

## 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  - c. The Libraries reorganization plan that had been extensively reviewed by a special Senate subcommittee had been withdrawn by Dean Geffert and thus there was no discussion.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

## 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 Lumbra, 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 Lumbra. 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 31<sup>st</sup>. 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 8<sup>th</sup>. 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

## 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



## 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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

January 15, 2025

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

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

**Absent:** Rachel Johnson

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

1. Minutes of November 20, 2024, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Faculty Senate Report (Mara). After President Tom Borchert's welcome remarks and approval of the consent agenda, the following items were discussed:
    - i. Acting Provost Schadler announced the Waterman Manor will open again for lunch on February 3rd, initially offering a self-service salad bar and panini station with the potential of expanding to full service if the initial offering proves profitable. All options, including self-service, would be available for "sit and eat" in the Manor. UVM faculty/staff are encouraged to take advantage of the Manor's reopening, especially for hosting guests (such as job candidates).
    - ii. Provost Schadler also announced the commencement configurations for 2025. The main commencement ceremony will be held on the Green on Sunday, May 18, 2025. The college/school ceremonies (except for the Honors College and the College of Medicine) will be held at the Champlain Valley Expo Center on May 17th and 18th. The proposed Friday events will not be held. Details to follow.
    - iii. Vice President for Finance Richard Cate provided information about FY26 budget planning. The biggest challenge to the budget is increases to health care costs. While the University had budgeted 7% annually for increases in health care costs, actual increases were in the 12-15% range, however, now have gone up to a 19% increase. In all, the University is facing a \$7M deficit. Each UVM unit will be asked to model 1%, 2%, and 3% reductions to base budgets. Growth in health care costs is targeted to be reduced by \$3M through collaborations with the hospital and reductions in costs for medical services and prescription drugs. The University is exploring continued revenue generating programs as well. During the Q & A period, a question was asked whether retirement incentives are being considered for current faculty, and VP Cate confirmed that it was not under consideration. Another Senator asked whether medical expenses for older employees were higher than for others. VP Cate indicated that it was not the case, and that expenses were higher overall for medical care/procedures and prescription drugs--as is the trend nationally. VP Cate outlined the budget process for FY26 for both Responsibility Centers and Service (Cost) Centers.
    - iv. President Borchert gave a detailed summary of proposed changes to the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws.
    - v. Meg Little Reilly and Richard Watts presented an overview of the proposal for a Center for Community News.
    - vi. As always, presentation slides for the above agenda items and detailed minutes of the meeting are available on the Faculty Senate website.
  - b. United Academics Update (Beth). U/A settled the contract. There were no changes to the health care agreement and coverage is unchanged. U/A is interested in working with UBAC on the negotiations for a health care plan for retirees and they understand that the University seems to be moving away from a progressive cost model. This is illustrated by the new health care options

offered to non-unionized staff, which is not fiscally progressive and not approved by UBAC. UBAC is the principal and perhaps only group that looks at benefits. The union thinks that the premiums for the new retiree health plan should be progressive. However the concern is that UVM wants a flat rate premium contribution to the menu of health care plan options offered to retirees.

- c. The Board discussed surveying the membership regarding satisfaction with the current health plan in the second half of February. Although their experience with the plan will be relatively brief, it will take some time to get and collate the results. The results then could be considered in the new negotiations. A concern was raised that an electronic survey favors results from more recent retirees because older retirees may have a problem accessing the survey. It was suggested that the survey include a question about the year of retirement.
- d. There was discussion about whether the Vermont Labor Relations Board should be approached to have a role in the discussion for the retiree health plan, but the sense was that this could not be done in the necessary timeframe.
- e. Discussion of the status of the procedure for collecting updated and accurate contact information from our membership. Chair Gurdon and Dwight Matthews had a video meeting with Liv Townsend to discuss the HR database for retirees. During the recent attempt to communicate with members regarding the health plan it was found to be incomplete, omitting for example the UVM email address and current home address. In addition, retirees may move or change phone numbers or email providers without informing HR. HR developed a new form to supply this contact information for future communications from UVM. It now provides a link at the bottom of the UVM Retiree Resources webpage. Dwight composed a draft email to RFAO members to facilitate this collection of data to update HR's records. A review by Board members suggested further modifications to make it more comprehensive and to request preferred and alternative email addresses. Dwight suggests having the HR retiree page as a main page in their website.
- f. New RFAO Website (Dwight). Dwight developed a new RFAO website with a new platform. It makes it easier to find the RFAO constitution and minutes of Board meetings.
- g. Other Business. Judy Van Houten is collecting a list of possible speakers for future meetings and requests suggestions.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:29pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: February 19, 2025, at 2pm

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

**February 26, 2025**

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams and at 327 Waterman

### MINUTES

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

**Absent:** Rachel Johnson

**Call to Order:** Chair Michael Gurdon called the meeting to order at 2:09pm

1. Minutes of January 15, 2025, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
  - a. Conversation with guest Christopher Lehman, Director of Human Resources, on human resources matters, most especially the status of retiree health care coverage. Chair Gurdon welcomed Chris who spent about one hour with the Board.
    - i. Chris began by saying that the Presidential search is progressing and that he hopes it will be over soon. Meanwhile Patty Prelock is making good progress but the University is affected by the national picture.
    - ii. He then turned to health care for employees and retirees. In his opinion these costs are not sustainable. Employee costs have gone from about \$50 million to \$80 million, and retiree health insurance costs from \$6 million to \$16 million. Comparing the Cigna plan to the current BC/BS may be misleading for several reasons, but the University still needs to cover about \$32 million health care cost increases that were not budgeted. The University has to balance its budget. He estimates that compensation expenses represent 72% of the general fund. Other state organizations saw similar health care cost increases.
    - iii. Going forward he wants to work more closely with UBAC and have more of a partnership on decision making. He will be in discussions with the Committee about future approaches.
    - iv. His impression is that senior leadership is leaning towards a marketplace health care insurance model and is not consulting with BC/BS about continuing the group plan. It seems likely that HR will use Via Benefits which is owned by WTW (Willis Towers Watson). It operates as WTW's individual healthcare marketplace business, offering services like Medicare plan enrollment and health insurance solutions for retirees and employees. Chris believes Via Benefits offers considerable wraparound support to enrolled members. A benefits advisor will devote at least 2 one-hour interactions with each retiree. There are at least two other similar organizations but a RFP will not be held because of the short time frame to provide a health care plan for next year. He estimates that a RFP process could slow down the decision-making by 2 to 3 months. Insurance companies pay a fee to be included in the marketplace and Via Benefits gets a commission. There is no direct cost to the University or the retiree. The University contribution is not taxable.
    - v. Chris was asked if there are enough insurance vendors in Vermont to have a true choice. He stated that there are about eleven Medicare advantage plans and several Medicare supplement plans that may participate. In his opinion BC/BS is not interested in participating in a marketplace because it does not want to invest in the required infrastructure. Because nationally there is more enrollment in marketplace than group plans, he believes that the premiums will be lower through the marketplace.

- vi. He will be looking to UBAC for input on how to proceed in the marketplace model. The University plans to allot a fixed amount of money, with yearly increases for inflation by a metric to be determined, to retiree health care insurance. UBAC will help decide how the money is allocated to individual retirees.
  - vii. If retirees prefer to not participate in the marketplace, they may be able to use the money for an individual policy such as with BC/BS. A Board member noted that these retirees may need additional support from HR.
  - viii. Chris was asked if the new insurance plan would take into account age or pre-existing conditions. He stated that a Medicare advantage plan would not and a Medicare supplement plan would not in the first year but could if the retiree chose to change plans in subsequent years.
  - ix. Going forward UBAC will need a timeline once a final decision is made regarding the marketplace and Via Benefits, which Chris feels will happen in the next few weeks.
  - x. The Board recommended to Chris that preparation of a chart comparing current health care benefits with those provided by the marketplace would be very helpful to the Board and membership. Beth Mintz offered to make suggestions for a spreadsheet.
  - xi. The Board pointed out that the current approach to retiree health care plan costs are not sufficiently progressive in that deductible and co-pay charges are the same for those with low and high retirement incomes. Chris thought that this could be addressed by UBAC as it looks at the University contribution.
- b. Faculty Senate report (Mara) The following points summarize two meetings of the Faculty Senate (both meetings held remotely via Teams).
- i. January 27, 2025, Faculty Senate meeting (approximately 140 attendees)
  - ii. The January 2025 meeting of the Senate was particularly efficient in that all business of the Senate was completed by 4:30, affording the opportunity for a wide-ranging conversation among senators until the scheduled arrival of Jay Jacobs, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, to discuss the Test Optional Admissions Policy. After the test optional discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:07 pm.
  - iii. Routine business included Senate President's remarks, conferral of degrees, approval of the consent agenda, and a call for nominations for Senate Vice President and Executive Council members at large (three openings). A resolution to establish the UVM Center for Community News housed in the Provost's Office (previously discussed) was approved; the intent of the Center is "to grow and support student partnerships between student reporting programs at U.S. local colleges and their local news outlet." In addition, proposed changes to the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws (previously discussed) were approved.
  - iv. February 25, 2025 Faculty Senate meeting (approximately 130 attendees)
  - v. At the February 25, 2025, meeting, President Borchert announced that Amy Trubek will be Faculty Senate Vice President (serving with Abby McGowan as President-Elect). Lisa Schnell read a moving Resolution in Memoriam for Mary Jane Dickerson. Voting matters included another revision to the Senate Constitution and Bylaws (approved) as well as a resolution to end the pilot phase of the Test Optional Admissions Program and to continue to monitor outcomes of the program (approved).
  - vi. President Prelock gave an extensive overview of the University's response to the various Executive Orders emanating from the U.S. President's office. She outlined a four-pronged approach: education; communication and engagement; monitoring; planning scenarios. Scenarios and impact assessments are being generated by four teams focusing on research, Our Common Ground (including DEI), immigration, and faculty affairs (RPT, career tracks,

- etc.) Regarding financial implications, she mentioned the cap on F&A recovery could potentially have a budgetary impact of \$10-\$51 million dollars. The UVM Foundation is working on expanding graduate student support. President Prelock also alluded to ongoing weekly communications to campus regarding initiatives coming out of Washington.
- vii. Board of Trustees chair Ron Lumbra gave an overview of the Presidential Search. The search committee met with eleven candidates (out of approximately 30 applicants). It is expected that a finalist will be identified by the end of March (after Spring Break). The meeting was then adjourned promptly at 5:30.
  - c. United Academics update (Beth) The only thing of interest to retirees on the United Academics front is an information request submitted to the administration re: retiree health care insurance. After much discussion, UA's contract administration committee could not come up with a rationale for an Unfair Labor Practice and submitted the questions below in the form of an information request. The answers follow, but I don't see how this will help, other than "informing" the administration they are watching the situation carefully.
    - 1. How many retired UA-represented faculty members were affected by this change?
    - 2. How many retired UA-represented faculty enrolled in the Cigna plan for 2024? How many lives did this cover?
    - 3. Compared to last year, how many retired UA-represented faculty did not enroll in the BC/BS plan option?
    - 4. Compared to last year, how many retired UA-represented faculty did enroll in the BC/BS plan option? How many lives does this cover?
    - 5. To determine the change in cost, please provide charts of the costs of the prior two plans for retirees and the new plan(s). Specifically include details about deductibles and copay costs and what portion of the costs the retired members are responsible for.
    - 6. What services and providers are no longer covered under this new insurance that were covered by the prior insurance, if any?
    - 7. What steps is the University taking to remedy the sudden switch to a new plan offered through a different vendor, now and for future years?
    - 8. Response from Caitlyn Sisler (HR Benefits):
      - a. Currently there are 677 retirees/and subscriber dependents that are coded with UA—but not all of them are eligible for Medicare.
      - b. November 2024 Census for Cigna had 458 UA retirees and dependents enrolled.
      - c. This information is not tracked.
      - d. February 2025 Census for VBA had 459 UA retirees and dependents enrolled.
      - e. During this time— some members enrolled in other plans, some returned to the UVM retirement plan after waiving the benefit previously, some passed away, and some new retirees—but the membership has remained consistent.
      - f. Medical Premium History for J Medicare Plan
        - 1. 2025 VBA is \$414/person per month
        - 2. 2023 and 2024 Cigna was \$148.59/person per month.
        - 3. 2021 and 2022 VBA was \$396.12/person per month
        - 4. 2020 BCBS was \$504.42/person per month
        - 5.



Table showing differences in benefits	Cigna	Vermont Blue Advantage 2025
Medical Deductible	\$0 (\$100 for DME)	\$1,000
Medical Out-Of-Pocket Max	\$500	\$2,000
Preventative Care	Covered 100%	Covered 100%
Primary Care Provider/Routine Office Visit	\$10 copay	\$25 copay
Specialist, Psychiatric, Urgent Care, Chiropractor, Physical Therapy etc.	\$10 copay	\$30 copay
Emergency Room	\$0 copay	\$100 copay
Inpatient and Outpatient Hospital	\$0 copay	Deductible Applies
Home Health, Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing Facility Care	\$0 copay	Deductible Applies
Medical Equipment & Supplies & Part B drugs	20% coinsurance after deductible	20% coinsurance after deductible
Diabetic Equipment & Supplies	\$0 copay	\$0 copay
Vision	EyeMed \$0 copay (Annual Vision exam) \$250 allowance (Eyewear Allowance)	VSP \$0 copay (Annual Vision exam) \$250 allowance (Eyewear Allowance)
Hearing Services	Hearing Care Solutions \$0 copay (Hearing exams) \$3,000 (Hearing aid benefit, every 24 months)	Nations Hearing \$0 copay (Hearing exams) \$3,000 (Hearing aid benefit, every 24 months)
Fitness	Silver & Fit	Silver Sneakers
Prescription Drugs	Express Scripts \$0 deductible \$5 copay (generic), \$20 copay (preferred brand name), \$40 copay (non-preferred brand name)	OptumRx \$150 deductible \$5 copay (generic), \$25 copay (preferred brand name), \$40 copay (non-preferred brand name)

- 1) BCBS/VBA has a stronger network, so we have not experienced the same issues with provider access that were reported with Cigna Medicare Advantage.
- 2) UVM's contract with Cigna Medicare Advantage was abruptly notified of non-renewal of our contract at the end of 2024. Cigna was not able to sustain the low premium that they had quoted us for a fully insured product—and the increase they would have needed to maintain our contract was too large that they declined to offer it as an option. We promptly explored all available options in the Vermont Market and notified retirees of the unplanned change and again as soon as a decision was made. We are in process of exploring additional options for 2026 with our benefit consultants, the University Benefit Advisory Council and the Health Insurance Working Group

- d. UA update (Allison) The UA Legislative Affairs Committee meets weekly, to shepherd this bill (see link) through the Vermont Legislature. The committee includes active and retired faculty and staff, including a former UVM Government Affairs Director.
  - i. Members of the committee also meet weekly at the Statehouse with representatives and senators.
  - ii. A letter-writing campaign engaging UA members by House district is also underway.
  - iii. The State of Oregon has recently passed similar legislation, applying to all its higher ed institutions.
  - iv. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Docs/BILLS/H-0198/H-0198%20As%20Introduced.pdf>
- e. UBAC report (Ruth) **UBAC Report -- RFAO 2-26-25** The University's Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) and its Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) both met twice since the last RFAO Executive Board Meeting. Each meeting is summarized below:
  - i. UBAC 1-16-25
    1. Membership update: Currently missing Teamsters, Staff United and United Electrical representation on UBAC.
    2. Upcoming HR projects: HR reported they are working to streamline and outsource certain internal processes, including those involved in COBRA requirements, the ACA (for employees not benefits eligible), retiree billing, lead recordkeeper process improvements for 403b, and a viewable benefits/rewards portfolio in PeopleSoft.
  - ii. HIWG 1-28-25
    1. Retiree Health Insurance: HR announced that they are beginning to examine options for retiree health insurance for 2026, noting that options for a group plan in Vermont are not robust. In discussion several questions emerged, including:
    2. What is the range and distribution of premium cost-sharing percentages among Medicare-eligible retirees currently?
    3. How many Medicare-eligible retirees are in-state residents vs. out-of-state residents?
    4. How do the marketplace options in Vermont and the UVM group plan compare?
    5. HR reported 2025 open enrollment choices for healthcare plans for current employees: Of the approximately 1,700 employees who had the option to choose among the 4 offerings, 25 employees chose the HDHP as follows:
      - 5 in \$50-\$80k salary band
      - 8 in \$80-\$100k salary band
      - 12 in >\$110k salary band (of these 2 were in the \$100-\$160k salary range, and 2 were in the >\$200 salary range).
      - 75 people chose PPO2
      - The rest chose the PPO1 (equivalent to 2024 plan)
  - III. UBAC 2-20-25 This meeting focused on how to evaluate 2026 insurance options for Medicare-eligible retirees: The HIWG reported that they will begin planning for a risk/benefit analysis at their Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> meeting and moving their March meeting to a date before the next UBAC meeting. They have also added two retirees to the group. Members also stressed the need for sufficient lead-time for communicating any 2026 changes in several formats
  - IV. HIWG 02-25-25 The HIWG developed a list of questions that need to be answered in order to conduct a risk/benefit analysis. Questions focused on the University's goals, available plans in the Vermont marketplace compared to our group plan, a timeline detailing steps for

implementation, and whether the University could extend the current group plan for one year.

- f. Health Insurance membership survey (Ralph) ---- the current version might be further shaped by the discussion with our guest. Following the discussion with Chris, the Board recommended that plans for a new survey be deferred for the present.
- g. Communications from the University (Dwight):
  - i. During the discussion with Chris, the subject of University communications with retirees was brought up. Dwight recommended a dedicated HR webpage for retirees, *i.e.* a main page versus the present subpage. Chris said he would look into it.
  - ii. Liv Townsend previously shared the following information with Chair Gurdon and Dwight:  
As members of our community, we understand your continued interest in staying informed about important university updates and appreciate the feedback many of you have provided. I am writing to share an update about the university's communications plan as it relates to retirees. I recently met with the Strategic Communications team to review and refine our approach to keeping retirees informed. As part of this effort, we formalized the following guideline: **Relevant announcements to UVM employees will be forwarded to UVM retirees within 24-48 hours.** This timeframe allows us to ensure that retirees receive accurate and contextually relevant information. The focus of this guideline is to maintain a balance between inclusivity and operational efficiency, ensuring that retirees stay informed about updates while upholding our commitment. You should have received the forwarded communication about Richard Cate's upcoming retirement from the university. This is an example of the type of communication that retirees will receive moving forward.
    - 1. **Types of Communications Available to Retirees**
    - 2. UVM News: [Findable on the university's website](#)
    - 3. Inside UVM: [Findable on the university's website](#)
    - 4. Inside UVM Retiree Edition: Emailed directly to retirees and [findable on the university's website](#)
    - 5. Internal UVM Announcements: Relevant messages forwarded to retirees via email
  - iii. The Board appreciated Liv's response and thought that gifting updates from the University Foundation might also be of interest to members.
- h. Other business: none

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: March 21, 2025, at 2pm

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

**March 21, 2025**

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams

### MINUTES

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

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

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

1. Minutes of February 26, 2025, approved as amended
2. RFAO Board Meeting
3. UVM leadership transition. Chair Gurdon asked Board members if they have a sense of the new UVM President, Marlene Tromp. Alison offered that she had heard that Dr. Tromp was personable and excited to be here. She was very clear regarding her commitment to supporting free speech and academic freedom at UVM and open to communication with stakeholders. The general impression from several sources is that, while it is early days, this feels like it will be a different campus administration from the previous administration. Others noted that she was cogent and articulate, with a different agenda compared to the national government. Since she was a first-generation college student, it seems likely that she will be supportive of incoming first-generation students. She is expected to be on campus later this summer.
4. United Academics update (Alison)
  - a. United Academics continues to advocate for passage of H.198, the bill that would place one voting member each of staff and faculty on the UVM Board of Trustees.
  - b. In the current climate, faculty and students holding green cards are fearful. Planned visits home have been postponed; visa renewals whose processing must occur at consulates in their home countries are fraught, as is traveling to conduct field research abroad when specified in existing grants.
  - c. UVM expects to face budgetary and enrollment challenges, similar to those institutions currently in the news, due to decreasing grant indirects and financial aid. The latter is also likely to affect enrollment.
  - d. UVM appears committed to upholding its commitment to DEI and academic freedom. The choice of the newly-appointed UVM president appears to send that signal. Navigating the landscape is expected to require skill and finesse.
  - e. United Academics is actively engaged in monitoring events, conducting and supporting appropriate training, and identifying constructive steps (e.g., ensuring that the RPT process includes sufficient and timely documentation to successfully answer ICE queries).
5. Assessment of developments at recent meetings of the University Benefits Advisory Council as these relate to UVM retiree health insurance coverage (Ruth & Mara). No final decisions were made, and there was no presentation by WTW.
  - a. The HIWG met on March 17th. The first half of the meeting was a Q&A with Chris Lehman regarding the exchange option. Points made include:
    - i. An exchange provides retirees a choice of plans. There is stress in the group plan market, resulting in higher costs, higher deductibles. There are plans available that would be better options for many retirees, the higher deductibles are a burden, and many would prefer supplement plans.

- ii. UVM is not expecting a significant reduction in cost, nor an increase in costs; it is expecting that costs will be more predictable and easier to budget.
  - iii. BCBS-VT is not in any exchange. It does not currently have the technical capacity and is reluctant to join because of potential increased cost.
  - iv. The HRA's can be designed so that retirees can use the UVM contributions to pay for plans outside of the exchange such as BC/BS.
  - v. A hybrid model raises two issues. First, exchanges typically charge an employer more for doing this, and second, if we continue our current plan, it might disadvantage those with pre-existing conditions that want to move to a supplement plan. They may need to undergo underwriting. When there is an end to service, there cannot be denial of service by another company. But if a retiree initially enrolls in a program but wants to change afterward, there could be consideration of pre-existing conditions.
  - vi. UVM will look to UBAC for recommendations regarding premium cost-sharing. How to set the starting "standard" premium, and how to adjust over time are yet to be determined.
  - vii. Depending on the nature of the RFP process, HR is looking at an implementation timeline that looks to begin educating retirees about a potential exchange option in June/July.
  - viii. Should conditions change, UVM would be able to move back to a group option at some time in the future.
- b. During the second half of the meeting Caitlyn described her investigation on a Medigap plan N using the VIA exchange.
  - i. She found three providers for a medigap plan: Cigna at \$1,700/yr., AARP at \$2,500/yr., and Humana at \$2,503/yr. This is roughly half of the current VBA plan cost but would require a separate drug plan. Drug plans run from \$20-\$50 per month.
- c. The UBAC met on 3/20
  - i. The first half of the meeting focused on UVM Cares, a new care management service available to current employees.
  - ii. The second half of the meeting focused on the exchange option for retiree benefits.
  - iii. Caitlyn presented data about the number of enrollees and current premium costs and cost-sharing. There are 2,333 Medicare-eligible retirees/spouses/dependents. Approximately 1900 are Vermont residents. Our current premiums for the group VBA plan is \$4,968 annually (a total of \$11.59m); of this amount UVM pays an average of 81% and the retirees portion is 19%. However, individual retirees pay anywhere from zero to 60% of the premium.
  - iv. To illustrate potential savings in the exchange model, she presented a cost comparison for our Group VBA plan, and a sample of three plans available in a Vermont exchange: a Medicare plan G\*, a Medicare plan N\* (plus a drug plan for each), and an Advantage plan. These plans available on the exchange showed a cost savings for retirees at median utilization, even with a somewhat lower UVM cost-share.
  - v. She reiterated that UVM is looking for UBAC recommendations and advice regarding the HRA subsidy (premium cost-sharing) and the transition/implementation plan.
  - vi. Plan G supplements provide the most comprehensive coverage; Plan N supplements have lower premiums and higher co-pays and out-of-pocket costs.
- d. During discussion by the Board it was noted that there will be a role for the Board in the education of members, and that there will continue to be a need for a point person in HR in addition to WTW. The Board will look to UBAC for support of its education efforts during the transition period. The Board could have a role in screening materials being prepared for members to improve clarity. It is anticipated that UBAC and the Working Group will continue to meet frequently and that the Board may need to schedule meetings during the summer as needed.

6. Other business.

- a. Separating personal data from a UVM netid account. Alison introduced a **Draft of Geoff Duke et al.'s "Personal Data Guide"** prepared by UVM IT. The goal is to develop a guide to protecting data and photos on the UVM server for distribution to our membership. During discussion it was felt that the draft is still overly technical for most of our membership. The draft will be edited further and sent out soon.
- b. Judy Van Houten requested suggestions for speakers for future meetings.
- c. Chair Gurdon will be unavailable for the next meeting. Vice Chair Beth Mintz or her designee will chair. Richard Branda also will be out of town and Judy Van Houten will take minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:18pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: April 16, 2025

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda

## **RFAO Executive Board Meeting**

The RFAO Board members met on April 16, 2025

Present were Beth Mintz, Alison Pechenick, Dwight Matthews, Alan Gotlieb, Ruth Farrell, Mara Saule, Lee Thompson, Rachel Johnson, Ralph Budd, Judith Van Houten

### **MINUTES**

1. The minutes of March 21 were approved unanimously.
2. The most recent Faculty Senate report was distributed to the members by Mara Saule.

The Faculty Senate met in Memorial Lounge on Monday, March 24, 2025.

- President Borchert's remarks to the Senate included mention of the University's response to events and actions in Washington that may affect the University, including the creation of four operational response teams: Research, Faculty Affairs, Our Common Ground, and Immigration. Pres. Borchert also indicated that several Senators have expressed the desire for the Senate to make statements concerning our commitment to academic freedom and to inclusive excellence. Two resolutions will be considered at the April meeting (pending petitions signed by 10% of senators). [Note: the resolutions are, in fact, on the Senate's April 21st meeting agenda and scheduled to be discussed from 4:50-5:25 at the meeting being held via Teams.]
  - The Consent Agenda was approved, with changes to Dean's List and Latin Honors policies being approved separately.
  - A resolution in memoriam for Prof. Phyllis Paolucci-Whitcomb, Professor Emerita of Social Work.
  - A detailed update on UVM's response to federal initiatives was provided by co-chairs of the Immigration operational response group (Pablo Bose and Jamie McGowan). Prof. Bose and Ms. McGowan described upcoming information sessions for all members of the UVM community, which will include advice on how to respond if ICE comes to campus, implications of travel bans, and advice re: visa questions.
  - There was a proposal to evolve the existing Food Systems Research Center (currently housed in CALS) to a Research Institute reporting centrally to the Vice President for Research. Such a change would better reflect the Center's mission and various internal and external research partnerships.
  - The Senate meeting concluded with small group brainstorming sessions for Senators on future senate goals in the context of the arrival of Dr. Tromp as UVM's next president.
3. The UBAC report was made by Ruth Farrell and Mara Saule.
    - The University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC)'s Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) met on April 7th with CHRO Chris Lehman and Benefits Director Caitlyn Sisler. The full UBAC will meet on April 17th.
    - At the HIWG meeting Chris Lehman announced that a broad RFP has been drafted and sent to Procurement. The RFP asks for bids for HR benefit consulting as well as an exchange/marketplace for Medicare-eligible retiree health insurance. It will most likely go out by the end of April. In order to inform retirees as soon as possible that UVM is considering an exchange for Medicare-eligible retirees for 2026, HR intends to send an update with information about the potential for an

exchange to retirees soon after the RFP goes out, perhaps using the April retiree newsletter as the vehicle for the announcement, depending on timing.

- Chris Lehman was also supportive of seeking information from BCBS-VT for a group plan for comparison purposes, believing that the data will support the cost savings for retirees that the exchange could provide.
- He was supportive of having someone from UBAC on the RFP review team, and in particular of that person being one of the retiree members of the HIWG. The UBAC will take this up at its meeting the 17th.
- There was also discussion about UBAC's advisory role and additional information that UBAC and the HIWG will need in order to offer strategic advice about UVM's initial cost-share contributions, approach for subsequent years, and Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) design for the exchange model.

Two things of particular note are the possible inclusion of Ruth or Mara on the RFP review team and the provision of information about the BCBS-VT group plan will help anchor one end of the coverage spectrum for retirees to consider as they review the market place offerings. There was concern expressed by Board members about the advisors who will work with UVM retirees on issues with their future insurance. There was some clarification by Ruth that even though the Via marketplace extends beyond Vermont, the advisors for our retirees will be state-specific and able to work knowledgeably with our members.

Many thanks to Ruth and Mara for this service.

4. The report on United Academics was presented by Beth Mintz.

- UA met on April 10<sup>th</sup> with much of the meeting about responses to the Trump administration's assault on campuses.
- Major questions addressed were:
  - What will the administration do when a student with a valid visa is deported?
  - How best to support free speech on campus given disagreements on Palestine?
  - How to prepare for cuts if grant funding is cut?
- It was noted that over 3000 Jewish academics signed a letter entitled, "Not in Our Name," ([https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vRt\\_jMNTIIH7ABX\\_s7fQFuspYWf\\_yN2OGzfrVzhNoO87YWICyPQzhaq2VcWYDGYvWJRfLq7INtpnd4/pub?urp=gmail\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vRt_jMNTIIH7ABX_s7fQFuspYWf_yN2OGzfrVzhNoO87YWICyPQzhaq2VcWYDGYvWJRfLq7INtpnd4/pub?urp=gmail_link)) arguing that antisemitism is being used as an excuse to stifle free speech and destroy higher education.
- Also noted is that April 17<sup>th</sup> is National Day of Action for Higher Education
- Alison reported that the UA Legislative Affairs committee has exchanged many messages concerning S.136 bill with Philip Baruth and others in the State House in support of including voting faculty and staff member representatives on the UVM Board of Trustees. The process is ongoing.
- There was a verbal addendum to the report regarding health care. The cost for active employees is exorbitant (~\$49,000 for a family of four with a 15% predicted increase for the coming year). UA is considering the possibility of working with the administration in hopes of bringing down costs.



- Also under discussion are how to prepare to support free speech and issues that visa holders face at UVM.
5. The spring meeting was discussed by the group at large. Last year, we met for a luncheon on June 5 facilitated by Liv Townsend. There was discussion of confusion by some retirees last year about a luncheon in June with the luncheon sponsored by the President in August. This will be taken into account as we go forward with this year's June luncheon. Dates were discussed and the range from June 9-11 was considered best for board members.  
The running list of recommended speakers was considered and ranked in two rounds of votes.
  6. The group expressed thanks to Alison Pechenick for her work on the Personal Data Guide for separating personal data from our UVM netid accounts. The goal is to safeguard email and other data of our retirees, especially regarding data stored on UVM servers. Alison will continue to fine tune this document to make it comprehensible to our retirees.
  7. Our next Board meeting will be on May 14. Ralph Budd was asked to secure a room and zoom address. Judy Van Houten will provide directions and personal help to those who wish to use an entry point to the MedEd building that does not require waiting for someone to exit the building.

Respectfully submitted May 3, 2025

Judith Van Houten

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

**May 14, 2025**

Video Conference on Microsoft Teams and Med. Ed. 305

### MINUTES

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

**Absent:** Dwight Matthew, Mara Saule

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

1. Minutes of April 16, 2025, approved as amended
2. Faculty Senate Report (Mara) The following are notes from the April 21st Faculty Senate meeting. The meeting was held remotely via Teams with approximately 90 attendees.
  - a. After President Borchert's introductory remarks and approval of the consent agenda, resolutions in memoriam were read for three faculty colleagues: Alfred Rosa (Professor of English Emeritus), Ralph Harry Orth (Professor of English Emeritus), and Isabella Jeso (Lecturer in the Department of English).
  - b. A resolution was passed to establish the Food Systems Research Institute in the Office of the Vice President for Research, which had been previously reviewed and accepted by the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Arts Committee of the Senate.
  - c. Dr. Kellie Campbell, UVM's new Chief Information Officer as of February 6, 2025, gave an update on short term technology planning initiatives. These initiatives are based on four pillars: a focus on service foundations; strengthening governance, partnerships, and engagement; strategic and digital transformation; and securing our future and expanding opportunity.
  - d. Members of the Our Common Ground Committee, which focusses on UVM's response to recent Federal Actions, gave an update on their recent initiatives. The committee explored the following areas (among others): curriculum language; communications; faculty/staff searches; admissions; financial aid; accessibility.
  - e. Two resolutions were generated by UVM faculty and discussed at the meeting, one resolution on Academic Freedom and the other regarding Inclusive Excellence. Extensive discussion ensued, largely reflecting concerns for international faculty and staff. It was proposed that instead of voting on these specific resolutions at the April meeting, voting would be postponed until the May meeting pending further discussion within academic departments as well as exploration of partnerships with other universities. A small working group of senators was constituted to provide additional perspective at the May meeting. Postponement was voted on and passed. Please see materials attached to the Faculty Senate April and May agendas for specific resolution language
  - f. The May meeting will be held in person in Memorial Lounge on May 15 from 3-4:30 (note the earlier time); Dr. Rachel Johnson will represent retired faculty at the May meeting.
  - g. The Faculty Senate report was discussed by the RFAO Executive Board. The Board recommended that UVM stand with other universities that are resisting the attacks on academic freedom because avoiding confrontation will not protect UVM.
3. Faculty Senate Report for May 15, 2025 (Rachel)
  - a. President's welcome remarks – Thomas Borchert
  - b. Update from UVM Board of Trustees (BOT), Cynthia Barnhart, Chair
    - i. Dr. Barnhart said these are challenging times for higher education. She described how the BOT will attempt to respond to financial pressures.

- ii. Dr. Barnhart was asked if she supports having a UVM faculty member on the BOT. She does not think this is appropriate due to potential conflicts of interest. She said it is critical that UVM trustees have connections to UVM but they need to look broadly at UVM without loyalty to individual units.
    - iii. Dr. Barnhart asked what faculty are worried about. Funding for graduate students was mentioned and Dr. Barnhart said this is a top priority for the BOT.
    - iv. Dr. Barnhart discussed the advantages UVM has including creative leadership from the VP of Research, “scrappiness” and “nimbleness.” She said a mindset of what is best for UVM not what is best for me is needed.
  - c. The Senate voted to award appropriate degrees and certificates.
  - d. The consent agenda was approved.
    - i. The name of the minor “Mathematics: Pure” was changed to “Mathematics”.
  - e. A resolution in memorium was read for Dr. Robert Sinclair, the former Dean of CALS. Dr. Sinclair passed away at the age of 102 and was a 6th generation Vermonter.
  - f. Update on federal actions - Interim President Patricia Prelock
    - i. UVM is a member of APLU, AAU and ACE who are plaintiffs in three separate lawsuits relating to cuts at NSF, NIH, and the US Department of Energy.
      - 1. UVM provided data for two of these lawsuits including the F&A cap for NIH.
    - ii. Bi-weekly meetings are being held with the Vermont congressional delegation.
    - iii. UVM is working with other EPSCOR states to negotiate a better F& A.
    - iv. Interim President Prelock has regular meetings with APLU and American East presidents.
    - v. Internal actions include
      - 1. Forums and information sessions
      - 2. Regular updates and communications
      - 3. UVM website FAQs regarding federal actions, immigration, and protecting personal information
      - 4. New discrimination/harassment video
    - vi. Faculty Affairs is working on revised faculty RPT and annual review guidelines that reflect the impact of delays in federal research funding.
    - vii. Dr. Prelock was given a standing ovation at the close of her remarks.
  - g. Old Business
    - i. Resolution on the Statement of Support of the Core Mission and Values of Higher Education in the US with UVM preamble and joint statement of New England Land Grant Faculty Senates.
      - 1. Extensive discussion on the statement ensued. The statement was amended to include broad language focusing on inclusivity. The motion to endorse the amended statement passed.
    - ii. Resolution to establish a Mutual Defense Compact for the universities of the NE Academic Alliance. Interim President Prelock expressed her concerns about the Compact. She thinks it could put the university at risk. Faculty comments included sentiments that alliances with other universities can be powerful. Discussion was held about how to come together to support the value of science and the humanities. The motion to adopt the resolution was passed.
    - iii. A motion to table the resolution on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom passed.
    - iv. A motion to table the resolution in support of continued commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion passed.
  - h. Closing remarks were given by Interim President Prelock and Senate President Tom Borchert.
4. United Academics Update (Beth) UA met on April 24<sup>th</sup> and May 4th and will meet again in August.

- a. UA had disappointing news from Montpelier: the legislation allocating one seat on the Board of Trustees to a faculty member didn't make it to the floor.
  - b. Grave concern about academic freedom, free speech, diversity initiatives
  - c. Grave concern for the financial situation
  - d. The administration has announced a buyout
  - e. Lay-offs feared
  - f. The UA EC is increasingly concerned about health care costs and invited Alex Garlick, a UVM political scientist and a member of UBAC's health care subcommittee, to a meeting to fill them in on the situation in UBAC. He said that most of their time this year has been taken up by the retiree issue, but it is clear that health care costs are unsustainable, and the administration is working on alternative models for the next contract. The faculty maintained their traditional high premium low-out-of-pocket plan in the recently settled contract, which means that they have this for another three years. Nevertheless, the problem will only get worse.
  - g. The UA report was discussed by the RFAO Executive Board. It was noted that health insurance for a family of 4 is about \$49,000 currently and that active faculty pay about 20%. The faculty at UVM appear to have signed a new contract for the next 3 years ensuring a high-quality health plan with low deductibles and low out-of-pocket costs. In contrast, the retired faculty for the past year have had a plan with high deductible and out-of-pocket costs. It was the understanding of some Board members that retired faculty would have a benefit plan as close as possible to employed faculty. The proposed Exchange plan for retired faculty is significantly different from the active faculty plan and may put our members at a disadvantage because they will have to individually negotiate in a confusing health benefit system. There are vulnerable people in our cohort who are at risk. It was also noted, however, that active faculty are paying much more for their premiums compared to retired faculty. Health care insurance plan options in Vermont are limited. The UVM health care plan is self-insured and is administered by BC/BS, with an umbrella plan from Cigna for large claims. Some universities have discontinued providing a health care plan to retirees. HR is aware that the current high deductibles have damaged retirees and hopes that the Exchange will provide more affordable plans. Nevertheless, some retirees have found that they are better off getting an individual plan.
5. UBAC Report and discussion of retiree health insurance (Ruth) The University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) met on April 17<sup>th</sup> and the Health Insurance Working Group (HIWG) met on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- a. At the April 17<sup>th</sup> UBAC meeting the Council designated Ruth Farrell and Mara Saule as UBAC's participants in the review process for the Benefits Consulting/Exchange RFP.
  - b. At the April 22<sup>nd</sup> HIWG meeting Caitlyn Sisler identified three higher education institutions that HR intended to call to learn from their implementation of a private exchange for retirees (Bowdoin, Tufts, University of Minnesota). Genevieve Anthony and Ruth Farrell agreed to participate in the phone calls. The group generated a list of questions for the institutions. The calls have not yet been scheduled.
  - c. Caitlyn shared new slides from WTW that modeled additional comparisons between individual plans and the current group plan. The slides also presented some Medicare basics, including the differences between Medigap and Advantage plans and the different Medigap plan types. The lowest cost Medigap plan N (most similar to our current plan), with a part D prescription plan added, demonstrated cost savings for retirees. The group asked for additional information that provided cost comparisons for the array of plans available in Vermont. This will inform the group's recommendations regarding the University's subsidy.
  - d. Since the last HIWG meeting:
    - i. The RFP went out, the question period has closed, and responses are due on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The two UBAC reps have signed NDAs required for the review process.

- ii. Caitlyn and I have been working together on putting together a spreadsheet presenting the additional data that the HIWG requested at its last meeting.
- iii. HR included an initial announcement about the University's consideration of the exchange model for retiree health insurance in its April retiree newsletter. I, along with Mara, Jane Knodell, and Genvieve Anthony were given the opportunity to comment and offer suggestions on a draft. It was a quick (same day) turnaround.
- e. During the discussion of Ruth's report, it was noted that UVM premium money could be used outside of the Exchange by retirees through an individual HRA. Another Board member, Ralph Budd, will be joining UBAC and HIWG, giving our organization three representatives on these important committees. There also was discussion as to whether the Board should be sending out frequent updates in the interest of transparency. It was felt, however, that much of the current information is speculative, with several unknowns, and that it would be best to wait until more definitive information is available. The Board then could share information it has confidence in. The Board thought it would be useful to have a comparison of a BC/BS plan and the Exchange plans, even though BC/BS is not participating in the Exchange.
- 6. Status of the Spring Luncheon arrangements (Beth). After discussion, the Board decided that the time frame is too short to make arrangements and get responses for a spring meeting this year. An informational meeting for members might be considered when there is definitive information regarding the health plan.
- 7. Action to be taken on communicating the advisory on personal data protection (Alison) Suggested changes have been incorporated into the document and it will be simplified further. The final document will be posted by IT and then our members will be referred to it.
- 8. Other business: none

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm

The next meeting is scheduled for: summer meetings will be held depending on need

Respectfully submitted, Richard Branda