

## RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

August 21, 2024

Video Conference on ZOOM

### MINUTES

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

**Absent:** Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:05pm

1. Minutes of May 15, 2024, approved as amended
2. Faculty Senate Report ( Mara) The final Faculty Senate meeting of the 2023-24 academic year was held May 16. In addition to routine business and approval of degrees, highlights of the meeting include the following:
  - a. Resolution in memoriam for Robert H. Rodgers, eloquently delivered by Prof. Roger Cooke.
  - b. Presentation by UVM Board of Trustees chair Ron Lumbra. Chair Lumbra gave an overview of the Board's mission and roles. He described the challenges facing the Board, including addressing the "demographic cliff in the Northeast" by building a national brand, expanding Vermont student recruitment while also recruiting students from across the country, and growing the endowment.
  - c. The Libraries reorganization plan that had been extensively reviewed by a special Senate subcommittee had been withdrawn by Dean Geffert and thus there was no discussion.
  - d. Presentation by Vice President for Research Kirk Dombrowski regarding progress toward Research 1 status. VP Dombrowski outlined various new and ongoing research initiatives. He is optimistic about achieving R1 status. UVM should hear of our status in the next couple of months. Slides from this presentation are available via the Faculty Senate website.
  - e. After the meeting, there was a reception for senators. The first meeting of the 2024/25 academic year will be held on Monday, August 26 (in person).
3. United Academics Update (Beth by email) UA hasn't started meeting yet; the only news is that they are still negotiating their contract and the sides remain very far apart.
4. Recommendations on Health Insurance Coverage submitted to the President & Provost (Ruth)
  - a. The University Benefits Advisory Council is charged to review and evaluate the University's benefits programs and make recommendations to the President and Provost with regard to the modification of existing employee benefit plans and the design of any new benefit program. RFAO was asked to fill two seats on the Council and Mara and Ruth were nominated. Ruth is the chair of the Health Insurance Working Group within UBAC. She took the initiative and was able to set up meetings during the summertime when such bodies normally do not meet to specifically create a forum for dialogue with other representatives and with HR. Caitlyn and others within HR were agreeable and helpful in this process. Mara and Ruth requested additional personnel support and both Ralph and Judy graciously offered to assist. Simultaneously, Ralph and Dwight spearheaded the creation of a UVM Health Insurance survey that ultimately went out to all members. Retiree feedback to the survey fit in nicely with the recommendations that Ruth's group proposed. This meant that empirical data could be offered to reinforce the recommendations submitted. The "Recommendations Regarding University Retiree Health Insurance" has been submitted to President Garimella and Provost Prelock. Chair Gurdon on behalf of the Board thanked Ruth, Ralph, Dwight, Mara and Judy for their significant contributions to this effort to ensure that UVM retirees have their voices heard this time around.
  - b. Given that the Cigna contract will expire soon, the University is simultaneously awaiting a quote from BC/BS to take over the current contract.

- c. The Board discussed other issues relevant to retiree health care coverage. They suggested that Chris Lehman be asked to advocate for our members, since the administration is in flux. There also was discussion that the University might look to cut administrative costs by simplifying and unifying the varying rates that retirees currently contribute to their health insurance plan. Rates now vary by when the individual retired and by any negotiated terms.
5. How should we most effectively utilize the Retiree Contributions Survey?
  - a. The Survey has been posted on the RFAO website.
  - b. The Survey may be useful to give feedback to senior administrators and to justify benefits that retirees currently receive or request in the future. These officers can include Jane Okech, Richard Cate, Patty Prelock and Chris Lehman.
  - c. Two weaker areas identified in the Survey which might be strengthened by UVM were public relations and philanthropy. UVM Foundation could be approached for support in these areas. There was a sense from the Survey that retirees should hear more from the Foundation. It was recognized by the Board that there may not be a prompt response from the Foundation because it follows the President's priorities and that office is in flux. It may be useful for the Board to either invite the CEO of the Foundation to a meeting or to plan a presentation to the Board in the spring.
6. Communications from the University. Does the quarterly newsletter "Inside UVM Retiree Edition", containing announcements and resources, address many of our concerns?

This newsletter is addressed to both faculty and staff retirees. The Board agreed that it provides useful information. An additional newsletter, "Inside UVM", is sent to active faculty members and some retirees. Rachel volunteered to look into whether it could be offered to all of our members. There are other communications from the University that may be of interest but are not sent consistently because retirees are not on the HR listserv. Dwight again will contact the Office of Communications and Jane Okech to see if anything more can be done to include our members.

7. Thoughts about an engaging speaker to showcase our annual general meeting. Chair Gurdon asked Board members to forward suggestions for speakers to him in the next week or two.
8. Suggestions for guests to be invited during the coming year. The Board suggested Chris Lehman at our next meeting for an update on the Health plan and Patty Prelock for the future.
9. Other business
  - a. Funds have been set aside for retired faculty awards by the Provost's Office again this year. Chair Gurdon will contact members in the fall about the program.
  - b. Some Board members have received emails from Jože Gričar, Professor Emeritus Maribor University Solvenia, who has organized a Professors Emeriti Network that ostensibly includes many universities in the USA and Europe. The Network appears to be addressing some of the same issues, such as retired faculty access to information technology and emails, that RFAO deals with. Chair Gurdon recommended that the Network be investigated further before UVM makes a commitment to join it.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:32pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: **September 18, 2024 at 3pm**

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda