack of academic jobs in many fields compared to a decade ago.

Leo thanked Provost Ritter and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office