Staff Council Update on Post-Retirement Medical Benefits
October 1, 2010

Submitted by Ida Russin, Staff Council President

These past weeks have been difficult for UVM staff and faculty alike. The discussion of changing post-retirement medical benefits has brought the UVM community together in many discussions. It seems it doesn’t matter if you’ve been at UVM for a couple of years, or 40 years, it’s equally distressing to know that your retirement benefits may be changing. Many staff have sent their comments and concerns to the Staff Council and/or directly to the University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC). The Staff Council office and I have reviewed each of these in detail, and would like to highlight the common themes we are hearing from staff. They are:

- We would like staff to be grandfathered into a plan based on our date of hire. Changes to benefits should impact future hires, not current staff.
- There is fear, worry, and anxiety about our security after retirement.
- We feel there should be flexibility in any changes, in consideration of years of service to UVM.
- We feel the promise of benefits should not be broken.
- Some staff members feel they cannot trust the information related in discussions and the evaluation process that has been underway.
- We have an awareness of local industry experiences that in some cases, reinforces the distrust.
- We would like to remind the administration to remember benefits as a way to keep UVM competitive so we can recruit top quality staff & faculty.
- We want the same benefits for all – represented or non-represented – from the President on down.
- We acknowledge the responsibility for maintaining our own health & wellness, and we participate in wellness events when provided opportunities to do so, but there are always unexpected illnesses and accidents for which we rely on health insurance.

When the UBAC was charged by President Fogel on May 29, 2010 to review and discuss the projected long term impact on the UVM budget of post-retirement medical benefits, they were given clear guidelines to “identify and examine options for adjustments to the program that reasonably balance its financial impact on the University and the needs of future retirees.” The UBAC was not asked to make a recommendation - rather, their task was to “generate an advisory report that includes possible program adjustment scenarios, with associated pros and cons of each.” (You can read the entire charge here) Prior to this charge, not many in our community were aware that a University Benefits Advisory Council even existed as it did not have a website or regularly announce its meetings.
When Staff Council became aware of this planned review, we communicated to the UBAC the importance of transparency, openness, and the need to educate the UVM Community. (You can read our communication here) The UBAC took our concerns seriously and implemented all of our suggestions.

From the very beginning, Staff Council has felt that the review process has been extremely attentive to the needs and concerns of all employees and retirees. In addition to our two appointed staff representatives on the UBAC, several members of the Staff Council have attended each meeting and have been impressed by the breadth and depth of the conversations as well as the openness to ideas and public comment. While we believe that there has been an increase in transparency and openness at the University on many issues and initiatives, we also recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done in order for our community to have confidence in decisions that are made by our leaders. Large scale changes should not happen in isolation and we hope that the review of Post-Retirement Medical Benefits highlighted for our community the necessity for change to be well communicated and planned. The approaches or models that the UBAC discussed and presented to President Fogel in their draft advisory report are complex, but we encourage everyone to review them, as they have an impact on the entire UVM community. You can find the report on the UBAC website here. The UBAC has also extended its comment period to October 4th. You can send your additional questions and concerns directly to them at ubac@uvm.edu for incorporation into the report.

Your comments will be presented anonymously (without your name attached). Please know that you can also contact the Staff Council at any time with a question or concern regarding Post-Retirement Medical Benefits by emailing us at StaffCouncil@uvm.edu The UBAC’s final advisory report to the President will soon be posted, and Staff Council will still be here advocating for staff at every step of the way through this process. We will be in touch as these matters are further discussed.