

RFAO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

November 20, 2024

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Present: 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: Taka Ashikaga

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

1. Minutes of October 23, 2024, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
 - a. Acting Provost Linda Schadler joined the meeting from approximately 2:00 -2:30pm
 - i. Chair Gurdon welcomed the Acting Provost and introduced her to members of the Board. He said that the Board has had several recent favorable interactions with the Provost's Office, citing the help of Jane Okech with the software access issue, support for the Retired Scholars Awards, and the nomination of a member to the committee that reviewed the Retired Scholars Awards applications. Along those lines, a recent survey of RFAO members showed that many retired faculty contribute to UVM scholarly activities. Chair Gurdon will forward a copy of the survey results to Acting Provost Schadler.
 - ii. Chair Gurdon asked the Acting Provost for additional support regarding communications from UVM. During his tenure in the President's Office, Gary Derr had set up listservs for retired faculty members and facilitated communication. Subsequently software was obtained for Communications that did not allow HR to communicate directly with retirees. This issue was raised with Jane Okech, who suggested that Dwight Matthews and Rachel Johnson, representing the Board, work with Susan Davidson (UVM Communications) and Liv Townsend (HR). Rachel and Dwight brought forward RFAO's concerns and goals for our RFAO members to receive timely communications from UVM about important happenings. The following were mentioned as examples: 1) the resignation of the UVM President 2) the appointment of an Interim Provost 3) the UVM Planetary Health Initiative launch and 4) the Leahy Public Policy Forum. Liv and Susan acknowledged our concerns about receiving timely communications and proposed the following next steps:

Liv is planning to get up-to-date e-mails and postal addresses for all retirees (not just our members). Liv will draft an e-mail for Dwight to send out to the RFAO listserv. Liv will mail postcards to people for whom UVM doesn't have an e-mail address.

Liv and Susan will develop a draft policy and practice plan for providing "breaking news" communications to retirees such as items from the President and Provost's Offices and the UVM Board of Trustees. Dwight and Rachel offered to review the draft policy.

The draft policy will be brought to the UVM Senior Leadership Team for approval. It will draft a policy for UVM to share with Communications.
 - iii. Acting Provost Schadler said she would look into challenges to improved communications with retirees. The Board also asked that there be better communication between Departments and retirees regarding meetings, events and functions. This will involve developing appropriate listservs. For example it is not clear that Departments maintain a roster of retired faculty.
 - iv. The Acting Provost said that the plan is to have a new President named by the spring of 2025.

- v. She then discussed her goals:
 - 1. Support of Graduate Education. The number of graduate students is increasing and requires additional support.
 - 2. Develop administrative and academic units to promote student success.
 - 3. Change processes to a more tractable and convenient system.
 - 4. Changes to campus climate. Currently there are 3 ongoing union negotiations. She has a commitment to shared governance. She also plans small gestures of appreciation to staff and faculty to improve mood and morale.
- vi. She was asked what the administration thinks might change for the University with the changes in the federal government. She thought that UVM will remain an inclusive campus and its admission process will not be in question. There are concerns about a federal tax on the endowment fund and about changes in the accreditation process.
- vii. She was asked if the Distinguished Scholars lectures could be live streamed for retirees.
- b. Faculty Senate Report (Mara). The Faculty Senate met Monday, November 18 via Teams, with approximately 95 attendees. The following agenda items were discussed:
 - i. President Borchert announced that Abby McGowan, professor of History, will become Faculty Senate president as of July 1, 2025, as per recent election results.
 - ii. Interim President Patricia Prelock gave an extensive leadership update. She described four "Strategic Opportunities" for UVM: Research/Knowledge Creation (including the Planetary Health initiative); Student Success/Teaching & Learning (emphasizing global engagement, innovation & entrepreneurship, and Catamount Careers); our Land Grant mission and Outreach; and, notably, Relationships and Communication. As part of the latter opportunity, she discussed strengthening relationships within the UVM community, with elected officials (city/state/federal), and with the UVM Foundation. In addition to these Strategic Opportunities, Interim President Prelock also mentioned a few areas of potential concern emerging from the new Trump Administration, such as for various cohorts of students/faculty/staff, and the stability of federal funding.
 - iii. The Senate Constitution and Bylaws are under review and revision. There was an initial discussion of the revised bylaws language and clarity.
 - iv. Faculty representatives to the Presidential Search Committee gave an update and encouraged faculty to read the "Comprehensive Leadership Profile" based on UVM campus input. The Profile is available on the Presidential Search website as well as a link through the Senate agenda.
 - v. A scheduled discussion of University finances by VP Richard Cate was deferred until the December meeting.
 - vi. The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on December 16th from 3-4:30.
- c. United Academics Update (Beth)
 - i. The union is still bargaining in a time-consuming process. There is nothing in the current bargaining contract that directly affects retirees. U/A is concerned about what the new federal government has planned for higher education.
 - ii. A discussion followed regarding the BC/BS VBA health care plan for 2025. The monthly retiree contribution again will be progressive in that it is income sensitive. However the out-of-pocket cost of deductibles and copays, which are significantly higher than in the current contract, are not progressive and will be a hardship for retirees on a limited fixed income. Although UBAC was presented with information as negotiations progressed and was able to develop a report and present recommendations, it was not involved in the final financial negotiations. Beth felt that UBAC should be able to look at costs in the next round of negotiations and try to ensure that they are progressive. She would like the union to push UVM to increase UBAC's input on future health care negotiations. She also

questioned whether the union should file an unfair labor practice complaint regarding the last health care negotiations since union members have an interest in the outcome as well as retirees. She feels that UBAC should play a critical role in future negotiations.

- d. UBAC Update (Ruth) There was no recent overall committee meeting but the Health Insurance Working Group will get claims data for comparison of the current and prior years.
- e. University Communications/Email Discussion (Rachel, Dwight) As noted above, Liv Townsend and Susan Davidson will draft a policy to present to the administration. The Board expressed concern about the wording in the draft regarding emails. The Board suggests that the draft ask for the address to which UVM should send official communications rather than the personal email address. Dwight Matthews will prepare a revised draft to address this concern. It was also noted that RFAO has a voting member on the Faculty Senate who could support the right of retirees to retain a uvm.edu email.
- f. Other Business
 - i. Recommendations from the Retired Scholars Awards review committee. The successful submissions are recorded below.
 - 1. Dave Barrington (Professor Emeritus of Plant Biology). To provide an accounting of, and ultimately an identification guide for, the species diversity of the fern genus *Polystichum* in the alpine zone of Ecuador. Funds will cover laboratory supplies and fees of the UVM Scanning Electron Microscope facility, student support in the preparation of illustrations, and travel to key herbaria. \$2000
 - 2. Cameron Davis (Senior Lecturer Emerita of Art and Art History). To contribute to the creation of the set design for Emergent Universe Oratorio, a performance scheduled to take place next year at Skidmore College. \$500
 - 3. Robert Gordon (Professor Emeritus of Anthropology). To support a continuation of the author's research on Namibian Bushmen, specifically for copy-editing and production of *The Bushman Myth: Genocide and the Road to Servility*, and with the goal of making this book more price-accessible to local readers in that community. \$2000
 - 4. Adrian Ivakhiv (Professor Emeritus of Environmental Thought and Culture). To support an edited anthology entitled *Terra Invicta: Ukrainian Wartime Reimaginings for a Habitable Earth*, as well as an associated symposium ("Ukraine and the Climates of War and Peace") which will involve several of the book's Ukrainian contributors. \$2000
 - 5. Jeffrey Marshall (Library Professor Emeritus). To assist in the travel needed to inspect a rare document source in order to address requested revisions to a provisionally accepted journal article entitled "A Curious Bible: Printing Imperfections in a Copy of Nicolaus Gotz's Biblia Latina (Goff B555)", \$1500
 - 6. Chair Gurdon will reach out to these awardees with the good news later in the coming week.
 - ii. Judy offered to maintain a list of possible speakers for future meetings.
 - iii. The consensus of the Board was that the General Meeting went well.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: **January 15, 2025, at 2pm.** Urgent issues will be addressed in a timely manner by the Board by email.

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda