

Governing Higher Education in Minnesota: Public Postsecondary Systems and Agencies

Minnesota has two public postsecondary systems and one state agency dealing with postsecondary education

Minnesota has two public postsecondary systems: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the University of Minnesota.

- The **Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU)** system has seven four-year universities and 25 two-year colleges located throughout Minnesota. MnSCU institutions provide occupational, general, baccalaureate, and graduate education, including certain applied doctoral degrees. The MnSCU system office—the office of the chancellor—is in St. Paul.
- The **University of Minnesota** is a major research institution with five campuses providing undergraduate, graduate, and professional education and research and outreach centers throughout Minnesota. The main campus and central administration are in the Twin Cities.

The Minnesota **Office of Higher Education (OHE)** is a state agency responsible for postsecondary financial aid and other assistance programs, data and information, and registration and licensing of private postsecondary institutions. The OHE is the successor to the Higher Education Services Office.

MnSCU is governed by state law and a board of trustees

Minnesota Law. MnSCU is established in [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 136F](#). In 1991, the legislature created MnSCU through the merger of the state universities, community colleges, and technical colleges. Minnesota Statutes:

- establish a 15-member board of trustees to govern MnSCU;
- specify the board's powers to manage MnSCU, its assets, and its institutions;
- designate the specific colleges and universities in the MnSCU system;
- require legislation to create any new MnSCU institution or location;
- authorize the colleges and universities to operate specific enterprises; and
- require the board to recognize statewide student associations.

Board of Trustees. Under state law, the governor appoints 15 trustees with the advice and consent of the Senate. Eight members of the board must reside in the state's eight congressional districts, one in each district. Three members must be MnSCU students and one member must represent labor. Student trustees serve two-year terms; other trustees serve staggered six-year terms. Except for the student and labor trustees, trustee candidates are recruited and screened by the Trustee Advisory Council, established in state law. All recommendations on trustee appointments are made to the governor.

Minnesota Statutes give the board of trustees all the power necessary to govern MnSCU, unless otherwise directed or prohibited in law. The board is responsible for appointing a chancellor with the authority to perform duties the board delegates. Minnesota law can put conditions on state appropriations for MnSCU.

The University of Minnesota is governed by the state constitution, state laws, and a board of regents

University Charter, Minnesota Constitution. The territorial legislature established the University of Minnesota in 1851, governed by a 12-member board of regents. The Minnesota Constitution incorporates the university charter by continuing all of the “rights, immunities, franchises and endowments” previously conferred to the university.

Board of Regents. The constitution requires the legislature to elect 12 regents to staggered six-year terms. The governor may appoint a regent to fill a vacancy who serves until the legislature elects a replacement. Regent candidates are recruited and screened by the Regent Advisory Council established in state law. The council makes its recommendations to a joint legislative committee, also established in law, consisting of members of legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education. The regents have the power to manage the university and all its campuses and facilities. Under the university charter, the board has responsibility for selecting the university president.

Minnesota Law. [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 137](#), requires eight of the elected regents to reside in the state’s eight congressional districts, one in each district. One at-large regent must be a student when elected. This chapter specifically provides authority for the regents to exercise eminent domain, accept federal money, control the permanent university fund, and establish a branch campus in Rochester. State law prohibits the regents from allowing expenditures for a purpose beyond the amount appropriated. State law also may put conditions on the university appropriations, if the conditions don’t violate the university’s constitutional autonomy.

The Minnesota OHE is created by state law and advised by a council

Minnesota Law. The OHE is established in [chapter 136A](#) of Minnesota Statutes. Since 2004, the office has been under the administrative control of a director appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Advisory Councils. OHE has a statutory Student Advisory Council (SAC), made up of student representatives of public and private postsecondary student associations. SAC reports quarterly to the commissioner of higher education and may make recommendations, as appropriate. Prior to 2013, OHE was advised by a separate advisory group, the Higher Education Advisory Council (HEAC). The 2013 Legislature repealed that council but retained the Student Advisory Council.

Director. The director of OHE serves at the pleasure of the governor and has administrative control over the office.

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