

RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

September 18, 2024

MedEd 304 in person and 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, Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson

Absent: none

Call to Order: Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 3:03pm

1. Minutes of August 21, 2024, approved
2. Faculty Senate Report (Mara) The Faculty Senate met on August 26, 2024 (in person) to launch the 2024/25 academic year. After the usual introductory comments, degree conferrals, and announcements, the following topics were discussed:
 - a. Ron Lumbrá, chair of the UVM Board of Trustees, gave an overview of the upcoming presidential search process. President Garimella is stepping down as of October 1, and Patty Prelock will then become Interim President. Guided by an external search firm, the national search for a new president will begin with a 16-member search committee to be seated by the end of September. A faculty panel, elected by the members' respective schools/colleges, will provide input to the search. Overall, the search process will be accelerated and candidates held in close confidentiality throughout. The goal is to have a president named in the spring.
 - b. To provide early Senate input into the qualities desired in the new president, the Senators formed small groups to discuss desired presidential qualities as well as to identify the top one or two initiatives on which the new president should focus. Those will be shared with the Board of Trustees.
 - c. Following the presidential search discussion, Senate president Borchert moderated an overview of Senate structure and functions, geared toward new senators.
 - d. Finally, the Complex Systems Center directors presented a draft proposal for a Vermont Complex Systems Institute. A full proposal will be presented in the spring, with Senate review anticipated in the fall of 2025.
 - e. The next Senate meeting will be held virtually through Teams on September 23rd. As always, the Senate website has full minutes and agendas of meetings.
3. United Academics Update (Beth)
 - a. UA is still in contract negotiations heading toward impasse. When impasse is declared, the points of least agreement will be made public but they will not be surprising.
 - b. Presidential search: Mara covered it well in her summary of Senate meeting remarks by Ron Lumbrá. UA discussion adds that this new search procedure (same as used in last Presidential recruitment) lacks the broad campus input that used to characterize these searches.

4. Invited guest, Christopher Lehman, Chief Human Resources Officer (arrived around 3:15). Discussion with Chris indicated that:
 - a. BC/BS Advantage and United Health Care responded to the request for proposals to provide health care coverage to retirees when the current contract with Cigna expires on December 31st. The University did not solicit a proposal for a Medicare supplement program because of time constraints. The United quote was received within the past couple of days. While it was slightly less than the BS/BC offer, it was decided that transitioning to a vendor with whom we had no familiarity and with different systems would introduce too much disruption for us all. Therefore UVM will go with the BC/BS Advantage plan for one year. The medical coverage will be the same as with the current Cigna plan but there will be an increase in premiums to approximately the range of our previous BC/BS plan. Chris will try to provide that range to retirees soon. The Board noted that plan changes are a challenge for retirees including new drug coverage, medical equipment and services. Chris noted that HR has added staff to help with this transfer, and that HR is familiar with the personnel at BC/BS.
 - b. The University is considering various options for retiree health care coverage following this one year BC/BS VBA contract. With progressive increases in health care costs, he notes that the insurance landscape is changing rapidly and many carriers are withdrawing from the market. The expectation is that premium costs to retirees and the University will continue to rise. Guiding principles in choosing a new plan include a recognition of the importance of honoring existing understandings regarding UVM's provision of health insurance benefits for its retirees and a fair and equitable cost sharing between UVM and its retirees.
 - c. Among the options being considered are:
 - i. A new group advantage plan
 - ii. A Medicare supplement plan
 - iii. A private Medicare marketplace with individual plans for retirees.
 - d. Chris felt that the Medicare marketplace model offers advantages over the other options. Retirees would arrange for their insurance directly with the insurers and pay the insurers directly. The University would contract a broker who would manage the marketplace and counsel retirees when choosing a plan. Retirees would be able to choose plans available in their geographic regions including Advantage Plans and Medigap plans. They could tailor the plan to their needs and preferences and avoid the "one size fits all" current insurance model. Chris thought that as insurance companies move out of covering group health care plans there may be more competition in a marketplace. One challenge in going forward with the marketplace will be determining the University contribution. Retiree premiums vary by years of service and final average salary and premiums will vary depending upon the plan choice. He said that the University will have to "dig deep" to find the funds to cover the increase.
 - e. The Board raised several concerns regarding a marketplace model. Could some retirees be excluded? When a retiree group plan ends, they have a "guaranteed issue right" to Medigap plans with no medical underwriting, and there never is

underwriting for Medicare Advantage plans Thus initially they could not be excluded but may not be able to transfer among plans later. Will coverage be the same or similar to the health care plan for active faculty? Chris felt that the current plan for active faculty is not sustainable indefinitely so it would be hard to match active faculty and retiree plans. Will premiums be adjusted for inflation going forward? The amount of UVM contribution to the premium is still under consideration.

5. Identifying a speaker to headline our AGM (aiming for the first week of November). Chair Gurdon is checking on the availability of Memorial Lounge for dates around November 8th. There will be no elections; the agenda will include a report by Chair Gurdon, an opportunity to answer questions from members, and a guest speaker. A small honorarium may be available. Discussion revolved around inviting a scientist or a health economist.
6. Other business.
 - a. There was further discussion of ways to improve communication between UVM and our members. Rachel consulted Jane Okech who recommended that Dwight work with Susan Davis to facilitate more rapid communication.
 - b. UVM Foundation has announced that Linda Shadler was appointed as Interim Provost.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:24pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: **October 16, 2024 at 2pm**

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda