

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

August 16, 2023

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** Stephen Cutler, Alan Gotlieb, Jack McCormack

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:01pm

1. Minutes of May 17, 2023, approved as submitted
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Ingrid Nelson, Associate Professor of Geology and Geosciences, grievance officer for contract issues for United Academics and co-chair of its contract administration committee, was introduced to the Board. She said that in her roles at UA she mainly answered inquiries regarding contract issues. Chair Gurdon invited her to discuss possible overlaps of interest for RFAO and UA.
    - i. A new bargaining year with a new team will begin in January, 2024. The current contract ends June 30, 2024. The Grievance Committee communicates problems to the bargaining team, particularly current gaps in coverage.
    - ii. It is her impression that the administration ignores retirement issues in discussions with UA because retirees are not in the bargaining unit. However UA members have an interest in protecting the interests of retirees because they recognize that they too will retire and face these issues eventually.
    - iii. UA finds that problems with retiree health care access and claims are often brought to its attention. UA also is asked by retirees to look into individually negotiated incentives but it has relatively little leverage outside of the general contract. These Voluntary Retirement Agreements are confidential, which serves to circumvent the CBA.
    - iv. Neither UA nor retirees have direct influence over health plan negotiations, but UA can exert influence politically and through publicity. Bringing issues to legislative committees requires complex interactions and this may involve hiring a lobbyist, which is expensive. UA cannot grieve individual arrangements made by retirees because they are not in the bargaining unit.
    - v. She suggested that RFAO prepare a list of concerns for the bargaining unit. The issues that ultimately are negotiated will depend on priorities, because everything cannot be covered.
    - vi. The Board wanted to bring to the attention of UA the fact that some retirees have no University supported health care because Cigna is not accepted by some health providers. The Board hoped that UA could look into this problem.
  - b. United Academics report. Alison Pechenick will join the legislative committee of UA. There now will be three retiree members.
  - c. Faculty Senate: Mara Saule.
    - i. The Faculty Senate's final meeting of the 2022-23 academic year was held on May 18, 2023, with approximately 115 attendees via Teams. Meetings for the 2023-24 academic year will be held alternating in person meetings with Teams meetings, starting on Monday, August 28 to be held in person (Keller Room, Ifshin Hall); the September meeting will be held via Teams.
    - ii. In addition to routine reports and conferral of degrees, the passing of Emeritus Prof. Canute VanderMeer was recognized through a Resolution in Memoriam.

- iii. The bulk of the May 18<sup>th</sup> meeting focused on two major resolutions. The previously discussed revision of the University Policy on Academic Freedom was slightly amended and passed. A discussion of a proposed resolution on the “University’s Response to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Investigation” prompted lengthy discussion. At their core, the faculty’s concerns were prompted by an OCR investigation into several bias incidents directed at Jewish students, the University’s response to those incidents, and subsequent lack of transparency by the UVM administration regarding release of the OCR report, its observations, and recommendations. The full resolution is available with the Senate minutes of the April 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. After extensive discussion and several amendments, the resolution passed.
    - iv. Discussion of the Catamount Core Curriculum Report was deferred until Fall 2023.
  - d. University Benefits Advisory Council: Ruth Farrell. There has been no meeting since the last scheduled meeting in April. The sense is that UBAC is relatively powerless so far with a heavy administration influence on the committee. Going forward it potentially may provide insights into future contract plans by UVM and be a strong voice regarding those plans.
  - e. UVM Foundation: Mara Saule. There is a sense that the Foundation will be attentive to RFAO and retiree member concerns and interests. The Foundation has a lecture series for alumni that highlights faculty members. There is a possibility that this series may coordinate in the future with a RFAO lecture series.
  - f. Discussion of lecture series. Chair Gurdon reminded the Board that there have been no lectures at our meetings since the last General Meeting. Renewing a lecture series would show members that the Board has additional roles. One possibility is to publicize UVM lectures that are available to retirees. There has been a problem informing our members of general UVM communications because the software is designed primarily for communications with students and faculty. The library will be coordinating campus-wide lectures. RFAO may be able to partner with the library to inform our members of these lectures. In addition Mara will express our interest in affiliating with the UVM Foundation lecture series. It will be important that this not be seen as primarily a fund-raising enterprise.
  - g. Treasurer’s Report: Branda
    - i. The RFAO has available to it a modest fund that originally derived from AAUP activity.
    - ii. It is titled: RFAO, a business account, At TD Bank
    - iii. Michael Gurdon and Richard Branda have access, and the Mailing Address is 385 School St, Shelburne.
    - iv. The account has been dormant for several years and was activated by a modest donation. The bank recommends yearly activity. The account will be dormant if there is no activity for 3 years.
    - v. It has accrued \$0.41 of interest over the past 2 years.
  - h. Health care plan issues.
    - i. A delay in coverage of RSV vaccine by Cigna was brought to the attention of the Board. Chair Gurdon communicated this concern to Caitlyn Sisler in HR, and a mechanism for prompt coverage was identified.
    - ii. The Board proposed that a letter to the administration be drafted to bring to its attention that some retirees have no UVM contribution to their health plan because of their geographic locations and that UVM has a responsibility to those retirees. Judy Van Houten, Alison Pechenick and Beth Mintz will prepare a draft letter.
    - iii. Members are still reporting problems with coverage of hearing aids by CIGNA.
  - i. Software access. There is a need for a common application form for use by retirees. Jane Okech will prepare one.

- j. Board meetings in person or alternating with videoconference. There was agreement by the Board that there is value to in-person meetings and they should be held periodically. There was a preference for a larger meeting room with more modern ventilation.
- k. The Board needs to plan for the next General Meeting and elections. There is a need to solicit nominations and to provide a 2 week voting interval, probably by the first week in October, with the goal of holding the General Meeting in early November.
  - i. The Current officers are:
    - 1. Michael Gurdon, President
    - 2. Beth Mintz, Vice-President
    - 3. Richard Branda, Secretary-Treasurer
  - ii. The additional elected board members are:
    - 1. Stephen Cutler
    - 2. Alan Gotlieb
    - 3. Rachel Johnson
    - 4. Alison Pechenick
    - 5. Lee Thompson
  - iii. There are 6 *ex officio* members (Jack McCormack, Taka Ashikaga, Ruth Farrell, Judy Van Houten, Dwight Matthews, and Mara Saule)
- l. The next meeting is scheduled for **September 20, 2023, at 2pm**. Michael Gurdon will be absent and the meeting will be chaired by Vice-Chair Beth Mintz. Richard Branda will be absent and Judy Van Houten will take notes.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:48pm

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

September 20, 2023

RFAO Executive Board meeting via TEAMS

In Attendance: Dwight Matthews, Judith Van Houten, Ruth Farrell, Takamaru Ashikaga, Alison Pechenick, Rachel Johnson, Mara Saule, Alan Gotlieb, Lee Thompson, Beth Mintz

Vice President Beth Mintz brought the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

1. Use of RFAO list serv: A retiree requested the All-Retirees Listserv be sent a letter encouraging people to sign a petition asking Vermont legislators to support paid leave legislation. The board unanimously decided that such materials are best distributed via the RFAO Forum email list.
2. Elections at the next RFAO Business Meeting:  
There should be an election for the officers of the RFAO at the next Business Meeting. In preparation for that, there should be a solicitation from the membership for people wishing to run for offices of President, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, and 5 at large Board Members. There was a discussion of current elected Board Members wish to run for their seats again. Stephen Cutler will not be continuing in his elected position. Four other members wish to run again.  
A request for nominations, including self-nominations, should be distributed very soon in order to meet the Constitution's description of the election process in time for the November 2 Business Meeting.
3. November 2 was chosen as the date for the next Business Meeting with special speaker. A subcommittee was charged with creating a slate of possible speakers to present to the Board. The time horizon for this process is short in that the potential speaker must be invited soon for the November 2 meeting.
4. There was an in-depth discussion of the various issues brought to individual Board members by our members, some of whom cannot find physicians or health care centers that will accept Cigna insurance. We again considered our approach to this problem. A draft letter for the UVM administration will be circulated and, before it is finalized, it will be brought to Caitlyn Sisler for her input and guidance. We also will invite Caitlyn to our next Board meeting and ask that she bring Cigna staff to attend as well.
5. A Board member described to us in detail the problems with identifying specialist physicians outside Vermont, who will accept Cigna Medicare Advantage insurance. The web site that should be a resource for identifying physicians was not functional and out of order for many days. The rep contacted by phone could not identify the kind of specialist needed. This problem should be brought to the Cigna Reps attention at our next meeting with them.  
There was a request that we should clarify the role of UVM HR in navigating these problems and concerns. Also an issue for our next meeting with Caitlyn Sisler.
6. The memo of March 7, 2023 from Michael Gurdon to the membership should be updated and distributed again because our new members have not seen it and its valuable information, including the contact information for our Cigna liaison.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Judith Van Houten

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

October 18, 2023

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** Stephen Cutler, Jack McCormack, Beth Mintz

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 1:50pm

1. Minutes of September 20, 2023, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Review of issues to be raised in the upcoming session with our guests.
    - i. The availability of providers who are not in network, and how they can be identified by members since they are not listed on the Cigna website.
    - ii. The need for a specific advocate for members who can't advocate for themselves.
    - iii. New retirees and those newly eligible for Medicare need to know who to contact for problems with coverage.
    - iv. There needs to be improvement in the ability of customer representatives to help members identify providers that accept Cigna.
  - b. Caitlyn Sisler (UVM HR) and Cigna representatives Becky Wells and Tyriney Sims-Caudle joined the meeting at 2:00pm.
    - i. In response to concerns about finding providers in some areas of the country and getting answers from Cigna in a timely fashion, the representatives replied that the directory of providers has been updated and is up and running. Cigna has not heard complaints about the directory. The regular customer representatives should handle most calls initially but problems can be escalated. However, the Board had the sense that not all customer representatives knew who to contact to escalate a problem.
    - ii. The Cigna website only lists in network providers but Cigna will work with out of network providers. To establish that a provider is available, the member needs to contact the provider and state that it is a group plan.
    - iii. Some members have complained that the Mayo Clinic won't accept our Cigna plan. It was pointed out that Mayo does not accept any medicare advantage plan.
    - iv. There has been no change in the Sarasota hospital coverage situation. Twenty-three retirees were affected and Cigna contacted them; three have taken other insurance coverage and the others found providers who accept Cigna.
    - v. Back and forth discussions continue with UVM regarding a contract but there have been no issues with processing UVM claims by Cigna.
    - vi. Some members prefer to get help with hearing aides from the Eleanor Luse Center at UVM. The Center will see patients with Cigna coverage but they must pay up front. The Center will help with filling out forms.
    - vii. HR meets with new retirees to review their benefits. HR recommends that if retirees are moving from this area, they establish the availability of local coverage by providers and hospitals.
    - viii. HR explains to new retirees that they should get good service from Cigna. If there is no resolution after a period of time they should contact HR, which will work with Cigna to escalate the problem.
    - ix. Cigna has negotiated with CMS to have 500 procedures removed from the list requiring pre-authorization. But many delays in claim payment are due to incorrect provider coding. The billing for providers is by code and is the same amount for in and out of network providers.

- x. HR continues to meet periodically with Cigna representatives, and Chris Lehman and Richard Cate are engaged in Cigna issues.
  - xi. The general sense by HR is that the need for escalation has decreased.
- c. United Academics update (Alison): UA continues to work for faculty/staff representatives on the Board of Trustees. UA is interested in learning about parking issues for retirees and may include these in a bargaining session.
- d. UBAC report (Ruth): The UBAC had its first meeting following summer break on September 21<sup>st</sup>.
  - i. Several members have resigned from the Council since the last meeting in the spring due to schedule conflicts, changes in position, and for other reasons. Ellie Miller resigned as one of the two full-time UA members and was replaced by Linden Higgins (Biology). Additionally, both Faculty Senate representatives, the Staff Council representative, and one Staff United representative resigned, and replacements were still pending at the time of the meeting. The Council still lacks members from the Teamsters and United Electrical Workers unions.
  - ii. The Council had a good discussion about priority-setting at the September meeting. CHRO Chris Lehman will attend the October meeting and share his ideas and perspective about priorities.
- e. There was no Faculty Senate meeting since the last Board meeting. The next meeting is Monday, October 24, which will be held in person (with no remote option) at 4 pm in the Keller Room, 107 Ifshin Hall (in Kalkin building).
- f. Status of letter being considered for submission to the Administration and associated strategy. The Board feels that the President needs to state the University position and go on record as being willing to work with retirees who lost insurance coverage of their preferred providers after the switch to Cigna. Retirees were promised equal coverage after the change but this has not happened for all members. Since UVM saves money when a retiree changes insurance plans to preserve provider coverage, perhaps this money could be applied to the members' new plan. The Board hopes to have a final version of a letter for the President and other officers soon.
- g. Details of the Annual General Meeting scheduled for November 2<sup>nd</sup> (along with strong encouragement of in-person attendance of Board members!)
  - i. The voting software has been refined and ballots will be going out to members on the listserv soon. Voting will close on October 31<sup>st</sup> in accordance with the by-laws. Alison will handle audio-visual support at the General Meeting, and a zoom link will be sent out 2 and one week prior to the meeting.
  - ii. The Speaker, Dr. Josh Bongard, Veinott Professor of Computer Science, will speak from 3-4pm. The title of his talk is "Organisms, robots, and AI. Past, Present, and Possible Futures".
  - iii. Board members are encouraged to attend in person and bring a friend.
  - iv. There will be light refreshments.
  - v. Following the lecture and discussion President Gurdon will provide a brief report on the Executive Board's activities during the year. One other item on the agenda will be the announcement of the results of the election of representatives to the RFAO Executive Board. The meeting will conclude with the opportunity for input and advice coming from our members in attendance.
  - vi. There was discussion of inviting retired staff through the staff council.
- h. Other Business. None

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm

The Annual Meeting is scheduled for: November 2, 2023, at 3pm

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for: November 15, 2023, at 2pm

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

November 15, 2023

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Raph Budd, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** none

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm

1. Minutes of October 18, 2023, and Annual General Meeting November 2, 2023, approved as amended.
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate report. Chair Gurdon attended the October meeting which was a rare in-person only gathering.
    - i. Presentation of degrees from the Graduate College
    - ii. There was an action item, being a Resolution in favor of Eclipse Day on April 8, intended to encourage alternative instruction for most classes, but which would also permit instructors who hold Monday-only courses or labs to petition to hold those if they believed that cancellation would adversely impact student learning. The Resolution passed on a 51 to 6 vote.
    - iii. Provost Prelock led a discussion of a draft document describing the university's Academic Success Goals. This is a process commenced in Spring 2020 and updated this Fall to support President Garimella's "strategic areas of impact", reflecting our priorities in Teaching and Learning, in Knowledge Creation, and in Engagement. She explained the evolution of the collaborative process across campus as well as the action steps that are being clarified. Questions from the assembly focused on the challenge of evaluating and rewarding interdisciplinary research.
    - iv. Dean Bryn Geffert presented on the reorganization of departments within the library system. The core issue is that many of the new hires have position descriptions which don't have natural homes within the current organizational structure. This is most evident in a lessened emphasis on purchasing (e.g. in cutting journal subscriptions) and consequently greater emphasis on borrowing. Several questions from senators revolved around concerns over support for the Health Sciences Dana Library).
  - b. United Academics update. (Mintz) United Academics is preparing for bargaining and the team will submit its final platform to membership on December 15<sup>th</sup>.
    - i. President Garimella is up for renewal of his 5 year contract and, as yet, there has been no announcement to that effect and no outreach for participation in the review process.
    - ii. UA has filed a record number of grievances this year with more coming.
    - iii. Filed an Unfair Labor Practice with the VLRB for the way it implemented its new classroom software.
    - iv. Underfunding of the university is really showing e.g. no soap in bathroom
    - v. Workload creep is taking its toll.
    - vi. UA leadership will bring these issues to the Dec board meeting.
    - vii. UA is partnering with retirees in multiple ways in addition to Alison on the Legislation Committee (e.g. retired faculty member working on Bteam in the role of consultant; retired faculty member to be on the Contract Administration Committee).
  - c. University Benefits Advisory Council. (Ruth) Notes from Oct 19th meeting:

- i. The UBAC met with CHRO Chris Lehman on October 19th. By way of introduction, he shared the following:
    1. One of his first actions was a reorganization of HR. He has created a much flatter structure with 6 direct reports.
    2. One of his top priorities is streamlining the hiring process – he believes that the many steps in the current process have resulted in the loss of potential new hires.
    3. He characterized his approach to benefits as one of not taking away benefits but in adding options.
    4. Discussion specific to UBAC and its role followed. Chris Lehman expressed an interest in utilizing UBAC for input, particularly given his unfamiliarity with higher education, as a sounding board, and as a group to vet HR communications.
  - ii. The council then discussed soliciting input from its various constituencies regarding benefits priorities. A small group, Genvieve Anthony, Cara Feldman-Hunt, and Katherine Elmer, agreed to meet to begin work on a broad communication to the University about UBAC and its role, followed by a survey/focus group.
  - iii. Other notables: UBAC is still lacking membership from several constituencies.
  - iv. The November meeting has been cancelled because of scheduling conflicts. The next meeting is in December.
  - v. The RFAO board discussed having Chris Lehman meet with it soon.
- d. Review of the Annual General Meeting. The consensus was that the speaker was excellent, with positive feedback from members. It was agreed that this format should be continued. The low attendance was disappointing. Prior to COVID there were luncheon meetings with good attendance. This could be considered for a spring meeting or the Annual General Meeting.
- e. Letter to President Garimella: status and next steps (Gurdon) The letter was sent on October 24th. When there was no forthcoming response, Chair Gurdon sent a second letter reminding the President that the Board was awaiting his response. Chair Gurdon then was contacted by Chris Lehman who indicated that he would look at the data with Caitlyn Sisler and follow up with Chair Gurdon.
- f. Discussion of retiree-relevant issues which might be conveyed to the UA negotiations committee. Formulation of the negotiations for the collective bargaining agreement will begin in December. The RFAO Board should send a memo for consideration by the bargaining team. Although retirees are not covered by the contract, parts of the contract are relevant to retirees such as HR benefits (parking, library access and e-mail) and health benefits. Drawing the attention of UA and active faculty to retiree issues highlights them.
- i. There is continuing concern that e-mail access might be curtailed by the administration, and the Board should call attention to this concern. E-mail access is critical to retirees for communication with UVM. Tech support for retirees should be requested.
  - ii. The administration apparently continues to attribute the campus parking shortage at least in part to retirees and this could become an issue again. The Board has requested that data be collected on retiree parking utilization but this has not been done. The sense of the Board is that on any given day few retirees are parking on campus.
  - iii. Retirees have guaranteed access to library books but it is not clear that this extends to on-line books and journals.
  - iv. Retirees should be involved in health care benefits discussions. UA should collaborate with retirees on the wording of the contract regarding health care.
- g. Determination of the optimal modality for our Board meetings during the remainder of the academic year. During and since COVID the Board has met electronically, which has been efficient. In discussion the Board favored meeting periodically in person with electronic support for members who reside at a distance. The Senate Conference Room was not considered satisfactory for an in-



person meeting given its size. Ralph Budd will look into an adequate meeting room at the Medical School with the goal of having a hybrid meeting on January 17<sup>th</sup> and again in the spring.

h. Other business

- i. Retired Scholars Awards: Applications were reviewed by a committee consisting of Alan Gotlieb, Lee Thompson, Taka Ashikaga and a Provost's Office nominee. The successful submissions are recorded below.
  1. Daniel Baker (Associate Professor Emeritus of Community Development and Applied Economics). To support the project "Utilization, Impacts and Sustainability of the Ecological Sugar Project: Assessment and Recommendations for Technology Transfer". The award will assist in funding field interviews by local partners of 30 sugar producers in Honduras regarding their use of adapted maple syrup evaporators, utilizing a survey instrument developed by Baker. The findings will be submitted to a respected rural development publication. \$2000
  2. Cameron Davis (Senior Lecturer Emerita of Art and Art History). To complete the set design for Emergent Universe Oratorio (composer Sam Guarnaccia). In partnership with Albany Pro Musica, the EUO Set Design is a video animation design projected onto a screen behind the choir, orchestra, and orator throughout the 80 minute performance which is scheduled to take place at RPI in Troy, NY. \$2000
  3. Scott Morriscal (Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry, and of Microbiology & Molecular Genetics). To cover publication costs for a journal article to be based on research data already collected on the virus but not yet publicly available. The running title is "Expression, purification & characterization of cyanobacteriophage-encoded glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase enzyme". \$2000
  4. Robert Rodgers (Professor Emeritus of Classics). To support research assistance in the verification of citations from medieval manuscripts and other publications. This will facilitate the timely completion of a Critical Edition of *Res Rusticae* which Rodgers has under contract with Oxford University Press and its Classical Texts series. \$1000
- ii. Retirees are not receiving newsworthy announcements from UVM or the administration. Part of the problem is that these announcements come from Communications and may include information not relevant to retirees. It may be necessary to develop another listserv for members who want these announcements since some complain of too many contacts on the current listserv.
- iii. The Board discussed polling members about their academic activities to demonstrate to the administration that retirees continue to contribute to the academic enterprise. Ralph Budd and Dwight Matthews will draft a survey to include research activities, mentoring and committee membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:21pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: **January 17, 2024 at 2pm; there will be no December meeting.**

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

January 17, 2024

Hybrid meeting with Video Conference on Microsoft Teams and in person in Medical Education Building, Room 309

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Ralph Budd, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** none

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:02pm. He noted that the last in-person meeting of the Board was 4 years ago.

1. Minutes of November 15, 2023, approved.
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate Reports (Maura Saule)
    - i. Faculty Senate meeting of 11/17/2023 (held via Teams)
      1. Faculty Senate president Tom Borchart started the meeting with a few announcements, including mention of the delay of a Senate report evaluating the libraries' proposed reorganization plan due to lack of consultation with affected academic units as well as with Libraries' faculty and staff. Also, Pres. Borchart mentioned that the UVM portal, MyUVM, is scheduled to be upgraded in the Spring semester.
      2. Most importantly, President Borchart addressed the very recent shooting of three young men near the campus and he decried--at length and with passion--any hate, violence, or racism and discrimination in our community.
      3. A lengthy discussion of academic freedom and outside speakers followed, prompted by the rescheduling of the Will Miller Social Justice Lecture Series speaker after October 7th's attack on Israel and bombings on Gaza. Trent Klingerman, Vice President and General Counsel, addressed concerns surrounding the timeline of the rescheduling and change of venue to virtual lecture. A detailed summary of this presentation can be found on the Faculty Senate website and its meeting minutes. Concerns largely centered on academic freedom, communication, and consultation.
      4. A report of the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Arts Committee's review of a Water Resources Institute proposal summarized the proposal and its benefits to research as well as the curriculum. The proposal will be voted on at the December 18th Senate meeting.
      5. Jay Jacobs, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, presented an overview of how UVM has responded to the Supreme Court decision on Affirmative Action. In short, while race can no longer be considered, in and of itself, as a factor in admissions, race can be considered via mention in application essays.
    - ii. Faculty Senate meeting of December 18, 2023 (held remotely via Teams)
      1. In his remarks, President Borchert provided an update on discussions regarding the decision to hold the 2023 Will Miller Social Justice lecture. The administration with the Senate will conduct a further review of decision and report back to the Senate.
      2. A resolution in memoriam for Jeremiah Dickerson, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, was read.
      3. The resolution to establish the Water Resources Institute at UVM was voted on and passed.

4. An overview of the new "UVM Go" program was presented by Assoc. Provost Dickinson. UVM Go is a program that engages students in short-term international and community service endeavors.
5. A presentation of the new MyUVM portal transition was presented by Registrar Veronika Carter, labelled the "Experience" project. Slides are available on the Faculty Senate website. Implementation of "Experience" will occur in fall 2024, with training, testing, and transition during spring and summer.
6. In his annual financial update to the Senate, Richard Cate addressed three specific issues as requested by President Borchert: current tuition strategy; employee and retiree health insurance; and student housing expansion plans.

Re: Tuition strategy. After holding tuition flat for several years, inflationary effects have demanded that this year the administration increase tuition for out of state students by 3.5% while holding in state tuition flat. In addition, in state and out of state students in 3 colleges (Nursing and Health Sciences, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, and Grossman School of Business) are now assessed an additional \$1000.00 student fee prompted by accreditation requirements for small class sizes for labs and practica, as well as national norms for highly competitive faculty salaries.

Re: Housing. Three projects are in various stages of planning and building. At the South Burlington Market Street (off Dorset Street) location a complex housing 290 students will open for the fall 2024. Also currently under construction is an adjacent housing facility with 35 units intended for faculty and staff. An additional housing facility in the same location is planned for fall 2025 opening, with 620 beds. A third housing facility for 545 undergraduate students is planned for construction in the current DoubleTree Hotel far parking lot, to open summer 2026. Finally, zoning permits are currently being pursued with both Burlington and South Burlington for student housing facilities in the fields at the corner of East Avenue and Williston Road.

Re: Health insurance. VP Cate gave an overview of current employee insurance via Blue Cross/Blue Shield, that has now affiliated with a Michigan organization for administrative support--although the plan itself is not affected by this affiliation. Regarding the CIGNA Advantage plan for retirees, VP Cate observed that UVM engaged the plan for financial reasons, specifically that it saved UVM \$7M/year through CIGNA's very competitive bid. While he said that there have been "bumps" in the implementation, overall UVM is making good progress with CIGNA in resolving most issues although there are still some issues left to address. When asked by a faculty member whether UVM is reconsidering CIGNA for retirees, he said there is no plan for reconsideration of the contract with CIGNA. Another faculty member asked how faculty provide the administration input about CIGNA issues. VP Cate said it is both through the "retiree association" and through emails to HR.

- b. United Academics Update (Beth and Alison). There is U/A concern about the enrollment and housing plans of the University for an additional 1000 beds and 1500 more graduate students. U/A encouraged the Faculty Senate to fill its committee for academic freedom. U/A has been asked to administer a proposed faculty bequest, because such donations made to UVM incur a 5% fee. A debate was initiated regarding Israel because some Jewish faculty feel unsafe. After discussion U/A did not take a position as a unit on the call for a cease fire but felt it best to leave this as an individual decision. The Bargaining Unit has developed a platform but it has not been disclosed yet. U/A continues to work in Montpelier to add faculty representation on the UVM Board of Trustees. There is a concern by U/A about whether the review process for the University President is being followed.
- c. UBAC Report (Ruth) University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) update 1-17-2024

- i. The UBAC met on December 21, 2023.
  - ii. Membership: Andrey Ukhov, professor of finance from the Grossman School, attended the December 21 meeting as a new UA representative to the Council. UBAC still lacks required representation from United Electrical Workers, Teamsters, and UVM Staff United, and recommended representation from the Staff Council and the Faculty Senate. Caitlyn Sisler is working on getting this representation in place.
  - iii. Working Groups: The Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) is a UBAC standing committee yet to be established. The Council discussed the importance of establishing the standing committee. In addition, the Council expressed interest in forming additional working groups on childcare benefits, retiree benefits, and employ wellness. There was also interest in forming a working group with expertise in conducting focus groups and surveys to gather information from the council's various constituents. Following the meeting, the Chair sent out an MS form seeking individual member interest in specific working groups and preferred meeting times for Spring semester.
  - iv. Council/Administration Communications: Some Council members noted that with the cancelling of our November meeting and other intervening factors, there was little time for the Council to provide input on the 15% increase in premiums for health care coverage, and in the decision about how to address the new Vermont law disallowing incentives for mail-order prescriptions. On the former, the 15% premium increase for health care coverage was a straight pass-through from BCBS. On the latter, 2.5% of UVM employees benefit from a \$100 cost saving on prescription deductibles by using mail-order providers. UVM proposed eliminating this benefit for the 2.5% of employees that utilize it to bring the University in compliance with this new law.
  - v. The administration will provide a benefits milestone/decision schedule for the next eighteen months to facilitate timely input.
  - vi. Next Meeting: The Council will meet in person on January 18th.
- d. Chris Lehman, the University's new Chief Human Resources Officer, was introduced to the Board, and Board members introduced themselves to him. Chair Gurdon stated that over 600 faculty and administrative officers are members of the RFAO. Mr. Lehman said that although he is new to education, he has multiple family and acquaintance ties to academics. Previously he served as CHRO at OTC Industrial Technology, a \$1 billion engineered equipment distribution and service company and he has had HR leadership roles at various diversified international manufacturing and distribution firms. He feels that he brings experience from private equity and can apply business principles to education. He recognizes that bringing an approach different from other HR directors may be seen by some as a radical change. His guiding principles are to build trust, have conversations, and treat people better than the contract. There has been some turnover of personnel in HR, with some people leaving and others retiring. For the most part vacancies were filled internally, with two new positions to be filled. Of particular interest to the Board is a plan to hire a retiree engagement coordinator who will look to improve relationships with retirees and strengthen ties with UVM. This person will seek to improve communication between retirees and UVM and enhance coordination between HR, Cigna and retirees. Following his introductory comments there were some questions from Board members. One concern has been the difficulty in finding physical therapy providers in our area who will accept Cigna. He said that he would look into the situation particularly as it relates to Birchwood Manor. He was asked about reports that Cigna was negotiating to sell its Medicare advantage program to another insurance company. He said that he has no new information but his hope is that if sold, it will be to a stronger company with a larger provider network. Currently there are issues with Cigna's limited network and its administration of coverage. Converting to a new company plan with an even smaller network would be a major hardship for retirees who live in other parts of the country. He was asked if HR would consider offering new retirees a choice between Medicare with medigap or a Medicare advantage program. He thought this idea was worth further consideration.

- e. Review, and possibly approve, the draft survey of our membership (Ralph and Dwight). Ralph and Dwight presented a Draft Survey of UVM-related activities by retired faculty members. They are hoping for a 25% response rate and perhaps submitting it to members at 5 year intervals. There was discussion of what period of the retirement should be emphasized (early, recent or all years). The Board recommended proceeding with its distribution to members. Ralph will prepare a cover e-mail and Dwight will distribute it.
- f. Other business.
  - i. There has been no response yet from President Garimella to the letter from Chair Gurdon regarding health insurance coverage gaps for some members, but Chair Gurdon discussed the letter with Chris Lehman.
  - ii. Chair Gurdon will not be available for the February meeting and will ask Vice Chair Mintz to lead the meeting. Secretary Branda also will be away and Ralph Budd will keep the minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: February 21, 2024, at 2pm.

**Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda**

## Minutes RFAO Executive Board Meeting

**February 21, 2024**

Hybrid meeting at LCOM MedEd203

**Present:** 7 members present in person (Ralph Budd, Takamaru Ashikaga, Judith Van Houten, Ruth Farrell, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson, Dwight Matthews) and two by Zoom (Alison Pechenick and Alan Gotlieb).

**Absent:** Michael Gurdon, Richard Branda, Beth Mintz

**Call to order:** Judy Van Houten presided, in the absence of President Michael Gurdon. Meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM with

**Approval of minutes of the January 17, 2024 meeting of the Board.** Accepted

**Discussion of the visit from Chris Lehman, Chief of HR.** Just received word that Liv Townsend of HR has been appointed as Retiree and Engagement Coordinator. She has previously worked in HR since May, 2023, first as Onboarding Specialist (4 months) and then as Benefits Processing Specialist (6 months). The group felt Liv should be invited to a future meeting. Feeling about Chris Lehman's visit was that he spoke at a high level in broad brushstrokes, but that it was time to discuss more the details of our health plan. Still have not heard on the letter Michael Gurdon sent to President Garimella.

Concern was expressed about what the future will be of our Cigna coverage, given the sale of their Medicare Advantage division. The sale is pending approval. Due to start in early 2025. This should be a key point in discussions with UA. Concern was raised about coverage for those who cannot use Cigna. They should be offered an equivalent plan that works for them ("No retiree left behind"). We are now in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of three-year contract. Alison will express these views to UA and particularly to emphasize that UVM owns this responsibility. Need also to raise issue of lack of timeliness of communications and transparency of HR with RFAO (and not via UA but directly with RFAO). This concern dominates over other issues of software access, parking, and library use. It was pointed out that President Garimella is undergoing his five-year review, so this might work to our advantage.

### **UA report (Alison Pechenick)**

Here are the United Academics (UA) Executive Council (EC) report from Beth (attended 1/30/24) and Alison (attended 2/13/24).

1. The Full-time Faculty Bargaining Team's first bargaining session was on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>. Retiree Joel Goldberg is serving as a consultant on the team. Jane Knodell, Bargaining Chair, informed the EC that she had met with representatives of RFAO (Alison and Beth), and is crafting language in response to that discussion.
2. Retirees are always welcome to participate with UA.
3. UA would like to take a grievance to the VLRB but they don't believe that it would be heard by the current board.
4. UA co-hosted a Burlington mayoral debate in 2/15.
5. The Board of Trustees has invited faculty and staff to provide feedback during President Garimella's five-year evaluation.

6. UA Legislative Affairs Committee members will testify today (2/21) in the Vermont House Education Committee hearing in support of HR.446, to “Democratize UVM’s Board” to add faculty and staff as voting members on the UVM Board of Trustees. This bill has overwhelming support from UVM’s faculty and staff unions, with large-majority approved resolutions by the Faculty Senate and SGA, and passed overwhelmingly in last year’s Vermont Senate. There is a similar bill in progress for VSU. A feeling was expressed that the UVM Board is becoming more a closed session with reduced input from faculty/staff, or even University Senate.

### **Senate Report (Mara Saule)**

Faculty Senate Meeting, 1/22/24

Held remotely via Teams

The January 2024 meeting of the Faculty Senate was attended by approximately 100 participants via the Teams platform. The following items were discussed:

1. During his introductory remarks, Tom Borchert announced that the review committee to consider campus safety and academic freedom has been constituted and will report to the Senate in February or March.
2. The Consent Agenda presenting various program changes was passed, including several new minors, changes in credit hours required in programs, the uncontested deactivation of the Clinical Nurse Leaders Program.
3. A resolution in memoriam was read and passed for Prof. Frank Manchel, Professor Emeritus of English.
4. A proposal was presented for changes to the student attendance policy regarding out of class expectations. It will be voted on in February.
5. There was a presentation about a new Howard Hughes Medical Institute Teacher Training Grant designed to foster an inclusive and welcoming climate for students on campus.

Any attendant materials in support of the above agenda items can be found on the Faculty Senate website.

### **UBAC University Benefits Advisory Committee report (Ruth Farrell)**

UBAC has been busy with two recent meetings, including first meeting of health insurance working group. Jane Knodell is now back as a UBAC member. At January meeting discussed and finalized two working groups (Health insurance group which Ruth is on) and employee wellness working group. Issue of faculty housing with new construction was raised. Raised issue that health insurance also includes retirees, and that the decision process by the University needs to be transparent. The 15% increase in premiums despite fewer claims is a concern (UVM self-insures). Will be meeting for SWOT discussion. Consultant from Hickock and Boardman made a presentation on employee-provided health insurance.

Alison raised question of involvement of BC/BS with the company that bought out Cigna MA portion. Hard to conceive how all this will work out by January 2025 when it is time for a new contract. Given that compressed timeline, Alan stressed need to have Chris Lehman and Liv Townsend have another meeting with RFAO to discuss all these issues very soon. We also need to know what proportion of retirees are not in Vermont. Judy will ask Beth Mintz to extend invitation to Chris and Liv.

**Update on survey of retiree activities (Ralph Budd and Dwight Matthews)**

The survey was highly successful in terms of responses from 122 of about 650 retired faculty (18.8%). Very preliminary analysis (survey closed just two days ago) shows that responses were across the spectrum of years retired, including one at 30 years post-retirement. Approximately 50% of retired faculty have been involved with publishing and mentoring. One recent retiree won a Tony Award for costume design of the Broadway hit “*Some Like it Hot.*”

**New topic: Should we have a Spring Luncheon for retirees?**

The group felt this was probably a good idea and should include a retiree guest speaker (e.g. winner of the Tony Award).

**New Business.** Alan proposed a resolution for a Zoom (or Teams)-only meeting with HR group in the very near future.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Ralph Budd

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**Supplement:** From Beth Mintz’s November memo to UA Bargaining Team:

Retired Faculty and Administrative Officers Organization  
University of Vermont

Memo

To: United Academics Bargaining Team  
From: RFAO  
Date: November 17, 2023  
Subject: Upcoming bargaining

In preparation for the upcoming Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations, the Retired Faculty and Administrative Officers Organization would like to draw your attention to some of the issues of concern to retired faculty. Although we understand that UA cannot negotiate for retirees, some of our rights and privileges are specified in the CBA and, in this way, guaranteed to your members, when they retire. These include:

Email access

At present, use of UVM email is contractually guaranteed to retirees, but in past bargaining sessions, the administration has proposed an end to this practice. Thus far, this has been dropped in the final throes of bargaining, but recent events have us worried about losing this very important benefit. In recent years, retirees have lost access to university software and all IT support, and we fear that email may be next. Thus, we would like to underscore how important email is to retirees, as a vehicle for remaining active members of the UVM community. Please note that the lack of IT support occasionally raises difficulty for us when



UVM changes its email platform, and, thus, we wonder if you might consider raising email support for retirees as an issue to bring to the table.

#### Library journals

At present, the CBA guarantees retirees access to library books, but there is no mention of on-line materials. Although at present, accessing electronic journals and other resources has not been a problem, given our experience with losing software, it would really be nice to get this codified.

#### Health Care coverage costs

Last year, UVM switched from a Blue Cross/Blue Shield Medicare Advantage plan to one offered by CIGNA. A few of our members live in parts of the country where major providers refuse to accept or bill CIGNA and, therefore, those individuals effectively found themselves without insurance. Since UVM saved an enormous amount of money with this change, we think it fair for them to contribute to costs incurred by those who have had to forgo university coverage and purchase insurance on the open market.

Initial requests on this have been denied and we recently sent a letter to President Garimella reiterating our concerns. We have not yet gotten a response but, *if denied*, we wonder if you might consider raising this for future retirees. The number of people who have had to purchase insurance is small, but we worry about the precedent that this sets.

#### Parking

At present, the CBA specifies that retirees are entitled to campus parking. We understand that lack of parking is an enormous issue for faculty, and Parking Services often blames retirees for the problem. We do not believe that we are at fault, and we assume that a very limited number of retirees are on campus at any one time. Although we have asked that our presence be measured, Parking Services has not agreed to collect any data about this. Many retirees want to remain part of the larger UVM community and parking is crucial for this, especially since some are not as mobile as they once were.

Additionally, we would like to draw your attention to the question of parking fees. When we met with representatives from Parking Services, they did not seem to understand the progressive nature of campus parking fees, complaining that while retirees parked for free, their poorly paid employees were subject to fees. When we explained that the cost of parking was calculated as a percentage of wages and that retired faculty, who had subsidized those workers throughout their careers, no longer had a paycheck, this didn't seem salient.

In sum, then, we do not believe that retirees are responsible for the parking problems on campus, and we believe that we have paid our fair share for parking throughout our careers. We raise these issues, in case the administration brings them to the table.

Thank you for considering our requests. We look forward to hearing from you.

Submitted by Ralph Budd

## RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

March 20, 2024

Video Conference on ZOOM

### MINUTES

**Present:** Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** Taka Ashikaga, Ralph Budd, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:04pm

1. Minutes of February 21, 2024, approved as amended.
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Liv Townsend (Retiree and Employee Engagement Coordinator) joined the Board meeting for a conversation. She was welcomed by Chair Gurdon.
    - i. By way of introduction, she said that she has been with HR at UVM for about 9 months and was an internal transfer to her current position. Since she had previously been working with retiree benefits it was a natural transition. Her current job description has 3 parts: 1) She is the liaison for all UVM retirees with Cigna. She meets with Cigna representatives bi-weekly and reviews claims; 2) She plans retiree engagement events and welcomes RFAO input; and 3) She coordinates employee recognition and staff awards. She is not a member of UBAC, where Caitlyn Sisler is the HR representative, but she is a member of the Summit Committee that works with UBAC. Currently Caitlyn is forwarding Cigna issues to her, so she is the first round of contact with Cigna and it is best to email her first. She will provide the Board with a recommended sequence of contacts that members should follow if they encounter problems with the Cigna health plan or its contractors such as for hearing or vision.
    - ii. She meets with Chris Lehman, the Chief Human Resources Officer, bi-weekly. One issue of interest to the Board is the problem some members have had finding satisfactory Cigna coverage. Chris and she are discussing a buy-out option in which the member would receive a buy-out payment in lieu of Cigna coverage. The member would not need to provide a reason. The member would be offered a renewal of the buy-out each November or if there has been a major life changing event. The general program will be available to all retirees but not tailored specifically to a member.
    - iii. She reported that Cigna has a new agreement with Birchwood for rehab services and no new patients have been turned away.
    - iv. She was asked by Board members whether VBA would be competitive in the next round of contract negotiations, whether the company that has acquired Cigna medicare advantage plans will work with BC/BS in more than the current 5 states, and whether the new company will be out of network with UVM too. HR does not have answers to these questions at present.
    - v. The Board again brought up the issue of inconsistent communication from UVM which harms retiree engagement. She said that she is looking into a newsletter for all retirees but will need to update a contact list. There remains a problem integrating our listserv with Communications to forward links to news from UVM.
    - vi. IT security remains a concern in general and more specifically as it relates to ex-employees. There is a question of who should have UVM email. There has been preliminary discussion of a separate email for retirees, perhaps with a link to UVM email. The Board was very concerned about this proposal because it would be highly disruptive for retirees. It was pointed out that many retirees remain academically active at UVM and function like

employees without a paycheck. The Board felt that there should be early discussion with Chris Lehman regarding this proposal.

- vii. The final topic was retiree engagement. The Board may reinstate a spring luncheon with a speaker. Liv was supportive of this plan and offered to help with arrangements. Holding the meeting at UVM may be faster to schedule but more costly than the previous venue, Delta hotel. There will be enquires of both. The meeting could include a table for Cigna representatives to answer questions.
- b. Faculty Senate Report (Mara). There was a small turnout for the February 26<sup>th</sup> regular and special meeting. There was a call for nominations. In memoriam were held for Plant and Soil Science Emeritus Professor Norman Pellett and History Professor Frank Nicosia. There were two roundtable discussions. The first topic was the 5-year review of President Garimella and input from the Faculty Senate, and the second was the role of the Faculty Senate in the future. The next meeting is March 25<sup>th</sup>. Mara was asked if the Faculty Senate has an ombudsman to help negotiate health plan problems; she will look into this and report back.
- c. United Academics Update (Alison). United Academics leadership continues to work hard and professionally on behalf of full- and part-time faculty.
  - i. Negotiations are currently underway for the full-time unit. The bargaining team has woven our health insurance concerns (conveyed after being vetted by RFAO Exec) into proposed language falling within Article 20 (Benefits) of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and will bring that to the table during the Article 20 bargaining session later this month.
  - ii. The H.446 proposed legislation (faculty and staff voting seats on UVM Board of Trustees) was not voted upon in the House Education Committee before “crossover” (bills must leave their committees by this date), but there is still a path forward for the legislation during the current session. UA encourages any interested retirees to lobby their legislators in support of this endeavor.
- d. UBAC Report (Ruth) There was no fall meeting but working groups are meeting. The Health Insurance Working Group heard from Steve May from Hickok-Boardman. He said that UVM is self-insured for health insurance with an umbrella policy to cover very large claims. The UVM plan is administered by BC/BS. Last year UVM paid out \$75 million in claims. Any further attempts at cost containment would involve benefits and the structure of the policy.
- e. Discussion of the Retiree Survey and ideas regarding how the results should be used. There was an impressive response to the survey that provides an opportunity to talk about retiree contributions to UVM. There is a need to communicate this information to the President and to the Foundation. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.
- f. Other business. The Board will look into holding a spring-early summer luncheon, perhaps the first week in June. The meeting will include a speaker and a table for Cigna. There was a discussion of possible speakers. Chair Gurdon and Secretary/Treasurer Branda will investigate possible venues.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: April 17, 2024, at 2pm.

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

April 17, 2024

Hybrid meeting: Video Conference on Zoom and Med Education 305 in person.

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick

**Absent:** Ralph Budd, Lee Thompson, Mara Saule

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:02pm

1. Minutes of March 20, 2024, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate Report (Mara) The March 25, 2024, Faculty Senate meeting was held remotely via Teams. The bulk of this Senate meeting was devoted to a presentation by Provost Patty Prelock of UVM's newly launched "Planetary Health Initiative" (see below). As always, detailed minutes as well as presentation slides can be found on the Faculty Senate website.
    - i. In addition to routine announcements about upcoming Senate elections and other general reminders to Senators, President Borchert summarized the results of February's roundtable discussions regarding UVM President Garimella's achievements and areas for improvement as part of his 5-year review. Three areas were highlighted: the faculty's confusion regarding his Strategic Initiatives and "Amplifying our Impact" priorities (including seeking R1 research status); faculty's appreciation of his focus on research and his handling of the pandemic; and the importance of communicating with faculty more often and more substantively.
    - ii. President Borchert indicated that he will be increasing communication directly with the Board of Trustees through regular meetings with the Board Executive Committee. Board Chair Ron Lumbra has been invited to the May Senate meeting.
    - iii. Regarding meeting modalities for the next year, the Senate will continue to alternate between meetings held remotely on Teams and meetings in person on campus.
    - iv. The rest of the meeting was devoted to an overview of the new Planetary Health Initiative. Planetary Health is generally defined as "the understanding that human health and human civilization depend on flourishing natural systems and the wise stewardship of those natural systems." (from a 2015 Rockefeller Foundation Report summarized in *The Lancet*). For UVM, this umbrella unifying theme will engage existing academic units and centers across the University to leverage programmatic synergies and provide opportunities for public and private funding. For more detail, please see Provost Prelock's presentation slides.
  - b. United Academics Update (Alison)
    - i. The UA Bargaining team continues its work negotiating the next Collective Bargaining Agreement between UVM Administration and the Full-Time Faculty. No further news yet about any language protecting the promised level of retiree healthcare benefits.
    - ii. The UA Legislative Affairs Committee has engaged long and well with members of the Vermont Legislature, in support of H.446, a bill that would put voting faculty and staff members on the UVM Board of Trustees. Success this legislative session continues to be logistically possible, yet elusive, especially as the Education committees are grappling with major, statewide issues: moving beyond property tax-based preK-12 funding models, remediating school campus pollution, and responding to the Governor's controversial appointment of Education Secretary.
    - iii. Beth Mintz attended the most recent UA Exec meeting and reports as follows:

1. The President's office has taken Waterman Manor and the Phi Beta Kappa room for their own; faculty are very upset about it.
  2. The new HR Director has an approach and style that does not mesh well with UA.
- c. UBAC Developments (Ruth) Meeting 03-21-2024
- i. Opportunity to broaden travel reimbursement. At the request of HR, the UBAC reviewed a proposed updating of UVM's current health plan to include coverage for travel costs for medically necessary procedures that can't be received locally. The current plan offers travel for some limited procedures – this would broaden the coverage. HR is still in the early design phase, looking for advice on annual caps, and per diems or limits on specific covered costs.
  - ii. Working Group Reports
    1. Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) At its first meeting the HIWG clarified its scope as including active and retiree health insurance, as well as decision processes and transparency of benefits decisions. The HIWG agreed to a SWOT approach in developing recommendations. At its second meeting the HIWG received a detailed presentation about how UVM's current, self-insured health plan works and recent claims experience.
    - a. Employee Wellness Working Group (EWWG) The EWWG held its first organizing meeting. There are many issues to address, including raising awareness of current wellbeing programming, how to include other voices and offerings, incentives for participation, training for supervisors about the importance of employee involvement in wellbeing programs, and more. Funding is an issue that needs to be addressed – the current program is supported solely by BCBS.
    - b. Health Insurance Working Group 04-19-2024. This month's HIWG meeting is scheduled for Friday. The principal topic for discussion will be the potential for a lower premium/higher deductible plan and Health Savings Account (HSA) as an additional option for current employees. A faculty member from the Political Science Department, Alex Garlick, whose academic interest is health care policy, has been added to the Working Group.
- d. Spring Luncheon Status (Michael). June 4<sup>th</sup> was selected for the Luncheon. Enquires were made of the Delta Marriott hotel because that was the location for previous luncheons, but the cost would be considerably higher than in the past. Chair Gurdon and Liv Townsend found the Davis Center at UVM to be a more practical and cost-effective venue. A menu has been selected and a speaker has been identified. Rachael Floreani, who directs the Engineered Biomaterials Research Laboratory at UVM's College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, will discuss her studies of cell-cultivated meat. Chair Gurdon is waiting to hear the final price and about potential sources of support for the luncheon. There will not be a business meeting during the luncheon. Cigna representatives will have a table at the luncheon and be available to answer members' questions about the health plan in person. A Hold-the-Date notice will be sent out soon to members.
- e. Discussion of implications of UVM account lockout on death of retiree (Alison). The death of a colleague brought this important and unexpected issue to the attention of the RFAO Board. His UVM account was frozen soon after his death, and his wife was unable to access any of his documents including an email account and "zoo files" material related to a book in preparation. The spouse has been working with UVM's Information Security Office & Identity and Account Management, whose staff coordinates such matters with the Office of General Counsel. Thus far, the survivor has been provided with a plain text list of folder names, so they may indicate which folders contain items of interest to the family. It is a long process, constrained by legal restrictions, several staff layers, and finite staffing resources. UVM's policy states that use of UVM email for personal use should be "occasional and incidental". This is contrary to the reality for many UVM affiliates, for many years, but it was cited in our case study by UVM General Counsel to the case-assigned IT tech staffer.

Given the complexity of myriad regulations; our litigious climate and institutions' corresponding legal concerns; the dependence on tech staff availability to mine the data; the fact that it's unlikely survivors will be able to retrieve all files, emails and attachments, even in the best of circumstances; and the time, shock, and energy required to engage in the retrieval exercise, RFAO members should be encouraged to back up, if not also move, all non-expendable electronic materials off of UVM-contracted servers. Note that this situation is not specific to retirees, nor solely to faculty and administrative officers. Finally, the Medical School has a completely separate IT presence. The consistent policies reflected in other institutions' websites suggest that this landscape is guided by Federal and State regulations, and not by institutional caprice.

Following discussion by the Board, Chair Gurdon asked Allison Pechenick and Dwight Matthews to draft a concise communication to alert our members to this issue and share this information with our point persons in other faculty and staff cohorts.. The Board recommended that someone from Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) be invited to our next meeting to learn more about the problem and possible solutions that can be recommended to members.

- f. Review of membership activities survey and next steps (Dwight). There were 121 completed and 33 unfinished surveys. Most were completed in under 10 minutes. Most activities were reported during the first 5 to 10 years of retirement. There were about 50 academic manuscripts, 25 book chapters, and 25 course and/or lecture participation at UVM or other institutions reported. There also were journal review and editing activities, mentoring, and board and committee activities. About 16% of respondents have contributed financially to UVM. These results will be collated and developed into talking points to present to the administration and foundations.
- g. Cigna issues. The Board was made aware of an issue involving breast cancer prevention. Following a mammogram, an ultrasound is recommended for women with dense breast tissue. A member was billed for the procedure because it was coded as screening rather than diagnostic. This matter was referred to Liv Townsend who confirmed that Cigna covers this diagnostic procedure with no copay.
- h. Other business. Chair Gurdon has not received a response yet from Chris Lehman regarding a possible opt-out for members from the health plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: May 15, 2024, at 2pm

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

May 15, 2024

Hybrid meeting: Video Conference on Zoom and Med Education 306 in person

### MINUTES

**Present:** Taka Ashikaga, Ralph Budd, Richard Branda, Ruth Farrell, Alan Gotlieb, Michael Gurdon, Judith Van Houten, Rachel Johnson, Dwight Matthews, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

**Absent:** none

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2pm

1. Minutes of April 17, 2024, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate Report (Mara) Faculty Senate meeting of April 29, 2024 (held remotely via Teams)
    - i. The April Faculty Senate meeting was attended by approximately 125 people (68 senators). In addition to routine announcements and committee updates, there were three major presentations and topics of discussion:
      1. The Faculty Recruitment, Retention, and Progression Report presented by Associate Provost Jane Okech. The extensive and detailed report outlines trends in faculty recruitment and retention, particularly for faculty of color, over the 5-year period of 2018-2023. Notably, numbers of faculty of color increased by 2.3% during this period.
      2. The report of the After-Action Review Committee reviewing the circumstances surrounding cancellation of the October 2023 lecture by Muhammed El-Kurd. The report was shared with Pres. Garimella and several recommendations had already been implemented, such as engagement of University governance groups in decision-making.
      3. The Catamount Core Curriculum Committee (CCCC) update presented by Prof. Kat Scollins. President Borchert also reported that the CCCC will move toward becoming a standing committee of the Senate in fall 2025.
      4. Any associated slides and full reports cited in above discussions are available via the meeting agenda on the Faculty Senate website.
    - ii. Special Meeting of the Faculty Senate May 8, 2024 (held remotely via Teams, with approx. 75 attendees). The Special Meeting was called to provide Senators with direct information regarding events on campus surrounding the student protest of the ongoing situation in Gaza and Israel, the associated encampment on Harris Commons, and the ensuing student disciplinary process. Attendance of senators at the meeting was not taken, the meeting was not recorded and there were no motions or actions taken. Formal speakers included Tom Borchert who gave an overview of pertinent UVM policies and procedures, Michael Schirling (Director of Safety and Compliance), David Nestor (Dean of Students), and Keith Burt (faculty in Psychological Sciences) on the AAUP guidance on the rights and freedoms of students. Overall, the UVM student protests have been peaceful and contained, with little participation of non-UVM individuals. A lengthy and engaged discussion by faculty followed the presentations.
  - b. UBAC update (Ruth)
    - i. Alan Shashok, UVM Staff Council Administrator, has been in touch with UBAC's two RFAO members to gather information about RFAO procedures and practices. Staff Council is looking to form a similar group for retired staff in order to get retired staff membership on UBAC.



- ii. UBAC Meeting: 04-18-2024 After a cost analysis showed that expanding travel reimbursements for non-locally available medical procedures would add considerable expense, the consensus within UBAC was to continue with the current state for the time being and endorsed an annual cap. The Council is reluctant to add to the rising costs of health claims given recent increases. The UBAC is still seeking representation from the United Electrical Workers, Teamsters, and Staff United.
- iii. Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) Meetings: 04-19-24 and 05-13-2024. Two faculty members have now joined the UBAC, Alex Garlick from Political Science and Wade Carson, UBAC member from Biomedical and Health Sciences. Two HIWG meetings took place since the last report. Both focused on the same topic: the potential for adding a second health plan option for active employees, specifically a High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) coupled with a Health Savings Account (HSA) with both UVM and employee contributions. Caitlyn Sisler presented features of an HDHP and HSA at the April meeting and Steve May provided benchmarking information comparing UVM's current offering to other New England Institutions. Some key points:
  - 1. UVM is unique in offering a single plan; UVMCMC, for example offers four plans. An HDHP may provide an attractive option for a certain demographic.
  - 2. A HDHP must have a minimum \$1,600 deductible per member and \$3,200 per family to qualify for an HSA.
  - 3. There is a risk in offering this second plan. Depending on how many opt for the HDHP option, there is the potential of increased premium costs for those who stay on the current plan. Trying to reduce costs for some, might increase costs for others. Plan design can mitigate some of this risk. It is expected that 5-10 percent of employees would opt for the HDHP in the first year.
  - 4. UVM's PPO plan has not changed in 16 years. One consequence of this longevity is that the plan's co-pays have not kept pace with inflation. Increases in co-pays yield lower premium rates – more employees share equally in the lower rates.
  - 5. Sense of the Committee: After a discussion of the committee's charge to, in part, "suggest and advise on both short-term and long-term strategies ... to provide and preserve choice, access, equity, and value for employees," the committee felt that adding an HDHP coupled with an HSA as a second choice for employees was advisable. It would provide an option that would meet the needs of a certain demographic, and the HSA provides a useful tool for employees to manage higher deductibles and health care costs. However, it must be carefully done so as not to add so much risk to UVM's current PPO so that it is no longer viable.
- c. United Academics Update (Beth and Alison) Negotiations are continuing; they are time and resource consuming. The Legislative committee was unable to move forward a bill to add faculty to the Board of Trustees this session but may be more successful in the next session.
- d. RFAO Retirees' Survey: Decisions on dissemination of findings (Ralph). The results of the Retired Faculty Survey were presented in detail to the Board. 655 members received the survey and 122 (18.6%) responded. Figures depicting the data in various formats were shown. It was noted that most scholarly activity occurred during the first 5 years of retirement, but there was some productivity by members 25-30 years later. About seventy members reported scholarship and research activities, fifty taught and lectured at UVM or elsewhere, forty acted as mentors, and forty were active on boards and committees. Only about 15% participated in philanthropic activities at UVM. The latter was noted to be a lost opportunity by UVM and many departments to recognize and utilize retired faculty. Some departments no longer exist and these retired faculty feel particularly isolated. It was noted that the survey did not capture advocacy activity. The survey included space for comment, and representative comments were reviewed. Following discussion by the Board, it was concluded that all the data should be available as a tab on the RFAO website.

Members will be given feedback on the survey with results and accompanying explanatory text. Survey results and representative positive and negative comments will also be provided to HR, the President, the Provost, and the Foundation. As action items the Board may want to follow up on this survey to solicit further comments from members. Drafts of the figures and explanations will be prepared for review by the Board and then distributed to our membership and other interested parties.

- e. Types of communications from the university that most retirees would want to see. (Dwight) Poor communication of information from the administration to retired faculty remains a problem. For example, e-mails to the general University community from the President and Provost should include our members. Dwight will contact Communications again and consider inviting someone from that Department to a future meeting to discuss the problem and possible solutions with the Board.
- f. Other business.
  - i. Member response to the spring luncheon is lower than expected. Reasons appear to include that some members did not get the invitation, there was confusion about the relationship of this luncheon to the August President's luncheon, and some confusion about the method of payment. Chair Gurdon will send out an e-mail to members to clarify these issues.
  - ii. Members will receive an additional reminder to avoid using UVM e-mail for personal matters because it becomes unavailable to a spouse or other close family member once it is known by the university that the retiree is deceased.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:28pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: August 21, 2024

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda