

RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

October 23, 2024

Video Conference on Zoom and in person in Med Ed 304.

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. RFAO Board Meeting
 - a. Approval of the Minutes of September 18, 2024, as amended
 - b. Mary Jane Dickerson: Farewell to a long-time faculty colleague and Executive Board member. The Chair and Board wish to acknowledge The Chair and Board wished to acknowledge her great contributions to the RFAO and to the University community with a moment of silence. For many years she was the editor of a newsletter for retirees, HERMES, and provided guidance to the RFAO committee. She was gracious in her help to University community members through mentorship and teaching.
 - c. Faculty Senate Report (Mara) There have been two Faculty Senate meetings since we last met ourselves. The following are concise notes from the 9/23 and 10/21 meetings. As always, detailed minutes with associated documents and presentations are available on the UVM Faculty Senate website.
 - i. Faculty Senate meeting of September 23, 2024, held via Teams and attended by approximately 80 faculty senators and others.
 1. A resolution was read in memoriam for Prof. Aulis Lind.
 2. The Proposal to establish the Vermont Complex Systems Institute, first discussed at the August Senate meeting, was presented and voted on with 94% approval. Alexa Woodward (Executive Director), Peter Dodds (Institute Director), and Chris Danforth (Director of the Vermont Advance Compute Center) provide leadership for the Institute.
 3. There was the annual presentation of Senate committees, their charge, and their recent work.
 4. Kelly O'Malley, Senior Coordinator of Presidential Events, provided an overview and solicited input on significant changes to the May Commencement ceremonies. Four factors contribute to the need for changes to the ceremonies recently held on the campus Green: increasing heat and unpredictable weather; complications and additional cost in setting up two ceremonies (on the Green and contingently inside); severe and increasing crowding on the Green; and, the consequent difficulties in egress and emergency access. The current (and yet evolving) proposal is to hold on-campus college open houses and various celebrations (with a twilight gathering on the Green) on the Friday of Commencement and then hold several Commencement ceremonies by college/school at the Champlain Valley Expo Center on Saturday/Sunday. College of Medicine ceremony would continue to be held in Ira Allen. The Expo Center has air conditioning, adequate seating for families and

guests, and ample parking (transport will be provided from campus and local hotels).

- ii. Faculty Senate meeting of October 21, 2024, held in person in Memorial Lounge and attended by approximately 70 individuals.
 1. A resolution was read in memoriam for Prof. Gary Mawe.
 2. Linda Schadler, newly appointed Acting Provost, provided an overview of her evolving priorities for the upcoming year: graduate education; undergraduate recruitment and education; digital systems; and campus climate. She also addressed a recent campus-wide outage of the University's network impacting WiFi and other applications, and the need to upgrade the network's outdated network access to individual buildings. The University is investing significant additional financial resources to upgrade the network. Finally, she announced that current faculty benefits will now comprise four options, and faculty will need to proactively choose an option annually during Open Enrollment. Most faculty questions dealt with the nature and implications of Provost Schadler's graduate education priority.
 - a. There was a lengthy presentation by Vice Provost for Student Affairs Erica Caloiero about the Division of Student Affairs various departments and their current and upcoming work. There were many questions about the adequacy of mental health resources for both undergraduate and graduate students; the Division currently hiring four new counselor staff lines and increasing their targeted services for graduate and international students.
 - b. During RFAO Board discussion it was noted that the issue of prior staff reductions in the mental health support area and planned re-hiring was not brought up, and that more health benefit options for faculty are needed and are pending discussion with the union.
- d. United Academics Update (Beth) There have been two UA meetings since our last meeting.
 - i. UA is still in the throes of negotiations with the administration. As part of this, they are trying to figure out how the new choice in health care plans would work for its members. Note that the new plan options will be available for all non-represented faculty and staff starting in January of 2025, but for those unionized (which includes most to campus other than the medical school), the change has to be negotiated. Open enrollment starts in early November, with no agreement reached so time is very, very short, especially given the complexity of the proposals.
 - ii. UA is still working on a seat for faculty on the Board of Trustees and they invite retirees to participate in this and other initiatives. If interested, please contact Alison.
 - iii. Negotiations are being held regarding child care benefits provided by the State.
- e. Reflections on the status of the retiree Medicare health insurance transition.
 - i. Chair Gurdon noted that most members seemed to be satisfied with the presentation of the health plan.
 - ii. A comparison of the proposed plan for next year with prior plans indicates that although the premiums will be comparable, there will be higher deductibles, co-pays and maximum costs. There also will be a \$150 prescription deductible.

- iii. The Board suggested that UBAC indicate an interest in a return to original Medicare with a medigap policy.
 - iv. The Board discussed surveying members regarding their needs and desires for a health care plan and their concerns about the deductibles and co-pays. It was noted that these are first dollar expenses that apply to everyone regardless of income and will be a greater hardship to lower income members.
 - v. The Board intends to learn more about the experience of other institutions with marketplace plans. There was a concern about the effect of inflation on these plans and the extent to which administrations lower their contributions over time.
 - vi. It was noted that members who dropped CIGNA for other plans this year will be offered an opportunity to join the BC/BS plan next year.
- f. The Retired Scholars Award Program. The Committee received 6 applications. As in the past there will be \$8,000 to distribute. Three Board members, Taka Ashikaga, Alan Gotlieb, and Lee Thompson, and Kieran Killeen, appointed by the Provost's Office, will review the applications.
- g. Other Business.
- i. There continues to be poor communication between the University and our members. This issue has been discussed previously with several members of the administration and with University Communications. It appears that we are invisible to the communications system. More recently the issue was raised with UVM Foundation communications, which is sympathetic, but works through University Communications. It was suggested that the issue be discussed with the new Provost.
 - ii. There is a need to update the HR list of benefits offered to retirees.
 - iii. It was suggested that the new Provost, Linda Shadler, be invited to the next meeting.
 - iv. There is a plan to inform members of the difficulty in accessing files, data and emails from the University email system after the death of a member. It is recommended that this information be transferred now and UVM will help develop guidelines. This will take the form of a letter from the Chair to our members.
 - v. The Annual Meeting will consist of a guest speaker, Bill Schubart, who will speak on "Chaos and Hope in the Health Care Industry", an annual report from the Chair, and questions from the membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:26pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: November 20, 2024, at 2pm. The **Annual Meeting** is scheduled for November 14, 2024, in Memorial Lounge at 3pm.

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda